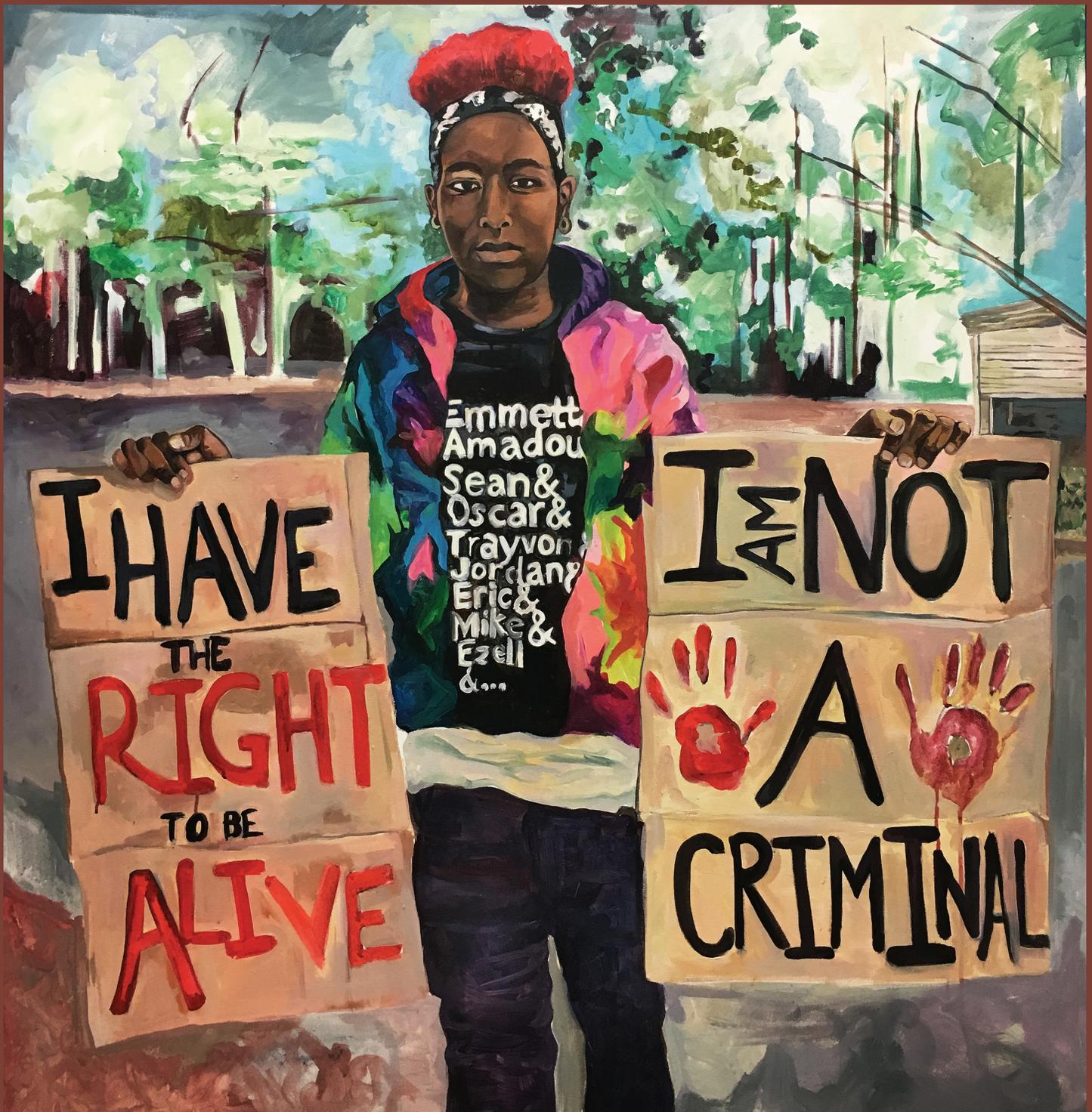


# RADICAL TEACHER

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



CHITRA GANESH, "BLAKE BROCKINGTON", 2015

**Issue 106: Teaching Black Lives Matter**

# RADICAL TEACHER

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

Erratum: Foster, J.A., Horowitz, S.M. & Allen, L. (2016). Changing the Subject: Archives, Technology, and Radical Counter-Narratives of Peace. *Radical Teacher*, 105, 11-22. doi<http://dx.doi.org/10.5195/rt.2016.280>.

An article in *Radical Teacher* 105: Archives and Radical Education included an incorrect version of Changing the Subject: Archives, Technology, and Radical Counter-Narratives of Peace by J. Ashley Foster, Sarah M. Horowitz, and Laurie Allen. The placement of two images was incorrect. A corrected version is included here. The editorial team apologizes for this error.

—The *Radical Teacher* Editorial Board



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What, in any case, is a socialist feminist criticism? The answer is a simple one. It wants to change the subject. The critic is committed to social change in her workplace, the university, as well as to political activism in the world.

— Jane Marcus, *Art and Anger: Reading Like a Woman*

Thinking peace in a time of war with undergraduates is a radical endeavor. It asks young writers to question their fundamental assumptions about human nature, the construction of society, and the way in which we (as global citizens) conduct our politics in world affairs today. As Paul Saint-Amour has shown in *Tense Future*, we are trapped in a “perpetual interwar,” where Saint-Amour uses “*inter + war* to denote not only ‘between wars’ but also ‘in the midst of war’” (306). He shows that the totalizing discourse of war has infiltrated every part of the social order, including notions of past and future: there is nothing *outside* of the war.<sup>1</sup> Susan Sontag, in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, asks incredulously, “Who believes today that war can be abolished?” She then answers with the declaration: “No one, not even pacifists” (5). Students often chime in with assent and agreement to this notion; the idea of peace, while lovely, is not practical. Seriously considering peace unsettles them. As pacifists have often reminded us, establishing a true, sustainable peace necessitates a radical and progressive restructuring of society, where the imagined peace requires being built upon a social intersectionality of feminism, socialism, human rights, social justice, racial equality, and an even distribution of power throughout the globe. Radical pacifist beliefs are often accompanied by anti-racist, anti-fascist, anti-imperialist beliefs, and argue for racial, gender, economic, and social equality. This world model demands a radical restructuring of our current lives and practices, and, the militant metanarrative of history tells us, is impossible. The difference between what should be and what is, is so great, such a rupture from the present, that it is potentially alienating to students.

As countless authors have shown, the story of a dominant “Western” history is one of battles won and lost, the lives of great men, and the inevitability, if not grandeur, of war. However, archives of the modernist era provide a counter-narrative of movements and people who worked rigorously for peace and equality during times of war, who argue that war is a *choice*, not a necessity of existence. It was a time of avid mobilization, but it also marked a flourishing pacifist global momentum, with the peace movement in Britain hitting its apex in the 1930s, women’s movements against fascism and war organizing internationally, the Harlem Renaissance fighting racism in the United States, and the Indian National Congress non-violently protesting British Imperialism. The international organization for peace is a counter-narrative that has been consistently, and the feminist critic suspects systematically, written out of the dominant story of Western history, and can be reconstructed and retraced through the recovery of what J. Ashley Foster calls here the “peace archive.”<sup>2</sup> Including students in this mission, introducing them to radical archives of what has elsewhere

been called “pacifisms past,”<sup>3</sup> radicalizes the classroom and allows undergraduates to become critical contributors to constructing counter-narratives of peace.

This article argues that performing the recovery of pacifist art and actions through archival research of the modernist era encourages students to engage in radical ethical inquiry. This article is based on four sections of the Peace Testimonies in Literature & Art freshman Writing Seminar, designed and taught by Visiting Assistant Professor of Writing and Fellow in the Writing Program J. Ashley Foster at Haverford College, and walks the reader through the construction of a student digital humanities and special collections exhibition, *Testimonies in Art & Action: Igniting Pacifism in the Face of Total War*. This exhibition ran from October 6 to December 11, 2015 in Haverford College’s Magill Library and involved extensive collaboration between Haverford’s library staff and students. In synergistic cooperation with Foster, Curator of Rare Books and Manuscripts & Head of Quaker and Special Collections Sarah Horowitz, and then Coordinator for Digital Scholarship and Services Laurie Allen (who has since moved to Penn Libraries) worked to help shape the course assignments and ensuing exhibition. The exhibition placed archival materials in conversation with the major modernist pacifist documentary projects of Langston Hughes’ Spanish Civil War poetry and dispatches, Muriel Rukeyser’s “Mediterranean,” Pablo Picasso’s *Guernica*, and Virginia Woolf’s *Three Guineas*. This undertaking was driven by the questions, “How does one respond ethically to total war?” and “How can archival and special collections research do the works of peace?” Built around the work of these classes and materials from Haverford’s Quaker & Special Collections, *Testimonies in Art & Action* allowed students to deeply interrogate a variety of pacifisms and become producers of a critical discourse that challenges the status quo position that violence is perpetually necessary and the most important aspect of world history.

***This undertaking was driven by the questions, “How does one respond ethically to total war?” and “How can archival and special collections research do the works of peace?”***

## Palimpsest Texts

*Testimonies in Art & Action: Igniting Pacifism in the Face of Total War* grew out of J. Ashley Foster’s Peace Testimonies in Literature & Art Writing Seminar, taught at Haverford College, Spring and Fall 2015.<sup>4</sup> This freshman class, which fulfilled the writing seminar requirement, was structured around five main, what Foster calls, modernist pacifist documentary projects<sup>5</sup>: Langston Hughes’ Spanish Civil War poems and dispatches, Pablo Picasso’s *Guernica*, Muriel Rukeyser’s “Mediterranean,” Virginia Woolf’s *Three Guineas*, and the Quaker relief effort for the Spanish Civil War. These projects document the pacifist artistic responses to total war and the history and experiences of the author, creator, or those on the ground in Spain during

the Civil War of 1936-1939. As the collaboratively-written and edited catalogue describes, all of the main works contain:

...many layers of composition and compilation. For example, [Woolf's] *Three Guineas*, which Jane Marcus has called a "part of a major documentary project" [(xlv)] and an "interactive" [(xlv)] text, was compiled based upon three reading notebooks that included letters, newspaper articles, and typed-out excerpts. Muriel Rukeyser's poem "Mediterranean" is part of a much larger series of writings on Spain, which includes the novel *Savage Coast*, news articles, and prosaic-philosophical meditations. Pablo Picasso's great mural *Guernica* has been documented by his partner, the surrealist photographer Dora Maar, allowing us to study various stages of creation. Langston Hughes' Spanish Civil War dispatches are in conversation with his poetry, creating an intricate dialogue of his time in Spain, encounter with total war, and anti-fascist beliefs.

The Quaker relief effort can also be followed through reports, letters, photographs, fundraising pamphlets, and meeting minutes, many of which adopt modernist concerns and aesthetic techniques to conduct their mission.

The nature of the course material itself, then, focused on the activists who responded to the Spanish Civil War, is radical. All of the course texts offer a divergent and multifaceted view of pacifisms that intersect with other major social causes. Woolf's blend of socialism and feminism converges into a radical pacifism that seeks to reform education, equalize society, and eradicate war in *Three Guineas*. Picasso's anti-fascism, communism, anarchist traces, and pacifism blend into a fearful protest of total war in Spain. Hughes points out that peace must be based on racial equality and shows how his anti-racism, anti-fascism, and communism intersect to imagine a world with social equality. Rukeyser's militant pacifism, and support of a violent fight against fascism, unites with her socialist sympathies to render an ambivalent call for revolution that is juxtaposed with her longing for peace. The Quaker relief in Spain witnessed a peace testimony that adopted a social justice dimension.<sup>6</sup> All of these modernist pacifist documentary configurations imagine a peace that necessitates massive social reform and are therefore radical.

The fact that this radicalism can be traced and studied through layers of composition and compilation makes these materials vital in the writing classroom. The existence of contextual historical archives for these

projects provides students with the opportunity to trace the creation of the works, emphasizing the importance of rethinking, revision, and the evolution of ideas. For example, students used the digital archive of Virginia Woolf's reading notebooks for *Three Guineas* to better understand the way in which Woolf was responding to a militant, patriarchal cultural climate. Laurie Allen and Foster created a series of digital humanities projects that would reflect this palimpsest, intertextual, and hypertextual way of reading. Foster named them "digital annotations." Drawing upon the digital archives of Picasso's stages of *Guernica* and Woolf's reading notebooks for *Three Guineas*, students were asked to study these online resources next to the final versions and construct arguments based on how these archives illuminate elements of the final works. What do you learn from studying these archives next to the "finished" compositions, the students were asked? How can you trace the pacifism, feminism, communism, anti-fascism, and other forms of political intersectionality throughout the stages of the text?

Using Omeka's Neatline, students digitally "annotated" and embedded the sources and stages of creation in the

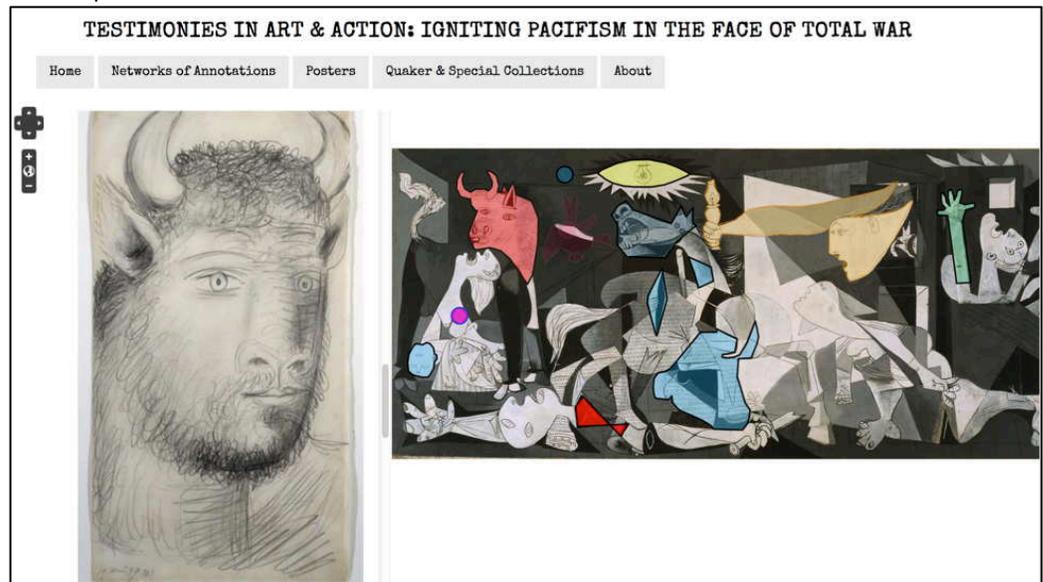


FIGURE 1: MADISON ARNOLD-SCERBO USES STAGES OF THE BULL TO ESTABLISH HER READING OF GUERNICA.

"final" versions of the texts and paintings themselves. This collage-like visual juxtaposition of the layers of creation alongside the finished product added variegated elements to the analysis of the text. Through these annotations, the students learned about researching, archival exploration, close reading, and analysis. The hands-on work of excavating and exploring the texts in their historical context and stages of creation allowed students to see the relationships among activism and writing, ethics and cultural production, by showing students how these artistic and civic works interacted within their current cultural moment. It also facilitated the creation of a visual argument that made apparent the palimpsest nature of the main texts.

Superimposing the stages of *Guernica* over the final painting allowed students to trace the politics in and pacifist genesis of Picasso's great mural. Responding to the brutal bombing of Basque civilians in the town of Guernica by fascist forces during the Spanish Civil War

is depicted in a more violent light, as he is covered in etched wounds. Therefore, Picasso's eventual drawing of a more peaceful child makes it clear that he wanted the viewer to contemplate the nature of death in the face of total war." [see figure 3] This analysis is conducted within

the context of a larger argument that responds to a class prompt that subverts Picasso's claim that "painting is not done to decorate apartments. It is an instrument of war."<sup>8</sup> The class prompt instead asked: "How is Picasso's *Guernica* an 'instrument' of peace?" Ultimately, Krapes argues, "Picasso's depiction of a dead child as a response to inhumane violence can be considered an 'instrument for peace', as it renounces the validity of blindly dropping bombs." From these examples, it becomes clear that students used the stages of *Guernica* to further understand the painting's relationship to, and

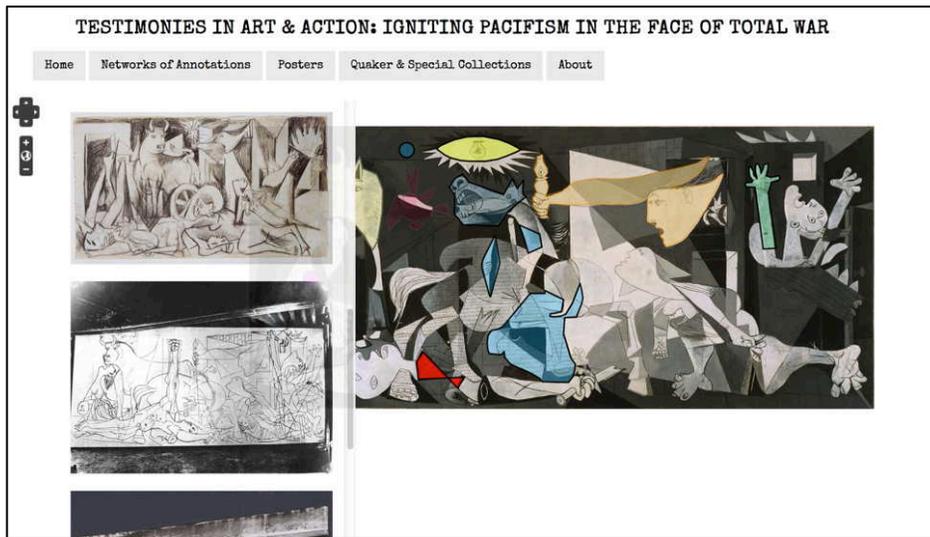


FIGURE 2: JOSHUA HILSCHER EXPLORES THE PRESENCE OF THE LIGHT BULB THROUGH THE STAGES OF GUERNICA.

(1936-1939), the painting represents the convergence of Picasso's communism, anti-fascism, and pacifism. Madison Arnold-Scerbo<sup>7</sup> traced the evolution of the bull through Picasso's studies, showing that the bull became progressively more "menacing," maintaining that "the contrast between the seemingly healthy bull and the death and devastation of the other figures clearly indicates a sympathetic feeling toward the victims and animosity towards the Nationalists." [see figure 1]

Another student, Joshua Hilscher, shows that the lightbulb in *Guernica* carries with it a critique of technology [see figure 2]. Arguing that although the light bulb was added to the mural late in the stages of creation, "the space was always reserved for politically-charged symbolism, first as a clenched fist, signifying a leftist salute, followed by a hand grasping a carrot, signifying a primitivist association of idyllic agriculture and simplicity." However, the light bulb has "an intrusive character, [ . . . ] One may imagine the waning lamentations of the dying peasantry, believing that technology only intruded their timeless lifestyle to inflict trauma."

Hannah Krapes, examining the studies of the dead child held by the wailing mother, illustrates that reading Picasso's studies next to the painting reinforces the pacifism inherent in the mural. She writes, "Here the child

intersectionality of, anti-fascism, communism and anarchism, and pacifism.

Excavating the layers of *Three Guineas* (1938) through identifying parallels between the text and the reading notebooks<sup>9</sup> Woolf kept before and during the writing of the text allows students to illuminate the ways in which Woolf used *Three Guineas* to combat patriarchy and the war-making system. These notebooks contained typed out excerpts of meaningful quotes and passages, letters, newspaper clippings, ephemera from the 1930s, and other items. A rich engagement of the intersectionality among Woolf's feminism, socialism, and pacifism—a trifold relationship that Jane Marcus points out in the introduction

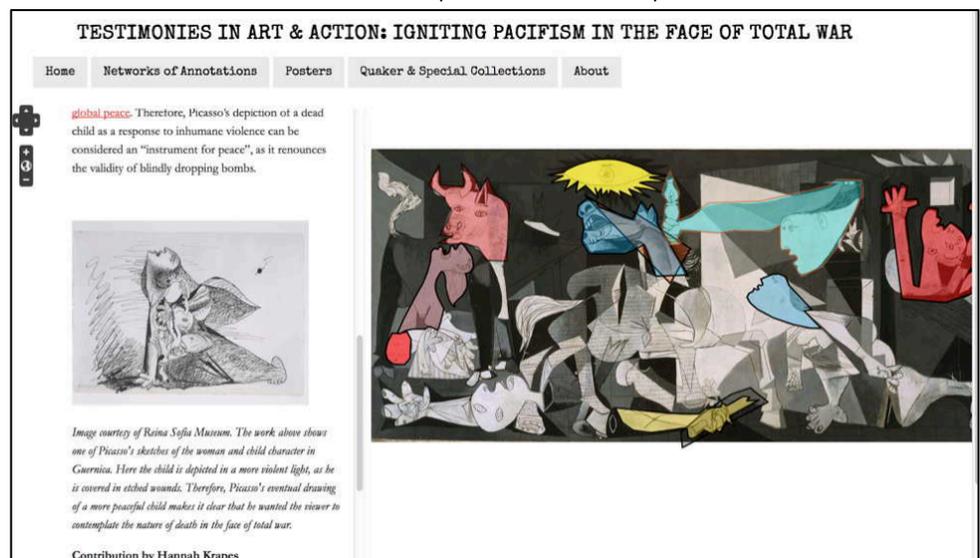


FIGURE 3: HANNAH KRAPES PROVIDES A PACIFIST UNDERSTANDING OF GUERNICA THROUGH EXAMINING THE STUDIES.

of the classes' addition of the text—unfolds in the students' annotations. Hanae Togami uses a quote from a

newspaper clipping about the necessity of the armed forces in cultivating “manly qualities,” to “deconstruct” the notion of the biological necessity of war. She writes, “Woolf deconstructs this concept contending that violent tendencies are not biological but stem from an education system that supports hostile competition; because women are not educated in formal settings, they cannot understand such tendencies (TG 2006 40).” Here, Togami gestures towards the way in which Woolf’s feminism and her call for education reform converge. Praxedes Quintana uses the scrapbooks to expose Woolf’s historical materialism and deep engagement with women’s financial independence, noting the inclusion of “Philip Mairet’s words about women’s supposed ‘love economic dependence’ on a male. Through the assumption that women enjoy the societally infantilized image of themselves, men are justified in their goals of keeping women under their thumbs financially.” Quintana exposes the specious argument that women want to rely monetarily on men, and works through how this argument is part of a Freudian “infantile fixation.” Emily Kingsley shows how Woolf’s feminism converges with her pacifism by building an argument that illuminates how men are “trapped” “within a fortress of their own creation.” She then goes on to argue that “Woolf empowers women to advance the anti-war cause by means of their outsider status—that ‘freedom from unreal loyalties’ which sets them apart from men (Three 1938 146).” Students, through this engagement of archival, textual, and artistic material, become able to trace the interaction between politics and aesthetics, and explore the intersectionality of socialism, feminism, anti-fascism, communism, and pacifism.

## Building a Peace Archive and Exhibition

On a parallel and complementary tract to the work with digital archives, the students also worked with original primary sources. The interface between the hands-on archival work the students undertook and the digital humanities project lead to the launching of *Testimonies in Art & Action: Igniting Pacifism in the Face of Total War*. Quaker & Special Collections houses peace pamphlets, ephemera, letters, journals, and memos from the Aid Spain campaign, to which both the British and American Quakers were significant contributors. When planning for the class, Sarah Horowitz and Foster discussed the materials available and their relationship to themes of the class; they wanted students to have hands-on experience with original primary sources in addition to their engagement with the digitized archival material discussed above. Horowitz planned a class in Quaker & Special Collections in which students were introduced to using archival materials and were asked to think holistically about them: not just what could be gleaned from the text, but from their material nature; not only their place in the archive but also how they interacted with the literature students had been reading. Students selected an item to further explore.

Early in the Spring semester of 2015, Foster met with the Librarian of the College, Terry Snyder, and asked if she could display the student digital humanities projects for a day. Inspired by City College’s digital art pop-up exhibition

*Bring Your Own Beamer*,<sup>10</sup> Foster wanted to project student work on the walls. Snyder suggested turning the display into a standing exhibition where the students could also curate and exhibit the College’s pertinent archival material expanding the scope of Foster’s vision immensely, and *Testimonies in Art & Action* was born. It became a multi-modal exhibition based on the guiding class questions, *what is an ethical response to total war? And, how can archives do the works of peace?*<sup>11</sup> Student digital humanities projects were cast onto the walls with huge projections alongside archival materials such as peace posters from the 1930s, ephemera, and reproductions of materials from other archives. Seven-foot vinyl decals from *Guernica* completed the effect.

The two Spring sections of the Peace Testimonies Writing Seminar worked diligently alongside Horowitz and Quaker & Special Collections staff to uncover intriguing materials. Each student, 24 in total, was responsible for choosing one item for the exhibition and writing an exhibit label which would be displayed with the item. While the label had a practical function in the exhibit production, it also gave students the opportunity to write for a public audience and required them to practice the difficult skill of writing concisely. Once each contributor had written their label, teams of student volunteers fact-checked, edited, and collaborated on the creation of the final texts for the exhibit.

Working with these materials allowed students to engage the practices of archival recovery, and illuminated how the archives contain lost stories, waiting to be uncovered and retold. Students chose a variety of items and worked across media and genres. Large 1930s peace posters were framed and hung alongside the digital projections and vinyl decals. Fundraising pamphlets, journals, letters, memos, and reports were identified, studied, and exhibited in three cases that stand in the gallery space. Students from the Fall 2015 semester, 23 in total, joined the Spring semester’s work in September, and were likewise asked to choose an item to display. On December 2, Horowitz re-organized the gallery cases and, in a pop-up format, hung new posters to allow the second semester’s work to be featured and included in the conversation.

This work empowered students to not only continue their interrogation of varieties of pacifism, but also to create connections among art, literature, and the activism of the Quakers. Many of the students used the Peace Studies term “positive peace” (introduced and formulated in Jean Mill’s writings on Virginia Woolf) to conceive of an activist pacifism that sought to construct a world that can sustain peace. Yutong Li, writing a label for an undated poster that says “Demand New World Conference,” brings together the notions of activist pacifism, Quaker relief efforts, positive peace, and the literary conversations of the 1930s. She notes that, “this poster, calling for a coordinated international effort in peace-building in place of force to deter war, sheds light on early explorations of what peace studies now call ‘positive peace.’” Connecting the discourse to Woolf and the Quakers, Li argues that, “In accordance with the Quaker effort to foster conditions for peace, contemporaneous pacifist writers such as Virginia

Woolf wrote about the role of socio-economic injustices (specifically financial and gender inequality) in the perpetuation of war . . . transforming pacifist activism from passive resistance of unethical wars to active promotion of peace.” Li situates the modernist pacifist effort within a larger history of pacifism, and locates an important trend of the convergence of social justice and activist pacifism while drawing parallels between the activism and art of the interwar era.

Writing about another poster called “Conscription,” Sydney Dorman interrogates larger ethical questions through the praxis of close reading. Maintaining that “the poster exposes war’s terrible nature with violent language,” Dorman avers “the causalities of total war beg the question, ‘How do we end war?’” Taking on this ethical mantle, Dorman offers one possible perspective, “For the Quaker community, the answer could be found within the creation of peaceful condition, complete reconciliation, and abstinence from fighting—thus conquering total war with total peace.” The hands-on engagement with archival materials, and the process of composing her label, facilitated Dorman’s construction of a counter-narrative, one that challenges “total war” with “total peace.” [see figure 4]

Engaging with primary documents also facilitated bringing students into ongoing discussions within academic fields. The debate surrounding the authenticity of Robert Capa’s famous photograph, “Spanish Civil War, near Cerro Muriano, Córdoba front,” most often referred to as “Falling Soldier,” has raised important questions concerning the relationship between photography and truth. Christin Bowen maintains, however, that “Allegations that this photograph was staged...do not take away from its pacifist message...‘Falling Soldier’ evokes an ethical call for peace by creating a sense of intimacy between the observer and subject during a dying man’s last moments.” The important lesson of this image is the way “the world was able to bear witness to the brutality of the war and feel affected by a far away conflict.”

*Estampas de la Revolución Española, 19 julio de 1936*, which features a collection of watercolors turned into stamps printed to raise money for the anti-fascist cause, allowed students to additionally explore the way in which representing war can glorify it. Sharim Jones points out that the picture *Guerrillera* “engenders positive feelings toward the cause of the Spanish people in fighting against the Fascist insurgents in Spain; it emphasizes the vivacious humanity of the Spaniards through endearing narratives and colorful imagery. Paradoxically, this painting screams for freedom in tones of war,” thus drawing attention to the iterative cycles between art and war.

Working on this exhibition, students came together to recover pacifist histories and construct counter-narratives of peace. Some contributors accomplished this by wading into ongoing debates in the disciplines, some found significant intersections among the authors, artists, and activists in our exhibition, some developed their own critical conversation and research questions that they pursued for the duration of the semester, and some asked overarching, and admittedly overwhelming, ethical

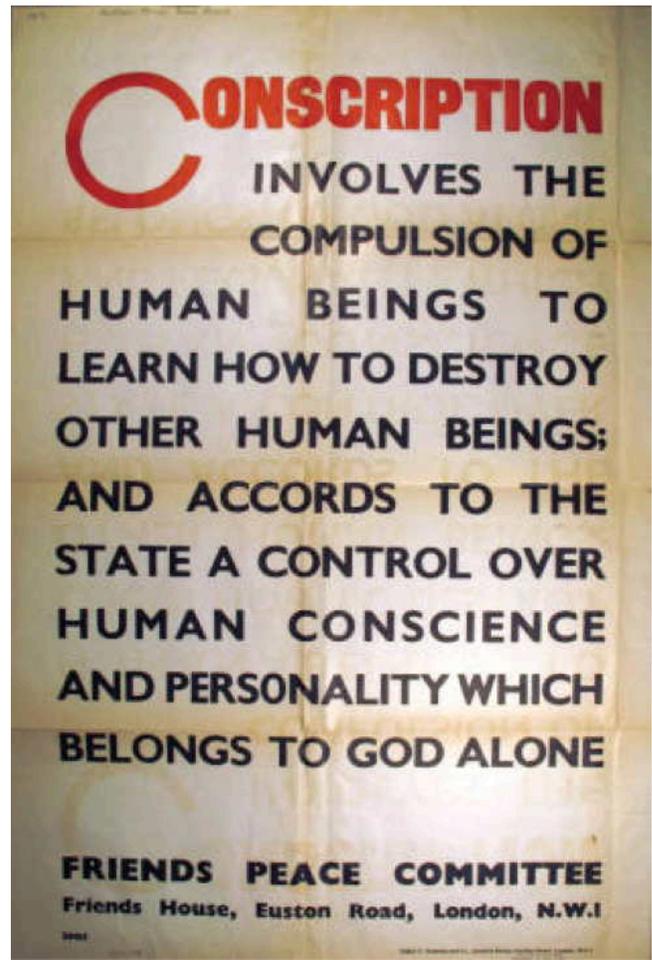


FIGURE 4: SYDNEY DORMAN OFFERS AN ANALYSIS OF THIS POSTER, “CHALLENG[ING] ‘TOTAL WAR’ WITH ‘TOTAL PEACE’”

questions. The juxtaposition of student digital-humanities projects alongside student-curated special collections materials allowed students to engage with a multitude of sources, conduct archival research, and work hands-on with primary documents. Despite all the exhilarating moments, and despite the astounding quality and consistency of the work, there were some challenges. We would like to take a moment to mention some of the challenges we encountered, and would also like to imagine ways in which interwar and pacifist archival recovery can be conducted in institutions that lack the resources available at Haverford College.

## Challenges and Translatability

As one might imagine, the biggest challenge involved in launching the exhibition as part of the course was time. Not only was the organization, creation, and execution of materials a consuming (though joyful and exhilarating) endeavor, but balancing these tasks within a course syllabus required a great deal of pedagogical acrobatics. The creation of the exhibition materials served important learning goals; however, students still needed to produce three formal papers of various lengths and practice thesis writing and structural skills for longer, sustained arguments. The digital projects and exhibition labels amounted to a fourth “paper” when put together.

Haverford's tutorial practice, where students share papers, engage in peer-review, and meet in small groups with the professor to critique each other's work, also added an additional consideration for the timeline of assignments. Because students meet with the professor at intervals over the course of a week, and then need time for revision, this necessitated that while formal papers were "under review," students were writing and producing annotations and other materials. Though this kind of multi-tasking and juggling multiple projects is an essential skill to develop for most workplaces, a small group of students felt their energies were too divided between projects and would have preferred to work on one thing at a time.

Additionally, it was harder to integrate the Fall semester's sections into the series of events than we had imagined. The Spring semester sections were part of the process from the beginning and were essential in creating the vision of the exhibition. This group of students, having had a real stake in the building of the terms of the exhibition, reflected great pride and investment in it. Their work was the most predominantly featured, and they collaboratively co-authored the initial curatorial statement and labels. While most of the Fall classes, all first-semester freshman, connected with the importance of the discourse and the kind of contribution they were making to the community, a few did not emotionally relate to their part in the process. All students contributed, and contributed well—we were very proud of all of them and their work, but a small handful from the Fall class failed to see how the exhibition, the digital projects, and the surrounding events benefitted them or their immediate community. Having joined in the middle of the process, all of them did not have the same level of ownership and realization of the vision the Spring semester's sections did. It was potentially overwhelming for first-semester freshman to walk into an undertaking of this scale without witnessing the full evolution and unfolding of the construction. These considerations stated, the net benefit of the exhibition was enormous, and all the students, even if they could not recognize how special their own work was, made a great contribution to the discourses of modernist, peace, and Quaker studies. As the next section will address, the exhibition allowed students to become critical participants in discussions of war and peace, writing and activism, and art and ethics. Using the archives radicalized the students to find their own scholarly voices and create intersections among social justice movements.

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movements.***

Haverford College, a small, private liberal arts institution, has enormous resources and networks of support for faculty and students. This undertaking would not have been possible without encouragement from the library, funding from the library and other sections of the College, and the expertise of the special collections and

digital scholarship teams. How might faculty at institutions that do not have such resources, or which do not have rich holdings of original primary sources, incorporate archives and special collections materials in their own classrooms? There are many special collections of materials available online, some of them radical activist "peace archives." In the previous sections of this article, we described how students used the online repositories of the Monk's House Papers (Virginia Woolf's Reading Notebooks for *Three Guineas*) and the stages of *Guernica* housed by the Reina Sofia. The TriCollege Libraries, a consortium of Haverford, Bryn Mawr, and Swarthmore Colleges, has likewise digitized many of its Quaker and peace-related holdings. For the radical teacher, significantly, the Warwick Digital Collections has opened a vast amount of resources to international scholars and students that are radical in nature. The King Center has publicized Martin Luther King, Jr.'s papers in a dynamic and interactive way, where users can scroll over a collage of his papers, gain information, and then click on a specific piece for the full item.

While the digital humanities components of this class and exhibition benefitted from the expertise of Allen and the library infrastructure, Omeka is a freely available software, and social media sites, such as Tumblr and Pinterest, can be used to similar effect.<sup>12</sup> Radical teachers should also not discount their local archives, historical societies, and other holders of primary source materials. Because finding aids are often written in the context of the dominant historical discourse, peace archives may not be easily discoverable. Collaborating with an archivist or librarian may uncover a treasure-trove of materials in unexpected places; even colleges that collect only their own history may have materials related to student reactions to the Vietnam War, for instance. Teachers can also encourage students to read against the grain and in between the lines of materials that might not seem radical on the surface. In short, the radical teacher can find many potential sites of connection for students to utilize archives, allowing students to develop political and cultural contexts around studying art, literature, and activism.

## Changing the Subject

The creation of *Testimonies in Art & Action* turned students into contributors and authors of a critical discourse concerning war and peace. The organization, series of events, and construction of materials surrounding this exhibition allowed students to collaborate alongside Foster, the library staff, with each other, and distinguished scholars in the fields of modernist, peace, and Quaker studies. The opening of *Testimonies in Art & Action* was preceded by a panel presentation entitled "Three Guineas, Pacifist Activism, and the Event of Total War," featuring distinguished scholars Jessica Berman, Farah Mendlesohn, Jean Mills, and Paul Saint-Amour. These four scholars also conducted class visits and spent time with students outside of class, and offered students the opportunity to be exposed to and in direct conversation with significant contributors to fields that think through war and peace, ethics, and responses to total war. In addition, at the events surrounding the exhibition over two semesters,

students conversed with members of the community at laptop stations, giving them the opportunity to articulate what they had completed, to explain to those outside the class the significance of their projects, and to engage in direct academic conversation.

In the brainstorming for the exhibition, students came up with the idea of creating a “mind-map” that showed how the authors, artists, and activists we studied were linked through ideological intersectionality. Locating the major themes of the class and the texts, students then connected these themes—which included concepts such as “socialism,” “communism,” “feminism,” “racial equality,” “ethical call,” and so on—to the students’ annotations, not only connecting the authors and artists to each other, but situating their own work within the middle of this discussion. Four students then collaborated to construct the actual map: Mairéad Ferry, Marcelo Juaregui-Volpe, Sophie McGlynn, and Jiaming (Rosalind) Xu. This map became Juaregui-Volpe’s main project as a summer worker—he took the original file and converted it to Neatline, adding the connection of the different idea bubbles to the student labels written on the Quaker relief work and special collections material, thus further identifying connections among the 1930s activists and the students’ scholarship. [see figure 5]

Five other students volunteered to help shape the vision for and worked on launching *Testimonies in Art & Action* over the summer. Christina Bowen, Adetomiwa Famodu, Ann-Victoria Isaac, Sophie McGlynn, and Ian Wheeler all brought creative vision to our undertaking and were essential contributors. Each found their niche in working with the materials; Famodu and Isaac helped generate the initial curatorial statement and materials; Wheeler took responsibility for editing, combining, and collating the labels; Bowen became very invested in the layout and design of the walls to the extent that she did the initial layout and learned to use an architecture program to map the materials; McGlynn compiled proposals, conceptually mapped the annotations to create videos for the large projections, and added copy. As news headlines about the Syrian refugee crisis announced that we were witnessing the biggest refugee crisis since World War II, the students demanded that we bring the exhibition into the present day. They made the argument that we were ethically obliged to include current materials concerning total war, and Bowen undertook a compilation of news articles that documented current humanitarian crises occurring throughout the globe. We used these news articles to tie the exhibition to our current cultural moment by placing QR codes and labels that drew a

parallel between the 1930s and the present on each wall and a map of current global crises on the last wall.

Working with the materials at Haverford, and connecting these archives to Picasso, Woolf, Rukeyser, and Hughes as well as the present day allowed students to operate in a networked structure of intersections and connections, linking a number of progressive and activist discourses, all while theorizing disparate modes of pacifism. Not only did they connect their work to the authors, with the digital humanities projects they hyperlinked to each other’s work and developed clusters of themes that interlinked to other clusters. This interlinking

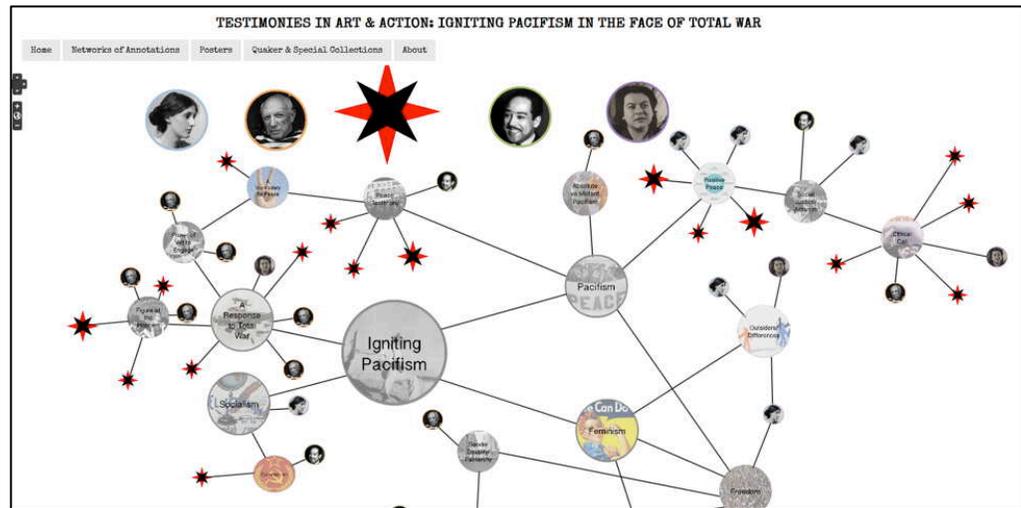


FIGURE 5: MARCELO JUAREGUI-VOLPE'S PROJECT WAS TO CREATE THIS MIND-MAP ON OMEKA AND ADD THE QUAKER CONNECTIONS.

created an elaborate web of activism in which the students became an essential part. Putting Muriel Rukeyser in dialogue with the Quaker relief work and Woolf (though the allusion to “gender equality”), Jiaming (Rosalind) Xu also situates Rukeyser historically:

By staying emotionally connected with the Spanish people, Rukeyser actualized the call of unity from Quaker Peace Testimonies and actively contributed to peace.

Furthermore, though Rukeyser escaped the Spanish Civil war, she hadn’t escaped the possibility of another, bigger war . . . some persisting social conflicts . . . that include fascism fighting against peace, patriarchy struggling against gender equality and class conflicts . . . might evolve into war, the ultimate manifestation of conflicts. . . . The only way to achieve peace, indeed, was to resolve these underlying social conflicts.

Here, we can see the connection that Xu makes among “persisting social conflicts” and war, issuing a powerful call to “resolve these underlying social conflicts.”

Using the peace studies notion of “positive peace,” in interrogating a Quaker poster, Sophie McGlynn connects special collections material to Hughes, Rukeyser, and Woolf. She writes:

Can peace ever be stable when injustice exists, and is just violence even possible? This poster, created by the London Quaker Friends in 1938, propels us to the heart of such questions by instantly equating peace and justice. Yet the Quakers were not alone in making this association. Virginia Woolf connects these ideas by setting women's rights (justice) as a precondition for preventing war (peace). Langston Hughes argues the inextricability of communism (which he views as the path to peace) and racial equality (justice). Muriel Rukeyser shows that giving war victims a voice (justice) is an ethical undertaking in her quest for peace in Spain. Like the Quakers, these authors all worked within a field now called "positive peace": exploring how to construct a world not only free of war, but where societies and institutions actively promote justice for all, thus generating a lasting peace.

Taking on the large ethical question of what a sustainable peace looks like, this label creates an intricate intersectionality amongst various modes of justice ("women's rights," "racial equality," and "giving war victims a voice") and peace. This label shows both the convergences and divergences of the disparate pacifisms put forth by the course materials.

This convergence and divergence of pacifisms is likewise discussed by the materials that Isaac constructed for the pop-up exhibition. Isaac's poignant summation of each thinker's pacifism originated with her in-class presentation, given on the last day of class. Isaac imparts:

- Pacifisms are anti-war views that are needed because of the repercussions of wars on individuals, as Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* teaches us.
- Pacifism is the dependence of local pacifism on global pacifism, as Virginia Woolf teaches us.
- Pacifism is an anti-war view that derives or is conveyed in a child's innocence, as Aurora de Albornoz teaches us.
- Pacifism does not mean that one needs to forget about the wars of the past. Forgive these wars, yes but one should absolutely NOT forget them, as Scott Hightower teaches us.
- Pacifism includes a subset called semi-pacifism, which means that one can express pacifist views but also believe that people need to fight for these pacifist views. Hence, a semi-pacifist is said to partially believe in pacifist views (debatable), as Rukeyser teaches us.
- Pacifism goes beyond war; it also involves issues such as oppression and discrimination, as Hughes teaches us.

From these examples, we can see that work with the archives, digging into the politics of artists, activists, and writers, and finding conceptual intersections between course materials and the students' work itself allows

students to become creators of a critical discourse. These students all fully engaged radical pacifist philosophies and generated a network of conceptual thought that challenges the notions of patriarchy, capitalism, and racism. These students' work shows that a lasting peace must be built on racial, gender, and social equality, social justice, and human rights. In thinking through the ethics of war and peace, students all contributed to 'changing the subject' (to invoke the epigraph above) from war to peace. Instead of averring that the only way to respond to total war is with more war, these students started thinking about different modes of pacifist intervention. They all considered ways to *ignite pacifism in the face of total war*.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Here we invoke and echo Jacques Derrida's famous statement "there is nothing outside of the text" (158).

<sup>2</sup> Foster is currently working on formulating a theory of the "peace archive" into a book project.

<sup>3</sup> This phrase from Foster's article "Recovering Pacifism's Past," was inspired by Saint-Amour's phrase "peacetimes past" (130).

<sup>4</sup> The class material and theoretical webbing was based upon the work Foster undertook for her dissertation *Modernism's Impossible Witness: Peace Testimonies from the Modernist Wars*. The central question of the text and what drove the research—*what is an ethical response to total war, or, how does one respond ethically to total war*—informed the themes of the class and, by extension, the exhibition itself.

<sup>5</sup> The analytic of "modernist pacifist documentary projects" is inspired by Jane Marcus's writings and teachings on women's documentaries. Continuing Marcus's legacy, there is now a community of scholars, including Magdalena Bogacka, Ann Donlan, and Rowena Kennedy-Epstein engaged in discussing women's documentary projects from the modernist era. The added dimension of pacifism to this manifold demonstrates the intersectionality between feminism and pacifism of the modernist era, among a number of other intersectionalities between the peace and social justice movements.

<sup>6</sup> "Testimony," as it is used here, draws upon the language of the Society of Friends (the Quakers). Quakers employ the term testimony to signify the set of actions that embody core beliefs and values. The testimonies historically are named as: simplicity, integrity, peace, equality, community, and today more progressively, sustainability. For further reading on the testimonies, see the website Quakers in Britain: Faith and Action. The convergence of the peace and social justice testimonies during the 1930s is developed throughout and a central argument of Farah Mendlesohn's *Quaker Relief Work in the Spanish Civil War*.

<sup>7</sup> We have received permission from students to quote them, and we use their full names here because the class materials are in the public domain--student names are listed online and accredited with each annotation. This use of their names also further includes them in academic communities as producers of critical discourse.

<sup>8</sup> This quote is in the epigraph to Russell Martin's *Picasso's War*.

<sup>9</sup> The digital archive of the *Three Guineas* Reading Notebooks Website, hosted by Southern Connecticut State University, with the permission of the University of Sussex and the Society of Authors of Great Britain, identifies the notebooks as having "entries dating from as early as 1927 to December, 1937."

<sup>10</sup> Many thanks to Zoe Berger for introducing Foster to this exhibition.

<sup>11</sup> This latter question is currently being worked into the theory of the "peace archive," and its articulation was informed by the collaborative work with Sarah Horowitz, the team in Quaker & Special Collections, and this exhibition.

<sup>12</sup> In the current semester, Foster is in fact using Pinterest to allow students to curate their own "peace archive."



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# RADICAL TEACHER

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

## Introduction: Teaching Black Lives Matter

by Paula Austin, Erica Cardwell, Christopher Kennedy  
and Robyn Spencer



BLACK LIVES MATTER WINDOW BANNER, GREENWICH VILLAGE, NEW YORK. 2014 (IMAGE: BILLIE WARD)

While civil rights warriors from decades ago believed that showing America its darkest and most unequal underbelly would challenge apathy and produce policy, activists today take a different view of the role of education. Since its beginnings in the summer of 2013, the goal of #BlackLivesMatter (#BLM) and the movement it inspired has not been to show, shame, or to teach people how and why Black lives matter, but rather to create the conditions for Black lives to thrive. Although technology, cell phone videos, and live streaming have provided a grim chronicle of violence against Black and Brown bodies, activists involved in #BLM have remained focused on structural change, accountability, and alternatives. Education is central to that. From the various organizations under the #BLM umbrella producing intellectual treatises and policy papers, to individual activists' deep commitment to the study of Black social protest movement tradition, to a commitment to educate people on the ongoing toll of racism, heteropatriarchy, and imperialism, #BLM has taken the United States to school.

This issue of *Radical Teacher* brings together a diverse collection of articles exploring educators' responses, strategies, and stories on how #BLM has informed their teaching practice, the content of their courses, and their personal relationship to colleagues, family, friends, and self. The editors have interspersed personal reflections throughout this introduction to highlight our multiple identities as educators, scholars, and activists, acknowledging there are no easy answers and daily infractions are real. At the moment of writing this, Terence Crutcher, a community college student in Tulsa, Oklahoma, was killed by police while driving home on September 19, 2016 and Keith Lamont Scott was killed in Charlotte, North Carolina.

We recognize the vulnerability of students outside of the classroom, and question how to keep the classroom a space of critical learning often in defiance of the mainstream topics and themes we are asked to teach. In reading each article and corresponding with contributors, we've come to understand that classrooms have become one of the crucibles for the #BLM movement to thrive, and that educators have transformed their pedagogy to create a nexus between the classroom and the streets. Finally, it was important for us to acknowledge that ongoing crisis and killings are happening all around us and shape the publication of this very issue. As such, this issue opens a conversation, and does not try to be definitive. We hope it will inspire further exchange and debate, and point to other paths of learning, activism, and struggle for social change.

## A Politics of Reflection

The Black Lives Matter movement is being experienced in deeply personal and political ways. It is an embodied response to a political moment where the fate of Black and Brown bodies hang in the balance. Many of the articles offer personal reflections and calls to action, highlighting the role of social media, protest, and dialogue in and outside of the classroom.

*In the fall of 2014, I was teaching African American History for undergraduates in Hunter College's Department of Africana and Puerto Rican/Latino Studies. Michael Brown had been killed some 3 weeks before the semester began and as the fall semester took shape, students in my course emailed me to say they would miss our late afternoon class meetings because there was a demonstration. Many afternoons, as I got to the building, students gathered in the tiny space between the subway entrance and the front doors, and readied to march to Union Square. I spotted several of my students amongst them. It was New York City, my city, where I had grown up, come of age, collecting a diverse set of friends, putting together a variegated community of folks. The students who rallied outside the building were also diverse. This was the semester that I began to rethink how I taught the African American survey course – the course that starts with the 1619 arrival of the "first Africans" and ends with our contemporary moment. I realized two things that semester. Students (black, Latino, white) had very different ideas and experiences with "race" conceptually. They fully understood it as a constructed notion and seemed to have widened their ideas about the categories of race the United States had come to take for granted. At the same time, while many had accused them of being (well, thinking) that the United States was post racial, when I asked them, they all said "no." They experienced and saw what I would have called racism, but that they weren't always sure what to call it because of their new understanding of race and how it functioned presently. I was challenged to think about how I would teach the emergence of these concepts in the burgeoning United States of the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the policies and practices that developed— how white supremacy and structures of race became entrenched and bolstered in the United States. As I pondered this, the #BlackLivesMatter movement took on meaning, providing me with so much material with which to end my semester-long look at what was rapidly becoming a course on a long struggle for black liberation and the development and constant evolution of structures and ideologies of white supremacy in the United States. Always wanting to challenge students who make generalized statements like "nothing's changed," I want to spend the necessary time on the nuances of relationships between the pasts and presents of Black life. The essence of my Black History courses and my own research has always assumed that black lives mattered, but it is an interesting assertion— the backlash to which has made it all the more necessary. Since we collected articles for this issue, the Movement for Black Lives put out a vision statement, reminiscent of the Black Panthers' 10-point plan, but oh so much more than that. The African American Intellectual History Society recently had*

*a virtual roundtable of scholars reflecting on the document and its place in our history. These essays are incredibly valuable to me as a historian and an educator and many of them will find their way onto my syllabus this semester. (Paula Austin)*

One of our intentions for this issue is to manifest the intersections made clear in the above reflection, those between the personal, the intellectual, and the pedagogical. Heather Moore's article "Teaching in Grief," explores her struggle to cope with the death of a family member in police custody, and how her grief informed both pedagogical strategies and understandings of her own identity as a scholar and educator. Ileana Jiménez highlights her experience working with youth of color at the Little Red Schoolhouse, and how the creation of poetry and film offered a space for response and activism in New York City. Similarly, Prudence Cumberbatch and Nicole Trujillo-Pagán's article "Hashtag Activism" discusses the role social media plays in activist movements like Black Lives Matter, and their efforts to integrate these strategies into their syllabus, describing the use of Twitter and other platforms as a kind of "politics of interruption." And, finally, an interview with the co-authors of the #CharlestonSyllabus, Chad Williams, Kidada E. Williams, and Keisha N. Blain offers a real world example of how a series of tragic events and the massacre at Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina prompted a new model for socially-engaged scholarship that continues to spark dialogue on everything from racial justice, civil rights, and white supremacy to the African American church as an institution.

## Confronting Systemic and Structural Issues

Black Lives Matter organizers have consistently pointed to a number of structural and systemic issues – such as institutional forms of racism, the school to prison pipeline, mass incarceration, redlining, the repeal of the Voting Rights Act -- as central to understanding the ongoing violence on Black communities in the United States and globally. School segregation is still very much an issue as well, with large school systems like New York City's amongst the most divided in the country. All this despite the Pew Research Center<sup>1</sup> pointing out that in 2014 the majority of students enrolled in the public school system in the United States are non-white. Yet, the reality is that the teaching population in the United States often looks quite different from the Black and Brown students found in many classrooms. Considering this, how do teacher allies make space for both white students and students of color, and explore the complexity of the Black Lives Matter movement and other civil rights struggles happening worldwide? Donna Troka and Dorcas Adedaja look at this from Emory University in Atlanta, GA., as does Reena N. Goldthree and Aimee Bahng at Dartmouth College in Hanover, NH.

Gender and sexuality are also central to this conversation. As a reflection on the tangled patterns of misogyny in the civil rights movement, the guiding

principles<sup>2</sup> of Black Lives Matter are explicitly centered on gender inclusive actions, de-centering heteronormative thinking and values that were customary at the beginning of the movement. As an editorial collective, we prioritized these principles and have chosen our cover design to reflect this evolved perspective on Black Civil Rights. Artist Chitra Ganesh has rendered a portrait of Black Transgender teen, Blake Brockington, who took his life on March 23, 2015. We honor Blake's life as a victim in the struggle and acknowledge the diversity of gender in the Black community and beyond. Additionally, our collective, primarily comprised of Black female contributors, relate to or feel strongly about the erasure of Black women as victims of violence and as movement builders within civil rights history—past and contemporarily. Contributors such as Ileana Jiménez, in "#SayHerName Loudly," and Danielle M. Wallace, in "Teaching Black Lives Matter in Africana Studies," share student narratives, academic writing, creative work, and personal experience critiquing the exclusion of queer and straight Black women and girls.

Other contributors also offer systemic critiques and analysis of larger socio-cultural, economic, and political systems that continue to marginalize and oppress communities of color in the United States and abroad. Erica Meiner's article, "Refusing to be Complicit," delves deeply into the politics of mandated reporting and other K-12 policies and practices that perpetuate racialized surveillance and forms of criminalization that disproportionately impact students of color in the United States. Richard Hughes and Catherine Zipf discuss Black Lives Matter in relationship to space and architecture, exploring how particular housing policies and urban planning strategies have historically targeted and continue to displace communities of color in cities across the country. Hughes's piece, featured in the Teaching Notes section, discusses the 1938 Federal Housing Association's Underwriting Manual as a pedagogical tool for examining both recent and historic concepts like gentrification and redlining. Other contributors such as Angela Pashia and Lora Vess address forms of institutional racism in higher education. Pashia, also featured in the Teaching Notes section, focuses on the field of information literacy as a critical site for examining the exclusion of diverse voices in libraries and scholarship at large, while Vess discusses a qualitative research project that investigates issues of colorblindness, racial identity, privilege, and racialized experiences amongst students and faculty at the University of Alaska.

## Pedagogical Strategies and Campus Activism

As many of the contributors point out, teaching about the Black Lives Matter movement requires a consideration of pedagogical approach, positionality, and politics. Aimee Bahng and Reena N. Goldthree's article, "#BlackLivesMatter and Feminist Pedagogy," offers an in-depth view of their organizing efforts at Dartmouth College in creating a #BLM course in the spring of 2015 that

evolved into a campus-wide movement for social and racial justice. Bahng and Goldthree outline a number of obstacles, some logistical, others conceptual, in developing an interdisciplinary and feminist course at a predominantly white Ivy League Institution. They describe their process as a “performative intervention of syllabus-creation-as-political-act.” They further elaborate on the complexities of adjunct labor, involving students in developing the course, and the organizing and activist efforts the course inspired. As many of the articles highlight, this work is complex and difficult, and necessitates more than merely compiling a list of resources for a syllabus, but rather inclusive and dynamic pedagogical approaches that are democratic, critical, and open-ended.

*When I started to teach at Pratt Institute in late 2014, one of the first things I noticed was the large wrought-iron gate encircling the main campus. The gate seemed to separate the school from the surrounding neighborhoods of Clinton Hill and Bedford-Stuyvesant. These neighborhoods are still predominantly communities of color and yet do not represent the majority of the student body. I would later learn locals at one time referred to Pratt as “The Plantation.”*

*Since I worked directly with pre-service teachers, issues of class, race, and privilege were certainly a part of our classroom conversation, but the more time I spent on campus, the more I realized this was perhaps an exception. Toward the end of my first semester teaching I was invited to join the Social Practice Seminar, a group of faculty who meet bi-monthly to discuss issues of social justice and politics on campus. As a relatively new group, we organized listening sessions with students and staff to get a better idea of what was happening on campus, how issues of race and class were being discussed or silenced, and what students felt like was needed to move forward.*

*In the fall of 2015, we decided to dedicate the entire school year to supporting the Black Lives Matter movement, and to open a space to explore the increased violence on Black bodies. Together with students and staff, we decided to organize an Institute-Wide Teach-In, drawing from the progressive pedagogies of Vietnam War-era peace organizing. The aim of the Teach-In was to inspire conversation and empower the entire campus to consider students’ well-being in relation to social and racial justice. As an art and design school our goal was to also analyze and celebrate Black aesthetics, and to consider Black Lives Matter more broadly, from a historic and contemporary politics of racial capitalism.*

*The organizing collective, made up of staff and faculty from around the campus, invited*

*dozens of speakers, artists, and designers to share their experience and knowledge. These offerings ranged from a presentation about a multimedia art project called “Question Bridge: Black Males in America” and a performance workshop called “Between Me and You: WHO SHOT YA?” to a lecture from Sheila Pree Bright on her recent work “#1960Now,” reflecting on current and historic civil rights movements; a workshop called “Disrupt the Police by Knowing Your Rights,” hosted by FIERCE, an LGBTQ activist organization; and a working group dedicated to developing a series of Institutional Demands that would be presented to the president and board. This was just the first day of a 3-day event, which began with a reading of the names of individuals who had been unjustly killed by police violence in the past 10 years (a process that took nearly 40 minutes).*

*There were a lot of things that worked and some that didn’t. By hosting the workshops across the campus we certainly interrupted the daily flow for many. Some professors brought their entire classes to our opening panel discussion, while some workshops were poorly attended, if at all. Yet despite these stumbling blocks, we made clear from the beginning that this event was simply the start of a long-term effort to ensure Pratt embraces a culture that goes beyond so-called “diversity” and actually provides substantial funding and resources toward scholarships for students of color, long-term support systems for accepted and enrolled students, coursework inclusive of the history and content of race/class struggle, and a commitment institutionally to assess and track these changes. While it’s too soon to know what kinds of impacts the Teach-In has made, it was certainly a step in the right direction and was transformative for me personally. (Christopher Kennedy)*

Specific texts, artifacts, and archives also played a substantial role in contributors’ discussions and reflections of teaching connected to Black Lives Matter. Brandon Byrd’s piece, for instance, uses the story of Celia, an enslaved young woman who was executed in 1855 for killing her master after years of sexual abuse, as a way to make connections to historical and ongoing state-sanctioned violence against communities of color, and lay foundations for the study of black radicalism and resistance in the United States. Jesse Kohn discusses his use of Ta-Nehisi Coates’s “The Case for Reparations” and Amiri Baraka’s *Dutchman* to inform an ongoing conversation about the Black Lives Matter movement in his U. S. survey course, describing his students’ coming to terms with a range of issues from the complexity of white privilege to a recent incident of racism on campus. In “Liberation Through Education,” Danielle Wallace details her approach to teaching about #BlackLivesMatter in several seminar

classes for students in Africana Studies. She describes her pedagogical method as a liberatory process, empowering students to think critically about the larger socio-economic and political systems that play a role in the ongoing struggle for equity and social justice.

## In Solidarity

As an editorial collective, we found the process of reviewing and editing each of these articles both deeply emotional and inspiring. We hope this collection of stories and essays, artworks and reflections, will inspire further action, inquiry, and research on the Black Lives Matter movement worldwide. We encourage you to also look elsewhere at vital resources like the book reviews featured here in this issue, the Ferguson Syllabus, the African American Intellectual History Society's blog, and the Movement for Black Lives vision statement, among many

others. Finally, we want to further recognize this collection is incomplete, but will hopefully open a space to further dialogue and exchange.

In solidarity,

Paula, Robyn, Erica, and Christopher

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/08/18/u-s-public-schools-expected-to-be-majority-minority-starting-this-fall/>.

<sup>2</sup> <http://blacklivesmatter.com/guiding-principles/>.



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# RADICAL TEACHER

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

## In Memoriam: Jim Miller

By Jeffrey Melnick  
for the *Radical Teacher* Editorial Board



PHOTO OF JIM MILLER  
COURTESY OF GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

It is with great sorrow that we note the death of James A. Miller, *Radical Teacher* board member in the early 1990s (during his tenure as a beloved member of Trinity College's faculty) and then as a comrade-at-a-distance when he moved to University of South Carolina and ultimately George Washington University. Jim embodied a number of phrases that we too often toss around blithely: he was a public intellectual in a meaningful way, bringing his expertise in African American literature and culture to high school students in Washington, DC and to readers of his book reviews in the *Boston Globe*, *Washington Post*, and elsewhere; he was an interdisciplinary and transnational scholar, who insisted consistently that it is indefensible—impossible, really—to study literature, music, and history as distinct arenas of social and cultural activity.

And perhaps most important of all, he was a committed teacher and mentor. Jim was regularly involved with the School Without Walls High School on the campus of GWU, but it is better to understand his entire life and career as being captured by the phrase “school without walls.” Jim was teaching all the time, and anyone who knew him at all knows that his commitment to mentoring younger scholars and teachers was tireless. I knew Jim during the four years I taught at Trinity College and was always impressed by his selflessness. Jim was always connecting people, promoting younger scholars to colleagues he thought might be interested in their work, making suggestions for how to engage more fully in the field and in the profession more generally. I know that I am one of a large number of people who benefitted from Jim Miller saying “I’ve got my eye on you.” As a young teacher and scholar working in an adjunct position at Trinity I was constantly amazed at Jim Miller's willingness to read my work, make suggestions for conferences to attend, and introduce me to major players in African American, literary, and cultural studies.

And then there was another special blessing: during one of my semesters at Trinity, Jim was on leave, and rather than leave his office unused, he generously agreed to let me camp out there for the term. It is not even the slightest exaggeration to say that a crucial part of my education took place among Jim Miller's books: I spent countless hours digging into his library, learning from individual volumes, of course, but most of all learning that *it all matters*. Jim's intellectual breadth was remarkable; this shows in his own scholarship of course (from his dissertation on Richard Wright in 1976 to his book on the

cultural legacies of Scottsboro in 2009). After living through a graduate education in American Studies during which the chair of my department had insisted to me that popular music was a “hobby” and not a proper object of study, it was incredibly energizing to come to know Jim Miller who knew that we could not even begin to do the work of American Studies without attending to the central role played by popular music—its texts, its players, its institutions. I learned not only from the content of Jim's library but also the form: the shambly abundance of his office made it clear to me that if you are going to do this kind of work seriously, there will have to be some piles of books on the floor, some piled on top of already stuffed-to-the-max bookcases.

Jim Miller received his Ph.D in 1976 from the State University of New York at Buffalo, after completing his undergraduate work at Brown University (Providence was his hometown). From the time he completed his doctorate until his retirement, Jim taught courses on African American literature and culture at numerous American institutions and in Johannesburg as well. In addition to his Scottsboro book, he also published numerous essays, edited a book on approaches to teaching Richard Wright, and introduced an amazing book of photographs by the twin brothers Morgan and Marvin Smith. In the 2000s, Jim turned his attention particularly to Black life in Washington, D.C., and published a number of significant essays on the subject. Jim often said that his most important intellectual influence was Ralph Ellison, whom he met at Brown during his undergraduate days, and it shows: like Ellison (and Ellison's acolyte Albert Murray), Jim was consistently engaged in a battle to uncover the complexly hybrid roots of American literary and musical culture.

Jim was an ambitious scholar who crossed all kinds of lines. But he was also, as one *Radical Teacher* board member put it, “a political realist who reminded us of our limits, warned against building our politics around other people's revolutions, and could be counted on for a skeptical word or two about heroes.” Jim Miller: a political realist who insisted on the high stakes of scholarly inquiry and public engagement. The editorial board of *Radical Teacher* mourns the loss of our colleague and friend and takes some measure of comfort in the example his work continues to set for us all.



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## #BlackLivesMatter and Feminist Pedagogy: Teaching a Movement Unfolding

by Reena N. Goldthree and Aimee Bahng



BLACK LIVES MATTER - FERGUSON SOLIDARITY WASHINGTON ETHICAL SOCIETY, 2014 (IMAGE: JOHNNY SILVERCLOUD)

*The classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy. (bell hooks, Teaching to Transgress)*

In November 2015, student activists at Dartmouth College garnered national media attention following a Black Lives Matter demonstration in the campus's main library. Initially organized in response to the vandalism of a campus exhibit on police brutality, the events at Dartmouth were also part of the national #CollegeBlackout mobilizations in solidarity with student activists at the University of Missouri and Yale University. On Thursday, November 12th, the Afro-American Society and the campus chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) urged students to wear black to show support for Black Lives Matter and hosted an open meeting to discuss racism on campus.<sup>1</sup> That evening, over 150 people gathered in front of Dartmouth Hall for a moment of silence and a group photo.<sup>2</sup>

Following these planned events, approximately 30-40 people continued the demonstration in nearby Baker-Berry Library. The group marched through several floors of the library, chanting "Black Lives Matter," "If we don't get it, shut it down," and "If we can't study, you can't study."<sup>3</sup> Fueled by an initial report in *The Dartmouth Review*, the conservative student newspaper, and a cell phone video of the library demonstration that went viral, conservative media outlets published sensationalized accounts of the protest in Baker-Berry, accusing students of assaulting bystanders and fomenting "race hatred."<sup>4</sup> Investigations conducted by Dartmouth College officials in the aftermath of the protests found no evidence of violence.

Just six months later, student activists at Dartmouth captured the attention of the national media once again for their activism in support of Black Lives Matter. On May 13, 2016, a group of students removed a controversial billboard created by the College Republicans for National Police Week from the student center. Protesting the billboard's use of the slogan "Blue Lives Matter," activists replaced the display with dozens of posters that proclaimed: "You cannot co-opt the movement against state violence to memorialize its perpetrators. #blacklivesmatter."<sup>5</sup> Reports condemning the student activists appeared in several conservative media outlets and Dartmouth's senior administrators characterized the protest as "an unacceptable violation of freedom of expression" in a campus wide email.<sup>6</sup> In the weeks following the controversy, students who participated in the protest faced widespread harassment, including death threats on social media.<sup>7</sup>

Located in the affluent rural town of Hanover, NH, Dartmouth College is a seemingly unlikely site for Black Lives Matter mobilizations. There are no #BlackLivesMatter chapters in New Hampshire and the state's major black civic organizations are headquartered far from campus in the cities of Manchester, Nashua, and Portsmouth. African Americans comprise just 2% of the population in Hanover and less than 7% of the undergraduate student body at Dartmouth.<sup>8</sup> Among its counterparts in the Ivy League, the

college has the lowest percentage of faculty of color.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, Dartmouth has "earned a reputation as one of the more conservative institutions in the nation when it comes to race," due to several dramatic and highly-publicized acts of intolerance targeting students and faculty of color since the 1980s.<sup>10</sup>

The emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement—following the killings of Trayvon Martin in 2013 and of Eric Garner and Michael Brown in 2014—provided a language for progressive students and their allies at Dartmouth to link campus activism to national struggles against state violence, white supremacy, capitalism, and homophobia. The #BlackLivesMatter course at Dartmouth emerged as educators across the country experimented with new ways to learn from and teach with a rapidly unfolding, multi-sited movement. Significantly, many of these efforts utilized or emerged from digital media. On Twitter, Georgetown University professor Marcia Chatelain launched the #FergusonSyllabus, a crowdsourced list of books, articles, films, and primary sources that provide context for the 2014 uprisings. The collective Sociologists for Justice also used Twitter to organize a crowdsourced bibliography through the #socforjustice hashtag. Librarians and faculty members at Washington University in St. Louis created Documenting Ferguson, an open-access digital repository that "seeks to preserve and make accessible the digital media captured and created by community members following the shooting death of Michael Brown."<sup>11</sup> And in 2015, Frank Leon Roberts, a professor at New York University, taught the nation's first Black Lives Matter course accompanied by a multimedia digital syllabus.<sup>12</sup> Subsequently, courses on the movement have been taught at Emory University, Wake Forest University, University of Florida, the University of Michigan, and Mount St. Mary's University.

We offer up this reflection piece as a means of interrogating both the possibilities and limitations of teaching #BlackLivesMatter at an institution of higher education during a media-saturated moment. What does it even mean to teach a hashtag? For, while one of our aims was to provide a history and context for the social movement that accompanies the hashtag, we also wanted to consider the particular interface with social media and digital community making for contemporary organizing. In this essay, we move from a brief narrative overview of how and why the course became a reality, onto a discussion of its second run, the adjustments we made, the structural shifts that enabled these changes, and what remained central to the course all along: a commitment to feminist pedagogy. Ultimately, this discussion will bring us to a reflection on the course itself as a curricular intervention and as intellectual labor designed to push the conventions of what counts as academic rigor at an Ivy League institution.

In the two years since the uprising in Ferguson, educators and activists have explored different strategies for bringing Black Lives Matter from the streets into the classroom. Much of the existing literature about teaching Black Lives Matter has focused on incorporating lessons about police brutality and racial discrimination into pre-existing courses or designing co-curricular workshops for

K-12 students. Absent from this growing literature, however, are the first-hand accounts of educators who have taught courses on the movement at colleges and universities. Our reflection piece seeks to address this lacuna while also foregrounding the classroom as a vital site for movement building and feminist praxis in the age of Black Lives Matter.

## Bringing #BlackLivesMatter into an Ivy League Classroom

The grand jury decision not to indict Darren Wilson was announced on November 24, 2014, as Dartmouth students were finishing up their fall quarter exams and checking out of campus. Over the following weeks and months, #BlackLivesMatter would galvanize a movement taken to the streets as well as to social media while most of northern New England was preparing for hibernation. Though there would be two die-ins organized in Hanover—one by faculty and staff (including Reena) on December 4th and the other by Dartmouth medical students on December 10th—it would be many weeks before the main pulse of campus returned.<sup>13</sup> Would the community bring Ferguson and Staten Island back with them?

On January 16, 2015, the Dartmouth Center for the Advancement of Learning invited Reverend Starsky Wilson (President of the Deaconess Foundation in St. Louis, MO and co-chair of the Ferguson Commission) to talk about Ferguson and his work in St. Louis and to lead a discussion with faculty about the implications of Ferguson for teaching. It was at this meeting that Dartmouth's #BlackLivesMatter course was first conceived. As Rev. Wilson called upon everyone in the room to bring Ferguson into our classrooms, Aimee and our colleague, feminist geographer Abby Neely, set to immediate work figuring out how to get a #BlackLivesMatter course onto the books for spring quarter. It was helpful that the Provost was also in the room at the time and told us her office would support whatever we cooked up. Over the subsequent 48 hours, Abby and Aimee, while reaching out to department chairs, faculty, and staff who had expressed an interest in getting involved, pulled together and submitted the necessary materials for the Registrar to include the course in the Spring 2015 catalog.

The logistical obstacles were many, and we met those challenges with the strength that a sense of urgency and commitment to a burgeoning national movement can bring. We would not have time to send a new course proposal through the conventional review process, nor would the course be taught by instructors getting teaching credit for their labor. As new courses at Dartmouth often enjoy a trial run as special topics courses, we found a willing and generous department in Geography to host this pedagogical experiment forged amidst the exigencies of a quickly emerging social movement. Anticipating that the labor for this course would largely have to be volunteered, in addition to already full workloads, we kept at the forefront of our brainstorming the need to distribute the work of in-the-classroom teaching, grading, course

development and maintenance as evenly as possible across the two dozen or so faculty and staff who had stepped forward to form The Ferguson Teaching Collective. Along with an amazing team of instructional designers, librarians, and media learning technologists, faculty from across the disciplines came together over the course of the next few months to develop a syllabus that could work for students with a wide range of familiarity with critical discussions about race and gender. We worked collaboratively through documents shared online and small task forces, as well as meetings of the whole Collective in one room, to design course assignments, discuss course goals, and strategize the means of assessment.

***Though members of the Teaching Collective shared a desire to bring the discussion of racialized police violence to campus, we each had different relationships to civic engagement, to practices of activist organizing, and to experiences of discrimination.***

To some extent, the preliminary run of the course (a.k.a. #BLM 1.0) necessitated pooling the parts of courses already on the books, drawing on people's teaching comfort zones and areas of specialization to piece together a syllabus.<sup>14</sup> After all, Dartmouth does occasionally teach across various departments about structural racism, intersectional feminist analysis, queer notions of family, race in media and performance, histories of social injustice, protest literature, and theoretical engagements with human rights discourse. Though members of the Teaching Collective shared a desire to bring the discussion of racialized police violence to campus, we each had different relationships to civic engagement, to practices of activist organizing, and to experiences of discrimination. Comprised of administrators, staff, adjunct instructors, tenured and untenured faculty, as well as undergraduate students, the Collective included members situated across a range of relationships to institutional power and cultural privilege. One of the first adjustments we would have to make in order to work together was to teach/model/practice a mode of feminist collaboration and grow a modicum of trust in one another.

## Growing Collectivity at the Corporate University

The Ferguson Teaching Collective was formed in solidarity with experimental practices of living, working, and/or thinking in common that take place among grassroots organizers, artists, environmentalists, DIY communities, radical open source movements, and even some academics who dare to flout demands for more quantifiable outcomes for tenure and promotion in an increasingly corporatized university. In this context, the Combahee River Collective grounded our endeavor in Black feminist praxis. In part, the collective as a formation

allowed for reflection on the “thousands upon thousands unknown” agents of social change across political scales and platforms.<sup>15</sup>

Black feminist collectives are tricky to enact, though, especially at predominantly white institutions. Every collective will experience a tension between its democratic ideals and its will to action. Democracy, after all, is not efficient. Its virtue is complexity, multiplicity, and even disagreement. In order for social movements to move, room for discussion and debate is as crucial as political organizing. The space for dissent, or at least “dissensus,” must remain sacrosanct and prioritized over consensus. We disagreed often—about capping the course at a certain number, the syllabus, the assignments, the budget, the guest speaker list, etc. However, what EwaZiarek calls an “ethics of dissensus” constituted the engine that kept the movement moving.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, we would revisit this question in the second iteration of the course when students joined us in reading Cathy Cohen’s foundational essay on the radical potential of queer politics, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens.” Citing Joshua Gamson’s “Must Identity Movements Self-Destruct? A Queer Dilemma,” Cohen directs our attention to how “the *destabilization* of collective identity is itself a goal and accomplishment of collective action.”<sup>17</sup>

When news broke that Dartmouth was to offer a Black Lives Matter course, we had to weather not only the unsurprising conservative media backlash but also the understandable request from #BlackLivesMatter organizers to speak with us about our intentions for the course. On the one hand, Fox Business News’s audacity to question the intellectual value of a course on Black Lives Matter before we had even held our first class should be fairly obvious.<sup>18</sup> It should have been just as obvious to us that including #BlackLivesMatter organizers in the shaping of this course would be a good idea and that a conservative Ivy League institution might be considered an unlikely place to find allies. Much more likely to expect a more appropriate move from a college that raised its founding funds on the notion that it could help bring enlightenment to Natives “*in deserto*,” even though the College would primarily serve the aspiring clergymen offspring of the landed gentry. A skeptic might have called this a branding issue. At the end of the day, perhaps part of the goal of creating the course was to make #BlackLivesMatter and #Dartmouth feel less incongruous—to affirm the value of black lives on our campus as well as in Ferguson, Staten Island, Baltimore, and elsewhere. Seeing those hashtags placed directly adjacent to one another in Twitter feeds across the nation confirmed the reach of Black Lives Matter, suggesting that college campuses could be an important staging ground for the burgeoning movement.<sup>19</sup>

Questions about the course’s relationship to political engagement and academic rigor highlight the stakes for black feminist scholarship in the racialized and gendered politics of knowledge production itself. Our course description frames this performative intervention of syllabus-creation-as-political-act from the outset: “Though the academy can never lay claim to social movements, this course seeks in part to answer the call of students and activists around the country to take the opportunity to

raise questions about, offer studied reflection upon, and allocate dedicated institutional space to the failures of democracy, capitalism, and leadership and to make #BlackLivesMatter.” Even if the course was taking up not only classroom but also curricular space at the institution, was it an occupation staged by an undercommons? Or, as an official course students could take for class credit, did it become part of the established university with all its limitations on more radical approaches to learning? Grades, for example, would be required, as would concrete evidence of deliverable and quantifiable outcomes. The Registrar would demand at least one instructor of record, despite our attempt to decentralize authority in the Teaching Collective. When presented with press requests, we would consult the legal team about whether journalists would be allowed into the classroom. In retrospect, some of us may have longed to have proceeded more along the lines of what Fred Moten and Stefano Harney call “fugitive planning,” carving out a space “to be in but not of” the university.<sup>20</sup> But in the push to make #BlackLivesMatter a credit-bearing course for students, we were rather quickly folded into an institutional framework and narrative.<sup>21</sup>

***Even if the course was taking up not only classroom but also curricular space at the institution, was it an occupation staged by an undercommons? Or, as an official course students could take for class credit, did it become part of the established university with all its limitations on more radical approaches to learning?***

As we moved through the term, it was not only the structures of institutionalized learning that made us question what we were doing but also the struggle, even within the parameters of a higher education institutional model, to get the students engaged with the broader movement, especially when our other teaching commitments, service obligations, and research pressures constantly pulled our focus from cultivating a daily classroom environment built on trust and open-mindedness. This was no doubt also a problem of labor. In its first iteration, class met every Monday afternoon in a three-hour long seminar format. Each week, and therefore each class, featured a new team of instructors who may or may not have been able to sustain the class discussion from the previous week or pass the conversational baton to the following week. While the hope was to allow the students and student teaching assistants to take on this work, the structure of the course was also designed as a labor-saving strategy. Plus, student-led courses necessitate training we didn’t give them and couldn’t model on a week-to-week basis. The student feedback would reveal that the course not only felt disjointed from one week to the next, but it also felt disconnected from the movement on the ground elsewhere. It felt as though every session was the first day of class, as though we were “starting over” again each week with a new set of instructors, methodologies,

and dynamics. Instead of “spiraling in and getting deeper and deeper,” it felt more like “a mini lecture series.”<sup>22</sup> Yet, students also stated that the Teaching Collective offered a powerful example of solidarity for budding activists on campus and urged us to continue to offer the course. So, we decided to change things up, starting with figuring out how to run the course again but with two significant adjustments. First, we wanted to address the continuity issue. Second, we wanted to revamp the readings and assignments to reflect a more direct engagement with the #BlackLivesMatter movement. Both concerns required a different structural base.

In February of 2015, just shortly after the initial sprint to get the course listed in the spring catalog, the College circulated a call to apply for “reallocation fund” support for innovative teaching. If selected for funding, our proposal would grant teaching credit for the course as well as \$2000 to assist with programmatic costs. Because Abby would be spending much of the following year conducting research abroad, Reena stepped up to co-teach. In May of 2015, we heard that we had won the innovative course grant and set to work thinking about how to deepen the course’s engagement with the movement across all aspects of the course. We were keen to make some significant changes and faced some immediate questions.

***We also viewed experiential learning as a vehicle for students to enact a feminist political praxis as they collaborated with community organizers, activist media makers, and artists—both on and off campus.***

Though there were some consistencies across the two versions of the course worth noting—in both instances, the course largely relied on the labor of untenured women—the second iteration witnessed some significant changes. If two of us were receiving teaching credit, what would happen to the Collective? While people’s enthusiasm for the course remained strong, it no longer seemed fair to call upon them to sustain the same level of responsibility to the course as in previous years. We began to reformulate the Collective as a supplement to the course—for organizing, circulating information, and continuing a practice of ongoing study—study which would become the ever-evolving heart of our practice. To that end, we hoped to kickstart that initiative by purchasing all the required books for the second run of the course for all Teaching Collective members. Ultimately, the Collective did become a locus of organizing—composing and distributing an open letter of support for student protesters, for example—as well as a resource for ongoing news gathering of more incidents of police violence as well as Black Lives Matter actions.

As we were preparing to launch the “#BLM 2.0” course, we received a major grant from Dartmouth’s new Experiential Learning Initiative, a “campus-wide, strategic effort to actively resource, connect, promote, and assess

intentional, reflective, high-impact learning experiences in and beyond the classroom.” This grant money would give legs to the public outreach project assignment and our attempts to connect with the Black Lives Matter movement from the first iteration of the course. Students had responded enthusiastically both to the call to public engagement, which resulted in the proliferation of student-led teach-ins, op-eds, and social media conversations, and our Skype session with Grand Rapids #BLM chapter founder Anita Moore. (In fact, one of our students is now the chair of that chapter!). Even as our \$45,000 Experiential Learning Initiative grant became a necessary windfall for facilitating more engagement with the Black Lives Matter movement, we were wary of using this money to supply a temporary experience for students—a sort of drop-in activism model—that would leave students feeling good about themselves and the little they had done to make an effort without developing a lasting relationship and impact more directly channeled to grassroots organizations. At Dartmouth, with Ivy League money, it is all too easy to reproduce “the very power inequalities that feminists have worked so diligently to expose and challenge.”<sup>23</sup>

Seeking to craft a feminist alternative to “voluntourism” and service learning, we designed the new experiential learning components of the course to foster three outcomes: critical awareness, sustained dialogue, and personal reflection. We drew inspiration in this effort from the writings of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire as well as the work of women of color feminists who have long argued for, and modeled, forms of “community accountable scholarship.”<sup>24</sup> We extended the ethos of public engagement from our first iteration of the course, designed to encourage students to “reclaim learning as a popular and democratic activity that resists the hierarchies and exploitative social relations fostered by education as we know it.”<sup>25</sup> Our four core books for the course—written by Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, Michelle Alexander, Angela Y. Davis, and Ta-Nehisi Coates—provided necessary context for both the current crisis of state violence and the powerful surge in grassroots resistance. By combining interdisciplinary inquiry with experiential learning, we prompted students to relate scholarly research and theory to the pressing social problems of our contemporary moment.

We also viewed experiential learning as a vehicle for students to enact a feminist political praxis as they collaborated with community organizers, activist media makers, and artists—both on and off campus. While on campus, students participated in discussion-based workshops with community organizers Osagyefo Sekou, Jay-Marie Hill, Darnell Moore, and Pete White. The workshops, in large part made possible by the grant money, examined the process of movement building—through media, music, and community campaigns—in the era of Black Lives Matter. Each visiting speaker also enacted for our students what “theory as liberatory practice” looks like at its best.<sup>26</sup> Following each workshop, we invited to students to join the visiting organizer(s) for a free-flowing conversation session, where they often posed questions about building a progressive movement culture

at Dartmouth. Reflecting on their engagement with organizers in the classroom, students commented that the experience helped them to gain a deeper understanding of the “tangible impacts and work of the movement.”<sup>27</sup> With a classroom comprised of about 75% students of color (around 66% in the first iteration), these Black Lives Matter organizers offered students a language, set of tactics, and broader conversation to participate in that could help address long standing grievances. Arguably the most diverse classroom on campus, it included students majoring in social sciences and natural sciences, documented and undocumented, first-generation and legacy, queer and environmental activists, athletes and members of performing arts groups. They would bring these various connections and affiliations to all aspects of their work, foregrounding how intellectual production emerges from what Donna Haraway would call “situated knowledges.”<sup>28</sup>

Beyond campus, students conducted short-term fieldwork with #BlackLivesMatter chapters and other community-based activist organizations across the nation. Given Dartmouth’s physical distance from the epicenters of Black Lives Matter mobilizations, we thought it was crucial that our course allocate significant time for students to observe, document, and study the work of activists “on the ground.” To facilitate sustained engagement with local movements beyond the end of the term, we encouraged students to collaborate with a #BlackLivesMatter chapter or an allied organization in their hometown or in another locale where they had preexisting ties to the community. Students selected a variety of sites for their fieldwork, including chapters of #BlackLivesMatter and Black Youth Project (BYP 100); cooperative urban farms in upstate New York; and a spoken word youth organization in Philadelphia. Significantly, four students traveled to California to conduct fieldwork with the Los Angeles Community Action Network (LA CAN) after meeting Pete White, the organization’s Founder and Executive Director, during one of the campus workshops.

The culminating assignment for the course prompted students to design multimedia projects that engaged with Black Lives Matter. In these projects, media served as a vehicle for research-based public scholarship on the movement and as a means to stand in solidarity with the movement. Working collaboratively in groups of 2-3, students addressed the reverberations of Black Lives Matter on college campuses as well as the movement’s ongoing impact on the national stage. Their projects featured several different media formats—from documentary films, podcasts, and music videos to Facebook pages, digital archives, and Zines—and highlighted the potential and challenges of documenting a movement as it unfolds. In keeping with the aims of the course, the students presented their projects at a public event attended by local community members as well as Dartmouth students, staff, and faculty.

These group media projects required a collaborative ethos we had been cultivating through our readings and daily practice over the course of the term. Most days we met in a special active learning space that did the physical work of distributing attention around the room.<sup>29</sup> Students

often worked in “pods” gathered around six multimedia stations equipped with projector and wireless connection to their laptops. We used this configuration often for small group exercises, including on-the-spot, real-time synthesis of a group’s responses to a critical passage or media clip. Students could collaborate even in their note-taking, thinking together on a shared screen, where they could collect their questions and comments for presenting to the larger group later. As this was our default set-up, we enjoyed seeing how our various guest speakers used the space, criss-crossing the center of the room, writing notes on all four walls of whiteboard, becoming a moving cursor, hovering over different groups of students at various moments of the discussion. Some days, though, required steadier communing. Midway through the term, students had formed such an intense and trusting community in that room, they started to construct the space themselves, asking if we could sit all at one big seminar table one day, or in a big free-floating circle “so we could all face each other” the next. Students brought in their organizing from beyond the classroom, too, often opening and closing class sharing with their peers what projects they were working on elsewhere on campus and how to get involved. In part, the gathering inward and the attention outward became a routine ebb and flow of the class. This telescoping movement was, in fact, part of the goal of the course, threaded through the kinds of work they were being asked to do for class: writing op-eds, listening to professor-curated playlists of the movement, and creating Instagram essays (one of which would earn its place in an arty publication called *Documentum* in an issue guest-edited by Teju Cole and Teaching Collective member Jeff Sharlet). For all the money and structural orchestration of this course, ultimately, these remarkable students took the reins of the experiment. Without their trust and willingness to participate, none of it would have worked.

***Midway through the term, students had formed such an intense and trusting community in that room, they started to construct the space themselves, asking if we could sit all at one big seminar table one day, or in a big free-floating circle “so we could all face each other” the next.***

Having now taught two iterations of the #BlackLivesMatter course, we are faced with the task of assessing the course’s impact and future. In the spring of 2015, Teaching Collective member and history professor Derrick White was denied tenure and, one year later, Aimee’s tenure bid was also denied. What does it mean that Dartmouth’s administration generously funded the #BlackLivesMatter course, but refused to acknowledge the very scholars whose intellectual and organizational labor made the course possible? What are the possibilities of sustaining the Ferguson Teaching Collective when “Black and Brown scholarly bodies (student, staff, and professorial)” are “churned up by Dartmouth and other

elite spaces"?<sup>30</sup> We pose these questions with the knowledge that the pedagogical work of teaching #BlackLivesMatter will be borne disproportionately by people by color.

And how do we even get to the part of the tale where we must face our classroom, full of black and brown faces, on the days when another police shooting of an unarmed black person has occurred? How do we write the part where we stop in our tracks and remember all the families who will likely never receive any justice, the lives cut short? Dedicated teachers often talk about extending conversations beyond the classroom. In this case, though we include a link to our publicly available syllabus, some of the most important lessons cannot be represented on those pages. What did it mean to lie ourselves down on the pavement, to embody and reenact the position of the unarmed victims of these police shootings? How do you show up for school every day when you feel the "between the world and me" gap that Ta-Nehisi Coates attempts to set down in words? As we collabo-write this piece in a shared document online, with media feeds running in adjacent tabs, two more stories of audacious police shootings of black men—one in need of roadside assistance and another reading in his car waiting to pick up his kid—demand our attention. In addition to the stories of Terence Crutcher and Keith Lamont Scott, we have also learned that the Baltimore County officer who fatally shot Korryn Gaines and wounded her five-year old son would not face criminal charges. And consequently we witness many of our friends needing to take a break from social media, needing to close the tabs, needing to carve out some space to respond to an unrelenting stream of deaths caught on video—to respond on their own terms, where their own words and silences can surface at their own pace. This is the kind of space we wanted to carve out at our institution, where we could help one another shuttle between media saturated life online and the all-too-quiet Ivory Tower in the so-called Hanover bubble. bell hooks writes that "the classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy."<sup>31</sup> The possibilities we glimpsed at many moments over the course of the past two years in the #BlackLivesMatter course have moved us and made us grateful to our students who will maybe grow similar spaces beyond the academy. This piece is dedicated to them, the ones who hold the key to a movement still unfolding.

*We would like to thank all the members of the Ferguson Teaching Collective at Dartmouth for their collaborative spirit and material contributions to the making of these courses. We also thank the anonymous reviewers of this article for their feedback and support. Most of all, we thank and would like to dedicate this piece to the students.*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For the initial announcement about the protests on Facebook, see <https://www.facebook.com/events/984278961637079/>.

<sup>2</sup> To view a photograph of the demonstrators in front of Dartmouth Hall, go to: <http://www.thedartmouth.com/multimedia/1624>.

<sup>3</sup> Briana Tang, "Students stage a protest in solidarity with Missouri and Yale, drawing both support and controversy," *The Dartmouth*, November 12, 2015, <http://www.thedartmouth.com/article/2015/11/students-stage-a-protest-in-solidarity-with-missouri-and-yale-drawing-both-support-and-controversy>.

<sup>4</sup> "Eyes Wide Open at the Protest," *The Dartmouth Review*, November 14, 2015, <http://www.dartreview.com/eyes-wide-open-at-the-protest/>. A cell phone video of the protest was posted on the YouTube page of *Campus Review* on November 14, 2015. As of September 18, 2016, it has amassed 1,045,348 views. To view the video, go to: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OJAuVQILxD0>. For examples of the coverage of the protests in the national conservative media, see "Dartmouth Protesters Assault Students While Screaming Racial Threats," *Fox News*, November 16, 2015, <http://nation.foxnews.com/2015/11/16/dartmouth-protesters-assault-students-while-screaming-racial-threats>; Jessica Chasmar, "Black Lives Matter protesters berate white students studying at Dartmouth library," *Washington Times*, November 16, 2015, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/nov/16/black-lives-matter-protesters-berate-white-student/>.

<sup>5</sup> Zachary Benjamin and Michael Qian, "Campus reacts to Blue Lives Matter display replaced by #BlackLivesMatter posters," *The Dartmouth*, May 13, 2016, <http://www.thedartmouth.com/article/2016/05/display-removed-in-collis-replaced-with-blacklivesmatter-posters>. For a public statement on the protest from student activists who participated, see "Official Statement Regarding Friday's Events," Dartmouth Action Collective, May 18, 2016, <http://dac.citizenmodern.org/2016/05/18/official-statement-regarding-fridays-events/>.

<sup>6</sup> For coverage of the protest in the national media, see "'Blue Lives Matter' display vandalized by BLM supporters at Dartmouth," *Campus Reform*, May 14, 2016, <http://www.campusreform.org/?ID=7591>; Jerome Hudson, "Black Lives Matter Activists Destroy 'Blue Lives Matter' Display at Dartmouth College," *Breitbart*, May 16, 2016, <http://www.breitbart.com/big-government/2016/05/16/black-lives-matter-activists-destroy-blue-lives-matter-display-dartmouth-college/>; "'Blue Lives Matter' display defaced at Dartmouth, college Republicans say," *Fox News*, May 17, 2016, <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2016/05/17/blue-lives-matter-display-defaced-at-dartmouth-college-republicans-say.html>. See also email from Phil Hanlon, Carolyn Dever, Rebecca Biron, and Inge-Lise Ameer to the undergraduate

student body at Dartmouth, May 15, 2016, reblogged at: <http://www.dartblog.com/data/2016/05/012664.php>.

<sup>7</sup>A Statement by Mikala Williams," Dartmouth Action Collective, May 18, 2016, <http://dac.citizenmodern.org/2016/05/18/a-statement-by-mikala-williams/>.

<sup>8</sup> For enrollment figures for the 2015-16 AY, see *Dartmouth College Fact Book* (2015), <https://www.dartmouth.edu/~oir/data-reporting/factbook/enrollment.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Alexa Green, "College faculty are least diverse in Ivy League," *The Dartmouth*, April 25, 2016, <http://www.thedartmouth.com/article/2016/04/college-faculty-are-least-diverse-in-ivy-league/>.

<sup>10</sup> Stefan M. Bradley, "Black Power and the Big Green: Dartmouth College and the Black Freedom Movement, 1945-75," *Journal of Civil and Human Rights* 1, no. 1 (2015): 25.

<sup>11</sup> Documenting Ferguson project is available online at: <http://digital.wustl.edu/ferguson/>.

<sup>12</sup> To view the digital Black Lives Matter syllabus created by Frank Leon Roberts, go to: <http://www.blacklivesmattersyllabus.com/>.

<sup>13</sup> Brady Carlson, "Police Violence Against Black Americans Inspires Hanover 'Die In' Protest," New Hampshire Public Radio, December 5, 2015, <http://nhpr.org/post/police-violence-against-black-americans-inspires-hanover-die-protest/>; Annie Ma, "Community protests police brutality," *The Dartmouth*, January 5, 2015, <http://www.thedartmouth.com/article/2015/01/community-protests-policy-brutality/>.

<sup>14</sup> The syllabus for the spring 2015 #BlackLivesMatter course at Dartmouth College is available at: <https://www.academia.edu/12277372/BlackLivesMatterSyllabus>. This version of the syllabus does not include the more developed assignment descriptions.

<sup>15</sup> "The Combahee River Collective Statement," <http://circuitous.org/scraps/combahee.html.....>

<sup>16</sup> Ewa Płonowska Ziarek, *An Ethics of Dissensus: Postmodernity, Feminism, and the Politics of Radical Democracy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001).

<sup>17</sup> Cathy J. Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" *GLQ: Gay and Lesbian Quarterly* 3, no.4 (1997): 439.

<sup>18</sup> "Dartmouth is offering 'Black Lives Matter' class?," February 5, 2016, <http://video.foxbusiness.com/v/4034458965001/dartmouth-is-offering-black-lives-matter-class/>.

<sup>19</sup> For an insightful assessment of the Black Lives Matter movement and the path toward achieving "a mass struggle for our time," see Russell Rickford, "Black Lives Matter:

Toward a Modern Practice of Mass Struggle," *New Labor Forum* 25, no.1 (2016): 34-42.

<sup>20</sup> Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2013), 26.

<sup>21</sup> For the official institutional narrative about the course, see "Dartmouth to Offer a New Course: '#BlackLivesMatter,'" *Dartmouth News*, February 10, 2015, <https://news.dartmouth.edu/news/2015/02/dartmouth-offer-new-course-blacklivesmatter>.

<sup>22</sup> Student feedback from #BlackLivesMatter course listening session, May 14, 2015, Dartmouth College, meeting minutes in possession of the authors.

<sup>23</sup> Leeray M. Costa and Karen J. Leong, "Introduction Critical Community Engagement: Feminist Pedagogy Meets Civic Engagement," *Feminist Teacher* 22, no.3 (2012): 171.

<sup>24</sup> The term "community accountable scholarship" was coined by black feminist theorist Alexis Pauline Gumbs. On the importance of dialogue and reflection in education, see Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Bloombury Academic, 2000); bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 13-22. See also Jasmine Mina and Annemarie Vaccaro, "Role Modeling Community Engagement for College Students: Narratives from Women Faculty and Staff of Color," in *Feminist Community Engagement: Achieving Praxis*, eds. Susan Iverson and Jennifer James (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 53-74; Melanie Brazzell, "Community Accountable Scholarship within a Participatory Action Research Model," [https://www.academia.edu/24561176/Community\\_Accountable\\_Scholarship\\_within\\_a\\_Participatory\\_Action\\_Research\\_Model...](https://www.academia.edu/24561176/Community_Accountable_Scholarship_within_a_Participatory_Action_Research_Model...)

<sup>25</sup> Gargi Battacharyya, "How Can We Live with Ourselves? Universities and the Attempt to Reconcile Learning and Doing," *Race Critical Public Scholarship*, special issue, eds. Gargi Battacharyya and Karim Murji, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36, no.9 (2013): 1411-28. Special thanks to Ferguson Teaching Collective member Patricia Lopez, who crafted the language for the public outreach project assignment and did the research to situate public engagement in feminist, decolonial praxis.

<sup>26</sup> bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education, as the Practice of Freedom*. Taylor & Francis Group, 1994.

<sup>27</sup> Online Student Course Assessment Report, #BlackLivesMatter, Dartmouth College, Spring 2016.

<sup>28</sup> Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575-99.

<sup>29</sup> <<https://sites.dartmouth.edu/edtech/projects/active-learning-space-incubator-program/>>.

<sup>30</sup> Derrick White, "Black Intellectual Lives Matter," March 17, 2015, unpublished document in possession of the authors.

<sup>31</sup>bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the*

*Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 12.



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# RADICAL TEACHER

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

## Liberation Through Education: Teaching #BlackLivesMatter in Africana Studies

by Danielle M. Wallace



BLACK LIVES MATTER DIE-IN PROTESTING ALLEGED POLICE BRUTALITY IN SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA, SEPTEMBER 20, 2015. (IMAGE: FIBONACCI BLUE)

The campus was uncommonly quiet on November 25, 2014. The night before, the St. Louis County Prosecutor announced that a grand jury had chosen not to indict Darren Wilson, the police officer who had, three months prior, shot and killed Michael Brown. Upon arriving in my Research Methods in Africana Studies class that day, my students—all of them Black, many of them activists and leaders on campus, and all of them angry about the decision—were withdrawn. The ensuing discussion in that class, and in others, demonstrated that my students were, and still are, full of questions: How could the officer be allowed to walk away? How could this happen in 2014? Why does it continue to happen? What would happen next? And, most importantly, how did we get here? Over the next week, the country erupted into action. Marches, die-ins, and protests were an everyday occurrence both on and off university campuses. My students participated in local activism, shut down streets, and held consciousness-raising sessions. They were consumed. Yet, the question still loomed: How did we get here?

The last few weeks of that semester illustrated just how little my students understood about the conditions leading up to the founding of #BlackLivesMatter as a movement. In the following semester (Spring 2015), I taught Seminar in Africana Studies under the topic, “The New Racism: Racial Violence, Criminality and Blackness.” The next year (Spring 2016), I taught the same course, this time with the theme, “The Black Radical Tradition: Activism and Resistance.” Both of these courses allowed me to provide the socio-historical background with which to frame and undergird a discussion of modern-day Black activism as represented by the #BlackLivesMatter movement.

Seminar in Africana Studies is offered once an academic year during the spring semester, and serves as the capstone course for Africana Studies majors. While there are some aspects of the course that are static, such as career preparedness, the overall course theme changes from year to year, depending on the interests of the instructor. I have been teaching this course since 2014 and, each time, have made an effort to ensure that the theme is timely and relevant to the current social and political climate. When teaching Seminar in Africana Studies, I have been able to delve into a number of topics in depth, which has aided me in exploring the social, historical, and cultural roots of what is now being dubbed the “new Civil Rights Movement” (Demby, 2014). I have found the approach outlined here most effective with my students, a population comprised primarily of working- and middle-class Black, white, and Latino students at a Northeastern liberal arts college.

Due to their different racial and economic backgrounds, the students have an interesting perspective on #BlackLivesMatter, which has informed my approach to teaching about the movement. In general, my students see themselves as very open, accepting, and free from the burdens of racism, much like others in their age group. However, class discussions illustrate that, like those of their parents and grandparents before them, their lives are steeped in stereotype and prejudice. Therefore, in many

ways, the information in these courses is brand new to my students. Although some of them—primarily the Black and Latino students—have first-hand knowledge of the conditions informing #BlackLivesMatter, many of them do not. For those students, this movement came out of nowhere and can be viewed as baseless, causing confusion, anger, and, sometimes, intolerance. It is here, at the meeting of awareness and unawareness, where I find my pedagogical approach to this topic to be most beneficial, helping to bring about a deeper understanding of the #BlackLivesMatter movement.

What I describe in this essay are my experiences with and approach to teaching about, #BlackLivesMatter in two seminar courses in 2015 and 2016. The students enrolled in these courses were juniors and seniors majoring in Africana Studies.<sup>1</sup> Although this course was specifically for Africana Studies majors, I have also applied the approach outlined here to a more general survey course, particularly in regard to informing discussions about social stratification, institutional racism, economics, and criminal justice. In the following sections, I will summarize my pedagogical approach, the courses’ objectives, the topics covered in these courses, and, finally, provide some general reflections on the teaching experience.

***The goal of Black Studies is to help students to critically use the knowledge and information they gain in Black Studies courses to change the conditions of Black people around the world.***

## Pedagogical Approach—Education for Liberation

As a scholar trained primarily in the discipline of Black/Africana Studies, I approach education as a fundamentally transformative process designed to encourage students to think critically about—and challenge—societal norms. Africana Studies’ emergence in 1969 as a formal academic discipline is rooted in challenge. The student strikes at San Francisco State College (SFSC; now San Francisco State University) came about because the Black, Latino, Asian, and Native students did not see themselves or their communities represented in the university curriculum, pushing them to demand that a change be made (Biondi, 2014; Rogers, 2012). Of the major demands made by the Black Students Union at SFSC was the development of a fully funded, autonomous Black Studies Department. They argued, “at the present time, the so-called Black Studies courses are being taught from the established departments which also control the function of the courses. We, the Black Students at San Francisco State College, feel that it is detrimental to us as Black human beings to be controlled by racists, who have absolute powers over determining what we should learn” (SFSC Black Student Union, 1968). These students saw their demands for Black Studies as the logical counterbalance to the “white studies” programs characterizing the system of higher education (Pentony,

1969). Africana Studies arose out of a need for a decolonized education, which places marginalized identities and experiences at the center of inquiry and de-centers the dominant narrative (Samudzi, 2016). The goal of Black Studies is to help students to critically use the knowledge and information they gain in Black Studies courses to change the conditions of Black people around the world. This goal can be realized through knowledge production (research), transformation of consciousness (teaching), and motivated action (service) (Carroll, 2008).

When teaching, I place an emphasis on the transformation of students' consciousness in order to move them on to motivated action in their respective communities. First and foremost, I view education as a liberatory process, one that encourages students to think critically about their lives and the social, economic, and political systems that shape them in order to help them come to a greater understanding of the human experience. As such, in the classroom, I place an emphasis on dialogue as a part of learning (Friere, 2000). Through the use of dialogue in the classroom, students are pushed to think deeply about their lives as beings that experience multiple forms of intersecting privileges and oppressions (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989).

***I do not think education is a neutral process. On the contrary, I believe that education and teaching are highly political and can have far-reaching effects on democracy, public policy and social justice.***

I do not think education is a neutral process. On the contrary, I believe that education and teaching are highly political and can have far-reaching effects on democracy, public policy, and social justice. As such, in the classroom, I allow students to share their experiences and realities through dialogue, and also require that of myself. A holistic, engaged pedagogy necessitates that as a teacher-student, I must allow my students to be vulnerable—and allow myself to be vulnerable with my students—in order to disrupt traditional power dynamics in the classroom (hooks, 1994). I encourage students to connect the lived experience to academic material through confessional narrative, in order to move the information from the abstract to the concrete. In creating a space for my students to share with one another, I also aim to create a space in which they can begin to humanize the experience of privilege and oppression. In doing so, my hope is that students reach a deeper understanding of themselves, each other, and the world they live in. My ultimate goal is that, through learning, students will take the next steps toward informed, direct action through service to community and increased political involvement that can bring about their own liberation.

## The Course

When developing the first iteration of Seminar in Africana Studies, "The New Racism: Racial Violence, Criminality and Blackness" in Spring 2015, I focused on answering the students' most common question, "How did we get here?" My main objectives for this course were, in part, to develop an understanding of the historical legacy of racialized violence in America; to explore the connection between racial violence and racialized perceptions of criminality; to develop an understanding of how the criminal justice system functions as a racist structure within American society; and to identify how the "new racism" has manifested in relation to perceptions of criminality and in violence toward men and women of color. The full set of course objectives is provided in Appendix A, the course syllabus.

In order to meet those objectives, I placed an emphasis on taking a socio-historical approach to understanding the current socio-political moment. It was important to trace the trajectory of the issue of violence against Black bodies in two ways as my first task. First, I wanted to explore how the belief that Black life is less important than white life, and therefore less protected, emerged. Second, I wanted to explore how and why race-driven violence is seen as a normal and regular part of life in the United States. In order to do so, I broke the course into four sections: the evolution of race and privilege, the historical roots of racial violence, criminality and the new Jim Crow, and racial violence in the modern day.

## The Evolution of Race, Racism, and Privilege.

In tracing the evolution of race in the United States, the course gives prominence to helping students reevaluate how race, as a social construct with lived consequences, developed. While this topic is so rich that it could be explored on its own in a semester-long course, it may really only be necessary to provide students with a brief but solid grounding in the historical ideas about race, humanity, and ability that have traditionally shaped and guided race relations in this country. In this portion of the course, we spent time defining "whiteness" and "blackness" as social markers with the ability to shape one's life chances and access to privilege. For example, a look at the development of whiteness using the experiences of Homer A. Plessy provided the students with an example of what it means to be able to claim whiteness as one's racial identity. In discussing Plessy, I ask students to answer the question, "What makes a person white or Black?" Plessy, in his challenge of racial boundaries in the post-bellum south, also helped to formally illustrate that although race is primarily about phenotype, it is also a valuable, social, economic, and legal identity within the American racial caste system.

In addition, I have found that it is also important to provide more timely discussions of systemic racism. Many students who have grown up in the time after the mid-century Civil Rights Movement have a hard time identifying

racism in the present day. In the United States, those born in the post-Civil Rights era have been conditioned to think of racism as a thing of the past, found only in grainy black and white footage from the 1950s and 1960s. Additionally, identifying racism has become more difficult since the election of Barack Obama to the presidency pushed many to argue that the United States had evolved into a "post-racial" society. I have found that students of all races are tied to the belief that a Black president is representative of significant social change. For many of them, this is a necessary part of their own future success; they would like for the exception to become the rule. Therefore, a discussion of the changing face of racism in the United States was helpful, particularly in regard to contextualizing the current movement. I have found that Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's (2001) framing of 'color-blind racism' and Patricia Hill Collins's (2005) argument about the "new racism" support students as they learn how to identify and discuss modern day manifestations of racism and racial privilege in a society in which racial discrimination is illegal, but also prevalent.

***I have found that students of all races are tied to the belief that a Black president is representative of significant social change. For many of them, this is a necessary part of their own future success; they would like for the exception to become the rule.***

## The historical roots of racial violence.

In the next portion of the course, we turned our attention to the history of racial violence in the United States. Beginning with chattel slavery, we explored racial tropes such as the jezebel, mammy, buck, and brute that justified the enslavement of Black men and women in the antebellum period. Additionally, we looked to these tropes to help further explain the creation of gendered racial identities typically assigned to Black men and women. For example, the jezebel figure positioned Black women as hypersexual temptresses, and the brute and buck figures positioned Black men as violent, destructive, sexual predators. These characterizations served to support the idea that African men and women were incapable of controlling themselves without the structure and monitoring provided by enslavement, thereby justifying their oppression.

These figures also provided a rationale for the gendered forms of violence historically endured by Black men and women. Specifically, they justified the use of rape and lynching as a form of social control over Black women and men, respectively. Rape and lynching continued to be used in the Jim Crow era to intimidate formerly enslaved people and their descendants, particularly those who challenged the racial status quo. In conjunction with these ideas, we also explored the rise of the Ku Klux Klan, White Citizens' Councils, and vigilante violence practiced throughout the South. For example, here, a discussion of

the murder of Emmet Till helps to illustrate to students how the belief in the inherent hypersexuality, predatory (i.e., whistling at a white woman), and violent tendencies of Black males was used to justify the brutal lynching and murder of a fourteen-year-old child. It is at this point that students began to make direct comparisons to the 2012 shooting of Trayvon Martin, who, like Till, was killed because he was perceived to be a threat purely because he was a young, Black male and, therefore, in his killer's mind, a violent and dangerous criminal.

## Criminality and the New Jim Crow.

At this point in the course, we had laid a foundation for a close reading of Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (2010). This text served as a bridge between the two time periods covered in this class, succinctly and clearly linking historical ideas about race and criminality to the criminal justice system and the mass incarceration of a large portion of the Black population in the United States. By tracing the development of the modern day criminal justice system through enslavement and Jim Crow, Alexander argues that the War on Drugs and the resulting wave of incarceration have crafted a new racial caste system in America, continuing in the tradition of the racial caste system that preceded it. Taking this argument one step further, students were also asked to think about the connection between mass incarceration for non-violent drug offenses and the fast developing school-to-prison pipeline that has become a fixture of the American education system. In doing so, they were often surprised by the ways school disciplinary policies mirror mainstream policing, with a disproportionate number of Black and Latino youth represented in those who are placed under arrest for non-violent disciplinary offenses in schools.

## Racial Violence in the Modern Day.

Finally, we turned our attention fully on the present state of racial violence in the country. We began with incidents of civilian violence in which Black men and women were targeted for death because of their murderers' belief that to be Black is to be dangerous. Since Trayvon Martin's death, a number of instances in which civilians shoot and kill Black men and women have been brought to national attention (examples include the killings of Jordan Davis, Renisha McBride, and Darius Simmons). These killings, which took place primarily because the shooters felt they were in danger of harm at the hands of an imagined Black threat, can be explained in the context of American perceptions of Black criminality. Here, students made the connections between the historical racial tropes covered in the beginning of the course, and racialized perceptions of criminality and violence in the present. These realizations helped to solidify the lasting nature of these tropes in students' minds and also made the arguments about a new racism more salient.

Next, we explored legal policies that allow for the restriction of Black movement, such as "stop and frisk"<sup>2</sup> law enforcement policies. Browne-Marshall (2013) argues

that these policies are a continuation of the practices of slave-catching patrols and “Black Codes” which were created specifically to control, monitor, and limit the movement of Black men and women. The New York City Police Department’s stop and frisk policies have allowed police to detain and search hundreds of thousands of Black and Latino people since their implementation in 2002. In discussing “stop and frisk” with students, I provided them with the following general definition:

An officer may not stop a person without having a reasonable suspicion that the individual has engaged or is about to engage in criminal activity. Frisking someone is legally permitted only when the officer has a reason to suspect that the person is armed and/or dangerous. (Center for Constitutional Rights, 2012)

Once this definition was given, I asked them to think about it in the context of the racial tropes and perceptions of criminality we had previously discussed. In addition, I pushed them to think about what it means in the larger context of police-community contact with the following questions: Of what race, gender, and class are the people that we expect police might see as “reasonably” suspicious, and why? How might police respond to these individuals based on common notions of criminality? Who may experience high rates of contact with police? And who, then, might experience high rates of force in their interactions with police? Given these questions to think about, students invariably made the connections between current police practice and historical precedent. Then, they drew conclusions between their own lives and experiences (or the experiences of friends and family), police practice, and, ultimately, #BlackLivesMatter.

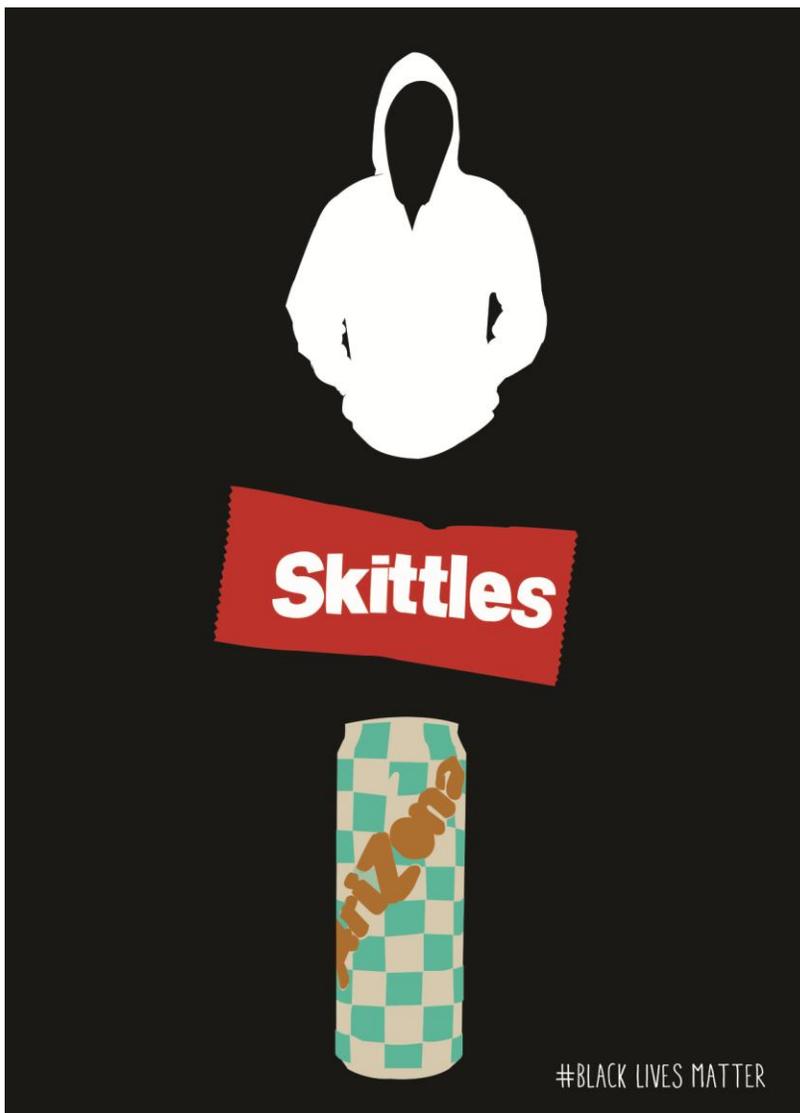
For example, Ashley saw a clear link between the racial tropes, lynching, and present-day police violence. She wrote,

*The myth of the Black rapist was drummed up and used to justify lynching. These lynchings were tools for White supremacy during, and immediately following, slavery. Today, the most common outlet for White supremacist tactics is police brutality. Police brutality is a form of systematic lynching that occurs as police, or modern day slave-catchers, unjustifiably and unprovoked take Black life due to fear for their own life. The threat of police violence itself is an instrument of the political and social control of Black people just as lynching once was in the South.*

Ashley also argued that the sustained use of violence against African Americans, undergirded by a belief in the inherent criminality of Black people, has also maintained

the need for Black men and women to “suppress and manage” their personal behavior in order to avoid being targeted by police.

Finally, as we discussed the establishment of and rationale for #BlackLivesMatter, I pushed the students to think critically about the movement itself. In particular, I asked them how the movement is dealing with issues of sexuality and gender as they relate to police violence. Here, a discussion of Daniel Holtzclaw’s<sup>3</sup>predatorial policing of Black women presented us with evidence of the lasting nature of sexual violence experienced by Black women.



“TRAYVON MARTIN,” ZARI WILLIAMS, 2016

Again, I encouraged students to think about gendered police violence in regard to the history of rape and lynching and how that history might inform Black women’s experiences with police in the present day. Next, I asked them to think about the concurrent movement to #BlackLivesMatter, #SayHerName, a campaign which developed in response to the lack of attention paid to Black women and girls killed by police, such as Aiyana Stanley-Jones, Rekia Boyd, and Sandra Bland. In particular, I pushed them to examine what it means about intercommunity relations for Black women’s experiences to

be left out of mainstream discussions about police violence, despite the clear proof that this is an issue also affecting their lives. This discussion of sexism in regard to the focus of #BlackLivesMatter is important because during the class, I placed an emphasis on intersectionality, pushing students to think about the ways in which race, gender, sexuality, and class impact one's experience of various phenomena. I am not shy about interrogating how the Black community addresses intersecting identities and oppressions in relation to police brutality and racial violence. The students, who were all female<sup>4</sup>, were open to having this discussion, and shared their own frustrations with the seeming unwillingness of members of their student and home communities to address sexism within the movement.

It is important to note that the national #BlackLivesMatter organization has articulated a position guided by anti-sexist and anti-heterosexist positions. The #BlackLivesMatter webpage provides some guiding principles which outline the organization's position on gender and sexuality. The webpage states, "We are committed to building a Black women affirming space free from sexism, misogyny, and male-centeredness." It continues, "We are committed to embracing and making space for trans brothers and sisters to participate and lead. We are committed to being self-reflexive and doing the work required to dismantle cis-gender privilege and uplift Black trans folk, especially Black trans women who continue to be disproportionately impacted by trans-antagonistic violence." Additionally, it further states, "We are committed to fostering a queer-affirming network. When we gather, we do so with the intention of freeing ourselves from the tight grip of heteronormative thinking or, rather, the belief that all in the world are heterosexual unless s/he or they disclose otherwise." (#BlackLivesMatter, "Guiding Principles")

#BlackLivesMatter's commitment to creating and maintaining a space that is safe for Black women and Black LGBTQ men and women is of great significance and importance. My students are well aware that of the activists credited with founding the movement, Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrisse Cullors, all are Black women, and that two of the founders are queer. However, although the students were comfortable with addressing gender and sexism within #BlackLivesMatter, they were less comfortable with, and sometimes less willing to interrogate, heterosexism and transphobia in the movement. Still, I pushed them to think about the ways in which one's sexuality might shape one's experience with police. In addition, I also asked that they think about the lack of critical attention paid to the murders of Black transgender women in police custody, such as Nizah Morris and Mya Hall. Here, we returned to Collins's (2005) framing of the new racism, a defining feature of which is gender. However, taking that further, I encouraged them to think about the intersecting identities that shape one's life and, in doing so, reflect on whether or not sexuality and gender identity should be considered another feature of anti-Black racism. I believe that the students' reluctance to address heterosexism and transphobia in more local discussions about #BlackLivesMatter may be reflective of

the reluctance of the larger Black community to engage gender, sexuality, and police violence in a way that is fair and inclusive.

## Additional Topics for Inclusion

Over the next year, although much of the activity around #BlackLivesMatter died down on our campus, the students were still eager to discuss the activism that continued to take place around the country. The moment of action that they took part in motivated them to keep going in their organizing activities. They began reinstating campus organizations, such as the Black Student Union (BSU), and were seeking out connections with local community organizations and other BSUs in the area. In the next iteration of the seminar course in Spring 2016, I chose to move past tracing the history of racially motivated violence in favor of examining the tradition of Black resistance to dehumanization and discrimination (see Appendix B for the course syllabus). In doing so, I found that a discussion of the tradition of Black activism in the Americas served as a complement to the socio-historical analysis of #BlackLivesMatter. The primary objectives for this course were: to understand the historical tradition of radical activism in the Black community; and to explain how the tradition of Black grassroots and political activism connects to and influences the "new Civil Rights movement."

***As a group, they determined that the Haitian Revolution was one of the earliest articulations of #BlackLivesMatter, as its goals were to illustrate the value of Black life in the face of a racist and dehumanizing system of oppression.***

## The Black Radical Tradition

The focus on Black activism in the Spring 2016 Seminar course allowed for a new way to understand and interrogate #BlackLivesMatter. In this course, when discussing the #BlackLivesMatter movement in conjunction with the tradition of Black activism, I proposed an idea to my class: What if #BlackLivesMatter is not a new movement, but a continuation of the long arc of Black activism that has taken place over time? I then asked them to come up with a timeline of Black activism up to that point, allowing them to determine some parameters in regard to time and geographic location. The students chose to confine their timeline to the Americas (specifically North America and the Caribbean), and began with the year 1804. As a group, they determined that the Haitian Revolution was one of the earliest articulations of #BlackLivesMatter, as its goals were to illustrate the value of Black life in the face of a racist and dehumanizing system of oppression. They went on to provide other points on the timeline such as Nat Turner's rebellion (1831), the abolitionist movement (ending in 1865), anti-lynching

campaigns (1890s-1930s), the mid-century Civil Rights Movement (1954-1968), and the Black Power Movement (1960s-1970s). They developed the argument that all of these moments of activism had laid the foundation for #BlackLivesMatter, which was not a new movement, just a modern-day articulation of the continued fight for Black civil rights.

In helping to support this point, we read two autobiographies, *Assata* by Assata Shakur and *Revolutionary Suicide* by Huey P. Newton, to discuss the evolution of an activist. These first person narratives were particularly useful for my students who have an interest in the Black Power Movement, but do not have extensive knowledge of the leaders within the movement. Both texts illustrate for the reader how Shakur and Newton developed their political viewpoints and came to their activism. By giving students a full description of their lives and activism, these texts provided a clear demonstration that activists do not emerge from a cocoon fully formed, but are shaped by a variety of circumstances that push them toward a movement.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps most useful for a discussion of #BlackLivesMatter was Newton's telling of the establishment of the Black Panther Party in 1966 in the chapter entitled, "Patrolling." Newton describes the hostile policing conditions facing the Black community in Oakland, CA, laying out one of the primary functions of the activist group: monitoring police-community relations, and ensuring that community members were not mistreated, abused, or exploited at the hands of Oakland police officers. Here, it was helpful to take a look at the Party's platform and program, better known as the Ten Point Program. In it, Newton and Black Panther Party co-founder Bobby Seale directly address the issues of police violence. Point seven reads:

*We want an immediate end to POLICE BRUTALITY and MURDER of Black people. We believe we can end police brutality in our Black community by organizing Black self-defense groups that are dedicated to defending our Black community from racist police oppression and brutality. The Second Amendment to the Constitution of the United States gives a right to bear arms. We therefore believe that all Black people should arm themselves for self-defense. (Newton, 1973, p. 124; emphasis his)*

The Black Panther Party's platform and the resulting community patrols were an initial articulation of one of the primary concerns of #BlackLivesMatter. A discussion of the Party's goals served to illustrate the current movement's connectedness to historical activist groups for students. I believe that looking to the Black Panther Party's program can be a useful tool for teaching about the development of #BlackLivesMatter as a movement, and for teaching about the continuity of the issues addressed by the movement.

## Conclusions

For both of the previously discussed iterations of Seminar in Africana Studies, I required a term paper and

presentation on a topic relating to the course theme. In the Spring 2015 course, they were allowed to choose a topic relating to racial violence, mass incarceration, and criminal justice. In the Spring 2016 course, they were asked to do a profile of an activist's life and work. In doing those assignments, students were required to think about their chosen topic in relation to #BlackLivesMatter and current social justice activism. Both papers were designed with the intention that students would not only increase their political awareness, but also possibly find a political movement impacting their community that they are passionate about and be moved to take action in a meaningful way, fulfilling the third goal of Africana Studies, inspiring students to motivated direct action. Through the realization of this goal, students are turning their education into a useful tool for bringing about radical social change.

Student feedback on these assignments was positive; in my conversations with them after their presentations, they voiced an appreciation of the new knowledge base they had crafted. As many of the students in these courses are embarking on the next steps in their careers (often graduate programs in law, education, or social work), they felt that the course and the research that they had conducted would be useful in their chosen fields. In addition, during the semester, I noticed that student leaders were incorporating the course information into their club programming and activity on campus. This was encouraging, as it illustrated their desire to raise their colleagues' consciousness about the circumstances shaping the political and social climate at the time.

***I believe that looking to the Black Panther Party's program can be a useful tool for teaching about the development of #BlackLivesMatter as a movement, and for teaching about the continuity of the issues addressed by the movement.***

I have found that in regard to my own personal growth, teaching this material to two different groups of students has provided me with a greater knowledge base from which to draw when teaching other courses. For example, I teach a course called Race, Gender and Social Justice at least once an academic year. This course is a general education course that many students take to fulfill their "Diversity and Justice" requirement, and is offered only by the Africana Studies and Women's and Gender Studies departments. The students enrolled in these courses are more racially diverse, are majors in a wide array of disciplines, and tend to have a very basic understanding of the racial history of the United States. Though I am not able to go into the same detail allowed by Seminar, the information from the courses is useful in helping students to develop a more nuanced understanding of the historical roots of racial injustice.

For me, teaching #BlackLivesMatter should move students to act in the interest of social justice in their

communities. In making the linkages between the current movement, the historical efforts to disempower Black people, and Black people's continued resistance to their dehumanization, I was able to provide students with the academic grounding to take the first steps to using their education as a tool for personal and collective political liberation.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>The majority of these students also had second majors in other disciplines such as Psychology, English, (Elementary) Education, Political Science, Sociology, Criminology and Criminal Justice, Communications, and Women's and Gender Studies.

<sup>2</sup>In the United States, these stops are also known as "Terry stops," deriving their name from the U.S. Supreme court case, *Terry v. Ohio* (1968).

<sup>3</sup>Holtzclaw, an Oklahoma City police officer, was convicted in 2015 of multiple counts of rape, sexual battery, and forcible oral sodomy. Holtzclaw methodically targeted poor Black women with previous criminal histories and/or warrants, using his power as a law enforcement officer to detain and sexually assault at least thirteen women over a period of seven months.

<sup>4</sup> Though it is not uncommon for my seminar course to be comprised of more women than men, it is not common for all students in this course to be women.

<sup>5</sup>Here, it is helpful for Africana Studies scholars to note that both Newton and Shakur encountered their first glimpses of activism through their involvement in the student movements to establish Black Studies on the West and East Coast, respectively. For student-activists in Africana Studies, this realization is a meaningful one that they can easily connect to.

**AWS 4980: Seminar in Africana-World Studies**  
**"The New Racism: Racial Violence, Criminality and Blackness"**  
**Spring 2015**

*"Racism is a much more clandestine, much more hidden kind of phenomenon, but at the same time it's perhaps far more terrible than it's ever been." - Angela Davis*

*"There's a lot more hypocrisy than before. Racism has gone back underground." - Richard Pryor*

*"Seems to me that the institutions that function in this country are clearly racist, and that they're built upon racism." - Stokely Carmichael*

*"We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality." - Martin Luther King, Jr.*

**Course Description:**

The murder of Trayvon Martin, and the resulting verdict in the case, ushered in a new era of law and order in the United States. Martin's murder became the first widely acknowledged murder in a long string of murders of Black and Latino men and women. The common thread within each incident has been the perceived threat and criminality tied to Blackness, rendering even the presence of Black bodies dangerous and justifiable reason to murder. Coinciding with these murders is the growing issue of the mass-incarceration of Black men and women at the highest rates in American history. This course investigates the role and function of race and gender within the lived experiences of African descended people in America, particularly in relation to the criminal justice system. The 2008 presidential election spawned the idea that we live in a "post-racial" society where race is no longer important and racism no longer exists. However, the growing violence directed at Black communities—by police and civilians alike—and the imprisonment of millions of Black men and women paints a very different picture. We will examine systemic aspects of social oppression and how they converge to form a "new racism," characterized by growing disdain for Black life both inside and outside of the prison system. This course will examine the historical legacy of racial violence in the United States in an effort to tie this history to the current social climate surrounding race, violence and criminalization. Through the use of course texts and popular media, a focus will be placed upon the consistency of social oppression throughout history and into the post-Civil Rights era through an analysis of the impact of racism, sexism and heterosexism on such issues as crime, criminality and race.

**Course Objectives:**

1. To define the concepts of race, gender and sexuality and discuss the significance they hold in American society;
2. To define racism, sexism, heterosexism and classism and be able to identify the myriad of ways in which they function;
3. To critically examine the ever-changing forms of oppression in America;
4. To explore the intersecting oppressions: racism, sexism, heterosexism and classism and the critical role they play in our lives;
5. To Understand the historical significance of global white supremacy and patriarchy;
6. To understand the impact of racism and global white supremacy, sexism, classism and heterosexism on the lived experiences of Black people;
7. To develop an understanding of the historical legacy of racialized violence in America;
8. To explore the connection between racial violence and racialized perceptions of criminality;
9. To develop an understanding of how the criminal justice system functions as a racist structure within American society;
10. To explain, discuss and identify how the "new racism" has manifested in relation to perceptions of criminality and in violence aimed at men and women of color.

**Text & Readings:**

Alexander, Michelle. (2010). *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: The New Press.

I will be providing supplementary readings for the semester via Blackboard along with any other pertinent course information.

**Schedule**

**SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION**

**Week 1:**

- Introduction to Course

**RADICAL TEACHER**

- Black/African American Studies as the disciplinary context for this course
- The current social moment

**Readings:** hooks, "Loving Blackness as Political Resistance"

## SECTION 2: RACE, RACISM AND PRIVILEGE

### Week 2:

- What is race?
- What is Blackness? Whiteness?
- Defining racism
- Defining white supremacy

**Readings:** Smedley, "Race' and the Construction of Human Identity"  
Harris, "Whiteness As Property"

### Week 3:

- Understanding racism
- Understanding white privilege

**Readings:** Lipsitz, "The Possessive Investment in Whiteness"  
Bonilla-Silva, Chapter 4, "The New Racism: The Post-Civil Rights Racial Structure in the United States"  
Collins, "The Past is Ever Present: Recognizing the New Racism"

## SECTION 3: HISTORICAL ROOTS OF RACIAL VIOLENCE

### Week 4:

- Enslavement and racial violence
- Racial perceptions of criminality

**Readings:** *White, "Jezebel and Mammy: The Mythology of Female Slavery"*  
*Davis, Chapter 11, "Rape, Racism and the Myth of the Black Rapist"*  
*Vidal, "Private and State Violence Against African Slaves in Lower Louisiana During the French Period"*

### Weeks 5 & 6:

- Emancipation and racial violence
- Lynching and social control

**Readings:** *Wells-Barnett, "A Red Record" and "Lynch Law in America"*  
*Freedman, "The Racialization of Rape and Lynching"*  
*DuBois, Chapter 4, "Science and Empire"*  
*Feimster, Chapter 2 "The Violent Transition from Freedom to Segregation"*  
*Viewing: "Ida B. Wells: A Passion for Justice"*

### Week 7:

- Racial violence during the Jim Crow era

**Readings:** *Lewis, "The Citizens' Councils: Aims, Organizations and Propaganda Tactics" and "The Case of Emmett Till"*  
*Trotti, "Trends in Racial Violence in the Postbellum South"*  
*Viewing: "The Untold Story of Emmett Louis Till"*

## SECTION 4: THE NEW JIM CROW

### Week 8:

- Crime and the criminal justice system

**Readings:** *Alexander, Introduction and Chapter 1*

**Week 9:**

- Crime and the criminal justice system
- The school-to-prison pipeline

**Readings:** *Alexander, Chapter 2*

**Weeks 10 & 11:**

- Crime and the criminal justice system

**Readings:** *Alexander, Chapter 3 & 4*

**Week 12:**

- The war on drugs
- The New Jim Crow

**Readings:** *Alexander, Chapter 5*

**Viewing:** *"The House I Live In"*

**Week 13:**

- Race, gender and the criminal justice system

**Readings:** *Alexander, Chapter 6*

**SECTION 5: RACIAL VIOLENCE IN THE MODERN ERA**

**Week 14:**

- Civilian Violence
- "Stand Your Ground"

**Readings:** *Lewis, "Lynching, Incarceration's Cousin: From Till to Trayvon"*  
*National Urban League, "Shoot First: Stand Your Ground Laws and Their Effect on Violent Crime and the Criminal Justice System"*

**Week 15:**

- Police violence
- Racial Profiling

**Readings:** *Browne-Marshall, "Stop and Frisk: From Slave-Catchers to NYPD, A Legal Commentary"*  
*Asim, "Shooting Negroes"*  
*Staples, "White Power, Black Crime, and Racial Politics"*

**Week 16:**

- #BlackLivesMatter

**Readings:** *Wingfield, "Gendering #BlackLivesMatter: A Feminist Perspective"*  
*"Whose Lives Matter?: Trans Women of Color and Police Violence"*



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# RADICAL TEACHER

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

## Making it Matter: Reframing the U.S. Survey

by Jesse Kohn



BLACK LIVES MATTER PROTEST AT UNION SQUARE, MANHATTAN (IMAGE: THE ALL-NITE IMAGES)

**B**lack Lives Matter changed the way I teach American history. BLM has raised pivotal questions that conventional histories of African Americans simply cannot answer with nuance and complexity. It has made us painfully aware of the wide gulf between our noblest ambitions, our “Empire of Liberty,” and the brutal reality of many people’s experiences, especially those of color. The African-American story has always been central to my course, but BLM made me realize the necessity of emphasizing this gulf to my students, many of whom were taking the U.S. survey for the first time.

I resolved to situate BLM’s spirit and critique at the beginning of my survey by placing the deceptively simple questions BLM raises front and center. Answering essential questions such as “Why are African Americans so often treated as second-class citizens in their own country?” and “Has our country made any of the progress we so often claim?” compelled a redesign of the course, placing race relations in the foreground and shifting the emphasis on African-Americans from being just victims of injustice to agents of change. Ultimately, my goal became to reshape my students’ understanding of the American story as a constant and precarious battle for equality, not just the perfection of an abstract union. In doing so we were forced to rethink many of our own progressive assumptions.

***Ultimately, my goal became to reshape my students’ understanding of the American story as a constant and precarious battle for equality, not just the perfection of an abstract union.***

I opened the course with a unit on Black Lives Matter bookended by two texts: Ta-Nehisi Coates’s 2014 “The Case for Reparations” from *The Atlantic* and Amiri Baraka’s 1964 play *Dutchman*. Both these sources are deeply painful and always unflinching in how they question and complicate traditional and liberal narratives of American history. Furthermore they are both a call to action, a call to action now embodied by Black Lives Matter. Coates’s article gives a sweeping view of African-American history as a series of struggles for legal and social justice. He refuses to present African-American history as a positive story of uplift; instead, it becomes a long, continuing and never-guaranteed fight for denied rights. As convincing and evocative as Coates is, I knew that my class would politely agree with most of what he said, so I wanted to end the unit with a provocative text that would speak to issues of racial tensions from a different and surprising perspective. I chose Baraka’s *Dutchman* because it dramatizes events in such an inescapably searing way. It is a compelling, intense play, and one that I knew would challenge my students specifically. Starting the course with two scathing social critiques compelled us to question the typical narrative of African-American history and allowed us intellectual space to discuss the core questions that BLM raises in ways that would pay dividends throughout the year. Quickly, my students and I came to appreciate that the unit and these readings were paradigmatic of a

recurring theme: the glaring inconsistency between America’s ideals of equality and the reality of state-sanctioned exploitation, discrimination, and violence in U.S. history. The discussion of Black Lives Matter set the stage for more conversations about American power structures and the enduring legacy of white supremacy, ignored in textbook narratives that tend to depict American history, and African-American history in particular, as a triumphant (if at times uneven) march towards progress. Not only did students refer back to the readings throughout the year, but they also recognized with stunning clarity the unshakable connection between America’s history and today’s most urgent issues.

A note about where I teach. Saint Ann’s School, located in Brooklyn, takes pride in being a very progressive pre-k through 12th grade independent school, both in pedagogy and politics. We have no grades, very few rules, and remarkably little structure. This lack of structure, including near autonomy in developing curricula, has come under question as the school grapples with a history of marginalizing students of color. The vast majority of students and teachers at the school are white, and many are wealthy. Students of all races have demanded more inclusive history and English curricula. This campaign has dovetailed with student activism in BLM. When a handful of students were arrested in protests after the failure to indict Eric Garner’s killer, they were treated like conquering heroes after spending a night in lockup. Later that week, students cut classes (accompanied by many of their teachers) to protest NYPD tactics. In other words, I teach highly engaged and political students. Yet few of these students face any discrimination by the police nor do they have a deep understanding of how BLM and the problems it seeks to redress fit into the larger scope of American history.

I start the first day of class with a little experiment. I ask my sophomores to draw an American. All of them draw a generic white person. Every year. This quickly leads us to ask who is “American” and who is not? Who does history honor and who does it ignore? Who is served by the way we tell our history? These questions bring us to Coates’s essay because it addresses the central historical claim of Black Lives Matter: African Americans have faced a specific and particular history of oppression, especially in regards to law enforcement and the judicial system. While all of my students are nervously embarrassed by their drawings, some argue that while certainly black lives matter, really all lives matter. But Coates’s essay challenges this perception by detailing the unique struggles of blacks as they faced and resisted “plunder” at every moment in American history. According to Coates, this plunder, in which African Americans’ labor, wealth, and opportunity were stolen, was the result of systemic injustice inherent to the American capitalist and legal structure, not just a few southern racists. Moreover, Coates claims that our failure to confront our troubled history has led to many of the daunting problems African-Americans still face today. Starting the course this way not only stresses the importance of studying history, but also makes students immediately question whether the United States has made significant progress in race relations.

***The debate between BLM and ALM also highlighted to students how African Americans were agents of change, and while many whites (including their teacher) sympathized with and protested alongside these activists, black-led action was at the center of the changes transforming the national conversation on race.***

The essay compelled us to look at the way our lives—in a city that prides itself on tolerance—have been shaped by structural racism. To make this connection clear we compared old redlining and current demographic maps of a number of cities to see the continuing legacy of these housing practices. We then used the New York City maps to walk through our days and look at the neighborhoods we pass through on our way to school, music lessons, and sports practices. Even I, who knew the point of this exercise, was surprised at how few of the white students—and me for that matter—ever went through a predominantly minority neighborhood. Armed with Coates’s historical lens and the evidence of how his argument impacted their lives, students quickly came to understand that the Youtube clips they had been watching of chokeholds in Staten Island and tear gas in Ferguson were a new manifestation of a long history, not simply examples of overzealous policing. Many of them would later turn this critical eye on their own school’s persistent prejudices as the year continued.

The guiding idea structuring my unit takes its cue from one of Coates’s key points: the significant role African Americans have played as authors of their own liberation, not just objects of victimhood. We contrasted Coates’s article with a counterargument by Kevin Williamson published in the *National Review*, in which he claims that much of the progress blacks have made is due to a change in whites’ opinions and tolerance of African Americans. The question of whether blacks essentially were given rights by white America, as Williamson implies, or secured them through their own activism, was particularly relevant and useful to the students as they challenged the status quo in their school and city. Thus, discussing this in the context of Black Lives Matter did more than just teach them history; it connected the students’ protests to the generations of activists who have come before them.

One pedagogical tool useful in linking the past to the present was mixing historical and contemporary documents. In our BLM unit, for example, students read an excerpt from Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow* about how difficult it is for the impoverished to navigate the justice system and defend their basic rights even when they are most certainly innocent. The next day in class, I gave students readings and statistics about African Americans’ interactions with the justice system. These ranged from colonial laws allowing masters to murder their slaves to lynching statistics to one op-ed advocating for the reinstatement of stop-and-frisk and another congratulating the St. Louis County Prosecutor for not indicting Darren Wilson after Michael Brown’s death. Using a jigsaw configuration, students read a single document in small groups and then switched into larger groups to share their impressions of each reading. As a class, we then discussed the connections between the documents and Alexander’s argument. Of course, it is too simplistic to draw a straight line from colonial slave laws to the death of Michael Brown, but it helped students craft a narrative that is distinct from the American exceptionalist model and also taught them to interpret the media around them with a critical eye as they would any primary document in class.

With this long narrative in mind, we began to place BLM in historical context by reading editorials for and against the protest movement. Unsurprisingly the major point of disagreement in the editorials and in the ensuing class discussions essentially mirrored the hashtag war between #AllLivesMatter and #BlackLivesMatter. Working through this point of contention was essential to accomplish my goals in the unit as I wanted students to understand not just the long subjugation of African Americans but the uniqueness of this oppression. To accomplish this we held a formal debate on whether students agreed with BLM activist Julius Jones’s controversial assertion that All Lives Matter was a “violent statement.” At the end of the unit, students wrote papers addressing a similar question. The resulting responses ranged widely in their scope and opinions. One student conceded that in context ALM might be “ignorant” and “unintentionally harmful,” but that All Lives Matter is inherently a statement of concord and peace, not violence. Among the most interesting was a student who at first thought that Jones’s assertion went too far but upon reflection and after more research came to the conclusion that ALM was indeed violent because it “erase[s] someone else’s racial identity.” Another student argued that “#AllLivesMatter becomes a tool for suppression, whose only goal is to maintain the old system.” His essay drew from the country’s founding documents to demonstrate the nation’s long history of using idealistic language to preserve existing power structures. Or as Howard Zinn put it in a reading that followed this unit, the Constitution “enable[d] the elite to keep control with a minimum of coercion, a maximum of law—all made palatable by the fanfare of patriotism and unity.”<sup>1</sup> These types of connections framed today’s news as part of a long historical argument between those the power structure serves and those it does not. While “The Case for Reparations” does not specifically address Black Lives Matter, it provided the historical context that allowed students to weigh the merits of the #BLM and #ALM debate. For example, another student argued that redlining (a major topic in Coates’s essay) had led to police brutality by segregating blacks and concentrating poverty. According to her, “This marginalization coincides with the significant difference in arrests between blacks and whites, as well as the disgusting police brutality that blacks experience day after day.”

The debate between BLM and ALM also highlighted to students how African Americans were agents of change and, while many whites (including their teacher)

sympathized with and protested alongside these activists, black-led action was at the center of the changes transforming the national conversation on race. This perspective also surfaced in students' work months after we studied BLM. One student's second-semester term paper argued that former slaves, not the Freedman's Bureau, led the charge for post-war, African-American education. She ended the essay by stating that it was important to acknowledge how influential black Americans were in "inspiring and anchoring, through practice and theory, social movements for the liberation of all people." This certainly stands in contrast to how most textbooks treat Reconstruction—where the drama plays out in Congress, not the schools of rural Tennessee and North Carolina.

As we ended the unit, I wanted to present an unexpected source that might sear its way onto my students' memory as we moved to more traditional topics. I chose the play that many credit with starting the Black Arts Movement, Amiri Baraka's controversial *Dutchman*. Not only is the play relevant to BLM, but it provides an example of advocacy that differs from marches and protests: that of the artist as provocateur. In a school that emphasizes the arts, and playwriting in particular, the play offered students an example of how they could turn their own artistic expression into political speech and activism. *Dutchman* is most often interpreted as a personal exploration of Baraka's own transition from beat poet to black nationalist, but I hoped to read the play as an artwork responding to forces that continue to define the American experience of blackness as well as what it means to be a bystander to racial violence.

The play centers on a seemingly chance subway encounter between a black college student, Clay, and a young white woman, Lula. Clay and Lula's witty and flirtatious banter slowly but inevitably descends into a conversation on race that exposes the ever-present, simmering racial tensions that dominate their interaction. In the closing moments of the play, Lula and Clay erupt into open argument. As Clay prepares to exit, Lula stabs him in the back. Within seconds, the rest of the car has disposed of Clay's body. As the passengers disembark the train, another young black man walks in. Lula smiles at him, the curtain falls, and the violent cycle continues. Most critics understand Lula as the temptations of white society and Clay as a thinly veiled stand-in for Baraka. The main characters' dynamic, therefore, represents a microcosm of the power structure that Baraka believed dominated 1960s race relations as Lula consistently denies Clay's racial identity, while simultaneously lording the promise of assimilation and equality over him before ultimately enacting his demise.

Baraka is hardly what students might think of when they envision a Civil Rights activist. Written and produced as the Civil Rights Act was being passed, *Dutchman* flatly rejected the promises that such legislation offered.

Instead, Baraka saw it as another siren call from white America.<sup>2</sup> Approaching U.S. history for the first time in a classroom, most of my students, thanks to pop culture and the news, think of African Americans as a monolithic segment of society, aimed at improving its lot in a multicultural America despite any number of obstacles. Baraka's rejection of this utopia and of white America in general is harsh, unrelenting, and unapologetic. This spurning can be/feel particularly severe for many of us at Saint Ann's because it is an explicit rejection of our like-minded liberalism. Thus reading *Dutchman* complicates their understanding of the Civil Rights Movement and, in turn, the more revolutionary aspects of Black Lives Matter that seek to fundamentally reinvent American social relations (as opposed to simply change police tactics).

My students were both surprised and disturbed by the play's final scene when Lula kills Clay and the other passengers discard his body. As they came into class, the board read "Why did Lula kill Clay?" Students jotted down answers and shared them with a neighbor and then as a group. Answers included "Because he was black" and "Because whites feel threatened by black males." This lent



STAGING OF THE *DUTCHMAN* AT JACKSONVILLE STATE UNIVERSITY, 2016 (IMAGE COURTESY OF THE DRAMA DEPARTMENT OF JSU)

itself to a discussion of the killings that galvanized the Black Lives Matter movement. For example, they immediately compared Clay's murder to the 2012 murder of Trayvon Martin by linking it to an article we read about African Americans carrying freedom papers in the antebellum South—papers that allowed manumitted blacks to go from point A to point B (theoretically) unmolested. The dramatic end of the play was a wake-up call that, in important ways, very little has changed from the days of Clay and Lula to Trayvon Martin and George Zimmerman. Hence, like "The Case for Reparations," it demonstrates that the daily and often unpunished violence perpetuated against black Americans is hardly new.

We also debated whether the other people on the subway car, and by extension the audience, are complicit in Clay's murder and its cover-up. In their opinion, Baraka leaves this open-ended. While Lula's actions are clearly premeditated, they questioned whether the other

passengers were part of a conspiracy. This struck many in the class as pivotal in an age before smart phones. The practical reason that Black Lives Matter has gained national attention at this particular moment is because these killings are being caught on camera, but Baraka's play shows what we all know: black lives and deaths have often not "mattered" in the past. To students on either side of the conversation, it was scarier if the white straphangers were not in on Lula's plan because it meant that she knew she could rely on white society to hide her crime. Thus, the end of the tragedy asks what role we have all played in these murders. Just as these issues were thorny for Greenwich Village audiences in the midst of the Civil Rights era, they also challenged my mostly liberal, affluent, and white students to confront their position in America during the Black Lives Matter movement. A few students chafed at this analysis, which they argued accused them of crimes they did not commit. Other students defended Baraka's point, stating that the ability to remain ignorant of these problems was only possible from a place of privilege.

I tried to maintain this method of inquiry and dynamic as we moved to other subjects of study. While the gulf between what America promises and delivers is most acutely seen in the African-American story, this paradigm informed our studies of many topics. Most obviously, it applied to Native Americans, women, and any minority group treated poorly, such as Asian and Irish immigrants. The power structure that pervades Coates's essay and Baraka's play and the shocking simplicity of the phrase "Black Lives Matter" provided students approaching the U.S. survey for the first time a way to connect all these examples of white supremacy. Since they were a group of mostly white "elites," it also gave many students a way to understand the impact and importance of their own privilege.

To keep BLM relevant in the rest of the survey, I knew the transition to our next subject, the Constitution, would be pivotal, so I asked students to write in class about what the phrases "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" and "We the people" mean to them. One prompt was to think about whether these terms hold the same meaning after studying reparations and Black Lives Matter. Some students saw no difference, just an evolution in how we interpret these words to include more and more groups: black men, women, gays, etc. Others had a more cynical reaction. A student even described the opening line of the Constitution as "coded racism." Rather than being an inclusive statement of popular sovereignty, he came to believe that the phrase was actually exclusive. "Everyone knows who they meant," he remarked. While many students were immediately offended by this, others drew a connection between this and the coded racism of "All Lives Matter." As many students had noted in our debate, the phrase "All Lives Matter" is seemingly benign, but it too uses inclusive language to exclude the particular suffering—and history—of non-whites.

To my delight—and the betterment of the course—I did not have to keep forcing Black Lives Matter on to the students. Rather, they frequently made connections to the material throughout the year, most concretely in our study of slavery. While reading Frederick Douglass's memoir,

they immediately saw similarities to Black Lives Matter and *Dutchman* when Douglass recounts the cold blooded murder of Demby, a slave who refuses to come out of a river to be whipped. They came to class eager to discuss how Douglass uses uncannily similar language to Black Lives Matter to describe the impunity of southern whites. About the murder of one slave he states that the "whole transaction was soon hushed up" and that another murderer "escaped not only punishment, but even the pain of being arraigned before a court for her horrid crime."<sup>3</sup> As a number of students noted, neither of these sentences sound out of place in today's news.

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By the time we reached the Civil Rights era, students were well prepared to analyze and contextualize the crimes and heroism of the period. Seen through the lens of Black Lives Matter, the murder of Emmett Till, for example, is no longer just a horror from a distant racist past. It is instead one in a long chain of murders by whites trying to maintain "law and order." We also spent significant time focusing on the heroism and bravery of Emmett's mother, Mamie Till, who demanded an open casket and invited the press to take pictures of the mangled corpse. The resulting images, in another echo of Black Lives Matter, changed opinions around the country about the supposedly "benign" nature of segregation. We also spoke about Till's defiant uncle, Moses Wright, who, at great personal risk, testified on behalf of the prosecution and identified the murderers in open court. While comparing this murder to that of Trayvon Martin is obvious, the reactions of Mamie Till and Martin's mother, Sybrina Fulton, demonstrate that African Americans, who are continually and consistently forced to defend the victims of crimes rather than condemn the perpetrators of these violent acts, are the true force behind changing laws and customs that effectively favor whites over blacks. Making these comparisons with Black Lives Matter in mind, students recognized that while Till's murder seems unthinkable today, we are far from the egalitarian society we claim to be, countering the absurd but frequently peddled narrative that after Civil Rights, African Americans shared in the full prosperity of America's bounty.

As African Americans moved to the foreground of the course, so did other marginalized groups. A student in a course evaluation wrote that the unit not only made her understand that "the hardships that black people face didn't end with Civil Rights" but also "what it's like being a woman in a patriarchal society." While Coates and Baraka may well object to comparing these two sets of hardships, using these texts gave her a new perspective on how to

study her own place in the world—her own history, in other words. By beginning the survey with a contemporary and pernicious asymmetrical power struggle, students can begin to see American history as a constant series of struggles for rights and influence, not just a predestined march of progress. While introducing Manifest Destiny, for example, I started a class with a loaded question: “Is the American West ethnically cleansed land?” “Of course,” chimed back my chorus of well trained liberals. “Are we standing on ethnically cleansed lands?” I retorted, to squirms and protests of “I mean, there weren’t that many people living here.” Suddenly Manifest Destiny was not an abstract term existing in the distant past on some homestead in Kansas but rather an example of what Coates potently refers to as “à la carte patriotism”—the disingenuous habit of emphasizing only positive parts of America’s past. Students now recognized they, too, were at risk of becoming “à la carte patriots” complicit in reifying white cultural hegemony. Indeed, sitting in beautiful Brooklyn Heights, students had to acknowledge they benefited from the ethnic cleansing of the Lenape natives. The revelation may have been startling but, as Coates argues, unless we come to terms with this, we remain American exceptionalists.

Needless to say, this way of approaching American history is not without its pitfalls and detractors. A small backlash did grow in the class. Primarily, students came to see me as enormously critical of the United States. One student even prefaced an email, “Mr. Kohn, I know you hate America, but . . .”<sup>4</sup> When placing Black Lives Matter at the forefront of the course, I made a conscious decision to emphasize America’s failures over its successes. Rather than discussing the tremendous amount of progress America has made in race relations in the past 150 years, we were immediately speaking about the issues left unresolved. My biggest fear was that my more radical statements could be laughed off rather than seriously engaged. I am not sure that I ever solved that problem, but I do believe that I was training my students to approach the world with a critical eye. As so many of us sitting in that room were in a position of privilege, it was important to challenge and sometimes ignore the theory of history that tolerates and exacerbates that very privilege.

***As so many of us sitting in that room were in a position of privilege, it was important to challenge and sometimes ignore the theory of history that tolerates and exacerbates that very privilege.***

Starting with a contemporary flash point is also a difficult way to begin the year. Rather than building camaraderie, I threw a brand new class into a discussion of one of America’s thorniest issues. Many non-black students were afraid to criticize the style or substance of Coates’s essay for fear of being accused of racism. I was surprised the first year I taught “The Case for Reparations” when well over half the class disagreed with Coates’s argument in their papers since there had been so few reservations

expressed in class. Their essays presented any number of convincing arguments that they did not feel comfortable expressing in front of their peers.

The classroom clearly had not yet become a safe space for fierce debates and arguments. When one difficult discussion occurred so early in the school year, I had to contemplate whether to push forward with the unit or to pull back to safer ground. One of the two African-American students in the class stated that she felt “attacked” by a white classmate, who had questioned the premise of reparations because it treats people as groups rather than as individuals. The African-American student believed that her history and the way she experiences contemporary New York City was being denied. It was hard not to sympathize with both students. On the one hand, it is a perfectly reasonable intellectual position to oppose reparations, and a student should not be castigated for expressing her opinions, especially in a classroom. When I spoke to the African-American student after class, though, I was relieved. She was happy this clash had occurred because these issues were finally coming to the surface in the school. Coates’s article provided an opportunity and framework for this challenging conversation, making it more meaningful for the entire class because the African-American student felt heard in ways not possible without reading the essay.

These simmering problems came to a head in the spring after a sophomore posted a racial slur on Facebook. Disillusioned by what they perceived as the administration’s slow response, students voiced their concern by staging a sit-in at the Head of School’s office. One of the leaders of these demonstrations was a student in our class. Though it is too much to say that Coates, Baraka, and the rest of our BLM unit inspired her protests, it was clear when she spoke to us about her activities that she was utilizing the language of our BLM unit as she turned the critical eye she had honed in class onto her own school. As she was telling us about the challenges she faced every day in our community, I was reminded of how it must have felt to be a white audience member watching *Dutchman* for the first time: complicit, guilty, and suddenly aware of one’s own privilege.

Baraka, in an act of defiance and consciousness raising, intentionally made his audience uncomfortable, and that is exactly where I want my students as we dive into American history. This unit and the themes it established throughout the year forced them to question their progressive assumption that the “arc of the moral universe” always “bends towards justice” and to rethink the way they have consumed conventional narratives of our history and our present. They also provide a usable past, and maybe even motivation, as students contemplate their own role in their community and school during the era of Black Lives Matter.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Howard Zinn. *A People's History of the United States*. (New York, Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2003). 99

<sup>2</sup> In an interview with the *New York Times* Baraka stated that the "civil rights movement has just provided more opportunities for prostitution."

<sup>3</sup> Frederick Douglass. *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. (New York: Dover Publications, 1995). 15



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# RADICAL TEACHER

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

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

by Donna Troka and Dorcas Adedoja



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

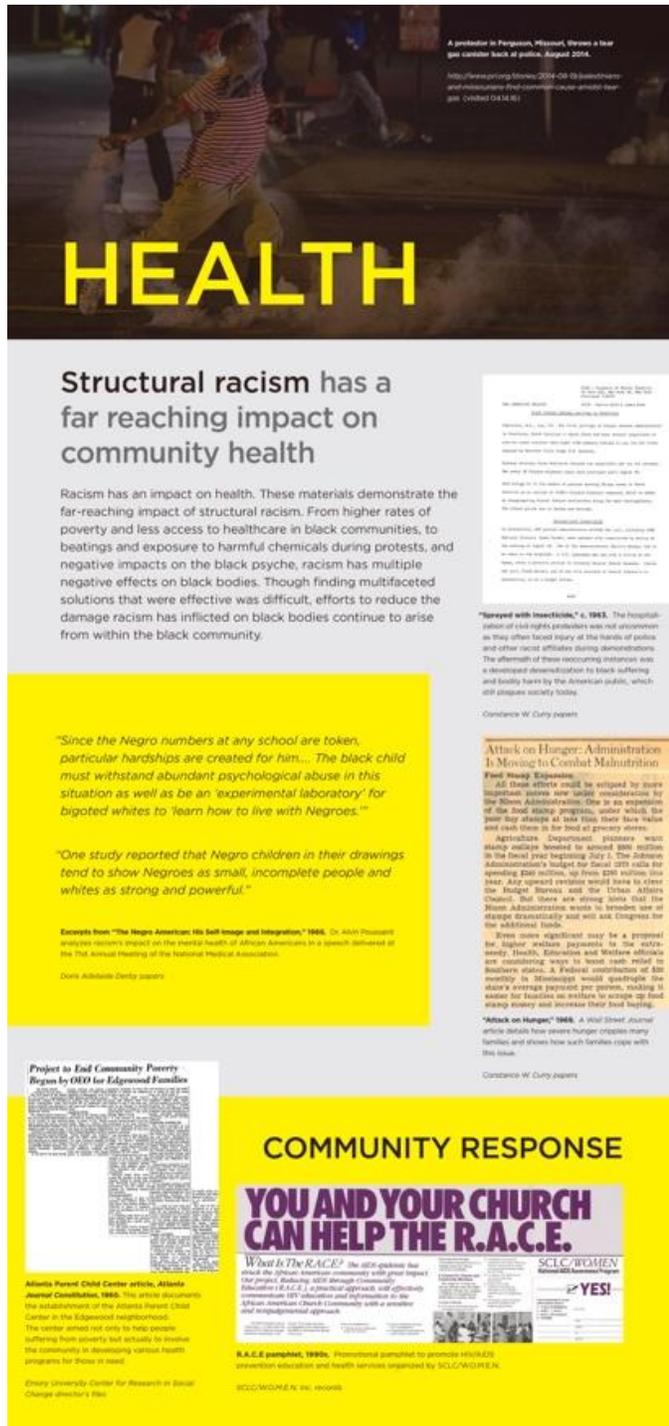
achieved (integration, voting rights, increase in Black leadership, exposure of red-lining in housing, the building of multi-racial coalitional politics for example) would be lost in a full scale dismissal of it and the approaches employed. I wondered if they would think differently if they actually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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**SCHOOL DESEGREGATION: the first six years**

"School Desegregation: The First Six Years," 1966. This publication was written by members of the Southern Regional Council in an effort to remedy the desegregation of schools and uncertainty about desegregation. The pamphlet includes subjects such as: history of desegregation, desegregation, and the racial capabilities of affected areas.

Frances Freedom Pinsky papers

# EDUCATION

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

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

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

Frances Freedom Pinsky papers

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

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

Emory University desegregation collection Ada Fort papers

**a first step toward school integration**

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

Frances Freedom Pinsky papers

**Steps of interest include:**

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

**INTEGRATION RESOURCE**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**PROTEST TACTICS**

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

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

**THE EMORY WHEEL** SPECIAL EDITION

**Black Students Present Demands**

**SGA Legislature Convenes Special Session**

**Monday Quad Rally Draws Over 500**

**Emory intensifies racial probe**

**EMORY STUDENT PROTESTS**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Conclusion

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

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

## Notes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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# RADICAL TEACHER

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

## Teaching Celia in the Age of Black Lives Matter

by Brandon R. Byrd



BLACK LIVES MATTER MARCH, JULY 2016 (IMAGE: BRANDON R. BYRD)

## Introduction

The response of black activists to the acquittal of George Zimmerman on charges of second-degree murder in the shooting death of Trayvon Martin was swift. Three black women, Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrisse Cullors, wasted no time in initiating #BlackLivesMatter, a call to action and Twitter hashtag that has since blossomed into a chapter-based national organization. It has also achieved intellectual clarity as it has grown in size and stature. The official website of Black Lives Matter proclaims that when “we say Black Lives Matter, we are broadening the conversation around state violence to include all of the ways in which Black people are intentionally left powerless at the hands of the state.” In fact, the movement does much more than just call attention to “the ways in which Black lives are deprived of our basic human rights and dignity.” It acts. Black Lives Matter boldly asserts that it “is working for a world where Black lives are no longer systematically and intentionally targeted for demise.” In short, the “call for Black lives to matter is a rallying cry for ALL Black lives striving for liberation.”<sup>1</sup>

There is no doubt that Black Lives Matter has inspired new ways of conceptualizing and combating threats to black life in the twenty-first century United States. But its defiant call for black liberation is, of course, rooted in a long history of black radical thought and action. In one of the first substantive attempts to define black radicalism, historian Cedric J. Robinson called it “a specifically African response to an oppression emergent from the immediate determinants of European development in the modern era and framed by orders of European social life from the inception of Western civilization.”<sup>2</sup> For Robinson, W.E.B. Du Bois embodied black radicalism because of his critiques of U.S. capitalism, political structures, and bourgeois culture. In more recent years, scholars have broadened the conceptual scope of black radicalism to include black women and organic intellectuals, working-class black people who understood the challenges confronting their communities and scorned the ideologies of the dominant class even if they did not enjoy the same relative privileges as traditional black intellectuals such as Du Bois.<sup>3</sup> In that sense, no historical figure better exemplified the black radical tradition than Sojourner Truth. To borrow the words of historian Ula Y. Taylor, Truth was not only quotable but also prophetic. She “isolated the core of issues that black radicals continue to struggle with and organize around today.”<sup>4</sup>

Truth was remarkable. She was not incomparable, though. This essay addresses one of her contemporaries and fellow radicals, an enslaved teenager named Celia who killed the white man who owned her after years of sexual abuse. The infamous court case that led to her execution centered on the rights (or lack thereof) of enslaved women. But it revealed something much larger and much more enduring, too. Put simply, Celia’s life offers a profound example of the systemic threats to black lives that have pervaded U.S. history and the resistance that black people have forged in the face of state-sanctioned

efforts to render them powerless. Indeed, I argue that the central lesson of Celia’s resistance and her trial has been made clearer in the age of Black Lives Matter. Students who relate to the language of black liberation captured by the three black women who have crafted the most trenchant challenge to racial discrimination today are better equipped to analyze and empathize with Celia’s response to the systems of racial and gender oppression that pervaded her era. Historians must seize this opportunity. Rather than avoiding the impulse to make connections between the past and the present, we should encourage students and fellow teacher-scholars to take a multigenerational approach to the study of black radicalism, protest, and resistance. In doing so, we can best illuminate the differences between the worlds of Celia and the activists behind Black Lives Matter, appreciate the common visions of black liberation and social justice that animated both, and point the way to a better understanding of black radicalism and black resistance in the United States.<sup>5</sup>

***Rather than avoiding the impulse to make connections between the past and the present, we should encourage students and fellow teacher-scholars to take a multigenerational approach to the study of black radicalism, protest, and resistance.***

Historians know very little about Celia before 1850. It is certain that she lived in Audrain County, Missouri, a small agrarian settlement located in the central part of the Show Me State. She was enslaved, but to whom? Her first master(s) could have been any number of white farmers or planters who migrated from the east to the frontier communities along the Missouri River in the hopes of profiting from land seized from American Indians and labor wrought from African Americans. It is possible that one or more of her earliest masters used Celia as a cook, for she would assume similar household duties at a later point in her short life.<sup>6</sup>

In 1850, Celia became the property of a white man named Robert Newsom. Newsom was a Virginian who brought his wife, adolescent son, and infant daughter to Missouri sometime between 1819 and 1822. They settled in Callaway County, a frontier settlement adjacent to Audrain, in a moment when Missouri was at the center of a national debate on slavery. A little more than a decade after the U.S. government acquired the territory of Missouri as part of the Louisiana Purchase, the influx of thousands of white settlers from the border South raised its population beyond the threshold required for statehood. When the territorial government of Missouri applied for statehood, northern members of Congress demanded that it abandon slavery as a condition for entering the Union. Missourians who had emigrated from slaveholding states were incensed. As congressmen considered an amendment that would require Missouri to prohibit the further importation of enslaved people and introduce measures for the gradual

emancipation of enslaved people already residing in the territory, some white Missourians issued sardonic toasts to an insane proposal whose supporters deserved no less than "a dark room, a straight waistcoat, and a thin water gruel diet."<sup>7</sup>

It is likely that Newsom celebrated the resolution to this debate, the Missouri Compromise, that admitted Missouri to the Union as a slave state and presaged future federal appeasement of southern demands. By 1850, Newsom had carved out a prosperous existence on the banks of the Middle River, a minor tributary of the Missouri. His wife had since died but his family now included two more children, a son and a daughter born in Missouri. Both of Newsom's daughters and three of his grandchildren lived on his farm. So did four enslaved men and one enslaved boy. Their labor sustained the property

prosperous and, according to the pro-slavery logic of the antebellum South, respectable.<sup>8</sup>

In many respects, Newsom was representative of his community. By 1850, more than half of the white families in Callaway County were slaveholders and enslaved people constituted approximately 40% of the population of the county.<sup>9</sup> Those white families implied that their reliance on human bondage did not degrade them. Instead, it brought them honor and prestige. One white resident of Fulton, the county seat, boasted to the *Missouri Republican* that his town was a place where "an elevated tone of morals pervades the community." Situated "in rich farming country" and "peopled with some of the choicest society (numbering among it many old Kentucky and some Virginia families)," Fulton was apparently "blessed with literary institutions of a high order and the great charities of the state, and the scene of scarcely any intemperance." It was, from the perspective of that newspaper correspondent, the epitome of Anglo-American civilization.<sup>10</sup>

Decades after the tenuous resolution reached in the Missouri Compromise that civilization continued to rest on the assumption that the freedom of white men was unassailable. Newsom certainly ascribed to that belief when he purchased Celia sometime during 1850. As historian Melton A. McLaurin puts it, Newsom's motivations for purchasing Celia deviated from those underlying the acquisitions of the enslaved men now laboring on his farm. To the public, Newsom could present Celia—then only fourteen years old—as a domestic servant responsible for the upkeep of his household. In private, he could exploit her in more sordid ways. From the moment that Newsom responded to advertisements or local gossip and set out on a wagon to buy Celia in neighboring Audrain County, the sexagenarian slaveholder regarded the young black girl "as both his

property and his concubine."<sup>11</sup> He deemed Celia's feelings about the arrangement inconsequential. Newsom made that clear during the return trip to Callaway County when he raped Celia for the first of many, many times.

## Teaching State of Missouri v. Celia

One of the most challenging lessons in my "African American History to 1877" course comes when we address the moment when Celia brought that pattern of abuse to an end. On that day, I begin by telling students one brief fact: on the night of June 23, 1855, a girl named Celia killed a man named Robert Newsom. They know and are told nothing more. After presenting the limited information

*Celia a slave, belonging to Robert Newsom  
says that she killed her master  
on the night of the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of June  
1855—about two hours after dark  
by striking him twice on the head  
with a stick, and then put his  
body on the fire and burnt it  
nearly up. She took up the ashes  
in the morning after day light, after  
breakfast, the body was not  
entirely burnt up. I took  
up the ashes and bones out of the  
fire place in my Cabin where I  
burnt the body and emptied them  
on the right hand side of the  
path leading from my cabin to  
the stable*

*I work to & subscribe  
before the 25<sup>th</sup> day  
of June 1855—  
D. M. White J. P.*

*Celia her  
mark*

TRIAL STATEMENT OF CELIA TO JUSTICE OF THE PEACE JUNE 25, 1855 (SCAN: KATHLEEN HALL)

owned by Newsom who, by then, was in his sixties. According to the 1850 census, the Newsom farm consisted of eight hundred acres (much of it improved land) worth about \$3,500. Thanks to the backbreaking work of its enslaved occupants, it produced more than 1,200 bushels of grain each year in addition to substantial amounts of wheat, rye, corn, and oats. The farm featured sizable herds of livestock, too. The enslaved men owned by Newsom tended to eighteen horses, six milch cows, twenty-seven beef cattle, seventy pigs, twenty-five sheep, and two oxen, worth a collective total of \$1,000. Of course, those enslaved laborers were also chattel. Their worth augmented their considerable work. Both made Newsom

about historical figures then unknown to them, I next divide students into three groups. One group is tasked with finding out who Celia and Newsom were and explaining what compelled Celia to kill Newsom, the second group must define the central questions raised during the ensuing trial that pitted the government of Missouri against Celia, and the third group is assigned the job of identifying the result of the trial and clarifying the rationale of the ruling. Each group then must write their findings on the board and present them to their classmates. At the end, after we have uncovered the background of *State of Missouri v. Celia*, dissected the case, and analyzed its aftermath, students are asked to consider the historical implications of the trial. After sharing their thoughts with a partner, we then discuss our responses as a class.<sup>12</sup>

The only documents available to students during this assignment are those taken from "Celia, A Slave, Trial (1855)," an excellent internet resource created by historian Douglas O. Linder as part of his *Famous Trials* website.<sup>13</sup> The documents from the pre-trial period include a warrant authorizing inquiry into the death of Newsom, testimony from one of Newsom's sons at the inquest hearing, the verdict of the inquest jury, and an arrest warrant for Celia. The records from the ensuing trial of Celia on charges of first-degree murder are just as complete. Students are provided with the testimonies of seven witnesses for the prosecution and two witnesses for the defense in addition to the judge's instructions to the jury. Also included are the jury instructions proposed by the defense and the prosecution, the final verdict, a failed motion to set aside that verdict, and a Missouri Supreme Court order denying Celia a stay of execution. There are even bills recording the profits gained by the prosecuting attorney, jurors, and witnesses in the case. The lone record from Celia is a sworn statement given before two justices of the peace.

Working together, students are able to piece together the life, trial, and death of Celia from these primary sources. The documents make clear the pain that Celia endured. Jefferson Jones, a white resident of Callaway County and one of the witnesses for the prosecution, gave sworn testimony that Celia had informed him that "the old man . . . had been having sexual intercourse with her." While he could not recall whether Celia said that Newsom "forced her on the way home from Audrain County"—it "was heard that he did"—Jones was certain that Celia asserted that her second child was Newsom's.<sup>14</sup> Other witnesses corroborated that testimony. William Powell, a neighbor of the deceased Newsom, a fellow slaveholder, and a witness for the prosecution, informed jurors that Celia told him that Newsom kept "forcing her while she was sick." She had become pregnant with her third child. Her compromised "condition" was well-known within the community and the changes to her appearance were apparent to neighbors including Powell. Just as obvious was the fact that Newsom felt no need to stop his assaults on Celia even as she prepared to give birth to another child whose father would become its master.<sup>15</sup>

The sources do not just show the students black suffering, though. Instead, they also offer keen insights into black resistance. A number of the witnesses for the prosecution admitted that Celia had taken a number of

steps to compel Newsom to stop raping her. Jones told jurors that Celia had entered into a relationship with a man named George, who was also enslaved on the Newsom farm. That relationship had not dissuaded Newsom. In fact, George, feeling emasculated, had warned Celia that "he would have nothing to do with her if she did not quit the old man." Of course, Celia was trying to do just that. According to Powell, Celia had "threatened [Newsom] that she would hurt him on the condition that he would not leave her alone." She had "told the white family" about those threats, too. The hope that Newsom's daughters, one of whom was barely older than Celia, would sympathize with her and come to her aid was misbegotten. Neither of them did.<sup>16</sup>

***The sources do not just show the students black suffering, though. Instead, they also offer keen insights into black resistance.***

Celia thus took matters into her own hands. On the morning of June 23, 1855, Newsom told Celia that he would come to her cabin that night. The reason was obvious. Newsom followed through on his promise and went to the cabin despite Celia's assurance that "if he came she would hurt him." When Newsom approached Celia, his face low over hers, Celia grabbed a stick that she had placed in the corner of the cabin earlier that day. She struck him once on the head. Newsom slumped to the floor. Celia struck him again. The second blow killed her rapist. An ensuing investigation confirmed that, to conceal her act, Celia then burnt Newsom's body in her fireplace. In the morning, she concealed some of the larger bone fragments under the hearth and the floor of her cabin and carried Newsom's ashes into the yard. She would later enlist the help of one of Newsom's grandsons, who welcomed Celia's offer to "give me two dozen walnuts if I would carry the ashes out."<sup>17</sup>

The enthusiasm for that radical act of defiance is evident as students work through the documents. But it is often matched by a palpable dismay about the way in which white Missourians conducted their investigations into Newsom's death and the state of Missouri carried out Celia's trial. On June 24, 1855, Powell and other members of a search party intimidated George and compelled him to point them in the direction of Celia's cabin. Once there, the search party used half-truths and threats including separation from her children to cajole a confession out of Celia. In a sworn statement given before two justices of the peace, she admitted "that she killed her master . . . by striking him twice on the head with a stick, and then put his body on the fire." That statement would become one of the last times that Celia would have the chance to speak on her behalf. In accordance with Missouri law, Celia could not take the stand at her own trial, held in October 1855. Instead, Circuit Court Judge William Hall, the man presiding over the case, made sure that the white men and women who could participate in the trial delivered a swift conviction. He instructed the jurors, some of them slaveholders and all of them white men ranging in age

from 34 to 75 years, to disregard testimony that demonstrated that Celia had acted in self-defense. He also rejected the proposed jury instructions provided by Celia's attorney, a man who was also a slaveholder. Instead, Hall informed a jury that contained not a single peer of Celia's that "the defendant had no right to kill [Newsom] because he came into her cabin and was talking to her about having intercourse with her or anything else." At a time when debates about slavery again roiled Missouri and neighboring Kansas, such instructions assured that the jury would reinforce the absolute power of slaveholders and return a guilty verdict.<sup>18</sup>

***After various students in my most recent African American history survey course suggested that Celia embodied the unique challenges faced and considerable resistance offered by enslaved women, one student, looking downward, murmured four simple words: "Black Lives Didn't Matter."***

On several occasions, students have demonstrated the least amount of surprise at the aftermath of the trial. By the time we encounter Celia, our class has studied the violence that erupted after the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act overturned the Missouri Compromise, left the fate of slavery in Kansas to a popular vote, and ignited the passions of slavery's defenders and opponents alike. As pro-slavery mobs of Missourians swarmed into Kansas at the behest of prominent politicians in both states, it stood to reason that the pro-slavery sympathizers then sitting on Missouri's Supreme Court would refuse an appeal from the defense. Indeed, the state of Missouri refused a stay of execution and Celia died on the gallows on the afternoon of December 21, 1855. Before then, she delivered a child while imprisoned. It was stillborn.<sup>19</sup>

## Celia and Black Lives Matter

In the past, students have consistently risen to the challenge of interpreting what the life and death of Celia can reveal to historians. For instance, in our discussions following the individual group presentations and the think-pair-share exercise, students routinely reach the conclusion at which many professional scholars have stopped. Echoing the words of historian Annette Gordon-Reed, they correctly surmise that "most particularly . . . Celia's case highlights the special plight of black women, whose bodies were used for manual labor and for the sexual gratification of white men."<sup>20</sup> They note that Celia can be understood as an archetype of enslaved women and enslaved black womanhood. Having been introduced to the pioneering scholarship of Deborah Gray White in a previous lesson, the students know that white men demanded submissiveness and domesticity from white women but still considered white women beautiful and worthy of protection. They understand that Celia experienced a much different form of sexism, one squarely rooted in her

blackness. She did not have access to the same anti-rape protections as white women in Missouri. Her children could be sold at a whim. Endless and unrequited labor was her expected fate. To paraphrase White, Celia's story is a powerful confirmation of the transformative effect of race on the experience of black womanhood during the antebellum era and beyond.<sup>21</sup>

This past semester was different, however. This time there was a concerted attempt to bring the focus to the beyond—to place it on the implications of Celia for today, not just the antebellum era. After various students in my most recent African American history survey course suggested that Celia embodied the unique challenges faced and considerable resistance offered by enslaved women, one student, looking downward, murmured four simple words: "Black Lives Didn't Matter." Those four words offered by the normally quiet student said it all. The case was about much more than Celia. It even transcended the exploitation of enslaved women. By linking *State of Missouri v. Celia* to Black Lives Matter, the black female student identified the ways in which justice systems beholden to white supremacy have never been and can never be considered just. She connected the hanging of Celia to the state-sanctioned deaths of numerous black men, women, and children that have come to light in recent months and years.

This was a profound and accurate connection captured in a clever rhetorical move. It was one that I had not anticipated. Unprepared to push the discussion in the direction that the student made available to our class, I facilitated an ensuing conversation that reiterated the ways in which black lives in the antebellum South only mattered to the extent that they were exploitable. Students pointed out that Missouri courts found that Celia was not authorized to use deadly force to protect herself against rape because that right was available only to white women. Whereas the sexual assault of a slave by a person other than his or her owner was considered trespass—a property crime—throughout much of the South, a court could not find an owner such as Newsom guilty of trespass against his own property.<sup>22</sup> Put simply, we concluded, Celia faced the reality of what fugitive slave and abolitionist James W.C. Pennington called the chattel principle.<sup>23</sup> She was the product and victim of a time and a region in which living, breathing black people found themselves commodified. And it was not just a market or slave traders that assigned value to their bodies. Instead, it was also a legal system that paid \$104.50 to the sheriff of Callaway County, \$39.30 to each witness, \$20.00 to the prosecuting attorney, \$14.80 to the clerk of the Callaway County Circuit Court, \$12.00 to the man who provided meals to the jury, \$2.00 to the justice of the peace, and \$1.50 for each juror. In sum, taking the life of Celia was worth \$210.85, all paid to white citizens of the state of Missouri.<sup>24</sup>

This was a fruitful discussion. But the student who found that "Black Lives Didn't Matter" in the antebellum South pointed towards a more meaningful lesson: Celia's life and death *do* matter. And students know that. It is clear to them that the assumptions about black life and black humanity that led to the state-sanctioned hanging of Celia also impacted the life and death of Sandra Bland, a

black woman found hanged in a Waller County, Texas jail cell after being arrested for a minor traffic violation. It is obvious that the American legal process was meant to defend the interests—even the depravities—of white slaveholders including Newsom and it is still supposed to protect white police officers including Timothy Loehmann, the Cleveland cop who opened fire on and killed Tamir Rice seconds after arriving at the park where the black adolescent was playing with a toy gun. The law has, of course, changed a good deal since the nineteenth century. Still, there is overwhelming evidence, available to students and teachers alike, that it was no more willing to protect a black boy enjoying a day at the park than it was to defend an enslaved girl attempting to protect her sexual and bodily integrity.

To be certain, the student who hinted at those connections did not just offer a useful lesson about the relevancy of the past, one that will shape my future teaching of Celia. Instead, she offered a striking illustration of the ways in which ideas spread and black radical movements blossom. Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrisse Cullors, the founders of Black Lives Matter, have created a vibrant international organization dedicated to affirming the humanity of black people. But they have contributed to something much larger, too. If the assertion that “Black Lives Didn’t Matter” in a discussion of the experiences of enslaved people in the antebellum South is any indication, #BlackLivesMatter has become a key part of a transhistorical language of black liberation. It is a useful and effective way for a new generation to articulate complex thoughts about the singular, systemic, and enduring devaluation of black life. It is, to be sure, much, much more than a hashtag.

In essence, the unfolding story of Black Lives Matter is about the diffusion and translation of an idea. It is the story of how a generation of black millennials bearing witness to the promises and pitfalls of the Obama era have seized opportunities to express an expansive notion of social justice. It is a development unfolding in classrooms as well as civil rights organizations, a history shaped by ordinary students in addition to activists. The media has, I think, captured only part of that point. While it focused on Bill Clinton’s asinine caricature of Black Lives Matter activists as fools bent on “defending the people who kill the lives you say matter” or asked them to respond to attempts to delegitimize their work, the ideas incubated in their movement have already diffused across the world and transcended organizational boundaries.<sup>25</sup> They have breathed new life into our discussions of the black past while injecting new energy into our strivings for black liberation in the present.

So, while the future of Black Lives Matter may, as historian Jelani Cobb asserts, be unknowable, its impact is not.<sup>26</sup> In fact, it is quite clear. The deaths of black people at the hands of the state in Sanford, Florida, Ferguson, Missouri, Waller County, Texas, Baltimore, Charleston, Cleveland, Staten Island, and elsewhere revealed a crisis that birthed a movement that nurtured an ideology. That ideology—a set of ideas centered around the simple belief that black lives do and should matter—has influenced the way that a black student may see the world she inherited

and interpret the world she thought we left behind. It just might move her to think of Celia and know that “Black Lives Didn’t Matter.” How, then, can it not move us, too?

***If the assertion that “Black Lives Didn’t Matter” in a discussion of the experiences of enslaved people in the antebellum South is any indication, #BlackLivesMatter has become a key part of a transhistorical language of black liberation.***

## Conclusion

On the night of December 20, 1855, several white men came to Celia’s cell to interrogate the enslaved woman whose life the state of Missouri would take the next day. Their goal was to figure out whether Celia had help in killing Newsom. According to a newspaper writer who recorded the interrogation, Celia, as she had done on several occasions before, denied that “anyone assisted her, or aided or abetted her in any way.” She again insisted that her intentions were to injure Newsom, not kill him. Something had come over her, though. Adding a new detail to her account of the killing, Celia admitted that “as soon as I struck him the Devil got into me, and I struck him with the stick until he was dead, and then rolled him in the fire and burnt him up.” There was no indication of remorse.<sup>27</sup>

Scholars have seen this confession and the invocation of the Devil as a final admission or attempted defense of temporary madness, insanity, or blinding rage.<sup>28</sup> That analysis is unconvincing. As cultural historians have shown, enslaved blacks in the antebellum South did not share the understandings of the Devil possessed by their white counterparts. Rather than viewing the Devil as a manifestation of pure evil, they often characterized him as a trickster or a conjure man. In fact, some of their folktales depicted the Devil as a semi-comic figure whom less powerful black people could and often did outmaneuver. In those renditions, the Devil often resembled and took on the observed qualities of white men.<sup>29</sup>

What, then, did Celia’s allusion to devilish possession mean? How should historians interpret it? The answers to those questions deserve more careful consideration. While it is possible that, in accordance with contemporary accounts, Celia, “alone and desperate” succumbed to “fear, raging anger, insanity, madness, or the ‘instigation of the Devil,’” other possibilities exist.<sup>30</sup> It is quite conceivable that Celia was the most rational person involved in her trial. There is no question that it was a near suicidal act for an enslaved woman to assault her white master. But, as numerous slave narratives including those written by other black women show, enslaved people knew that the system of slavery and the structures of racism and sexism that reinforced it were irrational. Perhaps Celia was thus trying to make her actions comprehensible to her white interrogators and interlocutors. Perhaps she was telling them that, in the moment when Newsom leered over her,

she felt possessed not by the influence of the Devil but by the spirit of his surrogate, the white man. It was, of course, the white slaveholder who, in Celia's world, wielded the most influence, who had the most power to devalue and even take life. It would have been fitting for Celia to see herself as appropriating that power as she struck her fatal blow against Newsom.

Accordingly, Celia strengthens our understanding of Black Lives Matter just as Black Lives Matter improves our ability to empathize with Celia and interpret her trial. Too often black radicalism and black resistance have been pathologized. White physicians charged that runaway slaves *must* have suffered from drapetomania, a mental illness that caused them to yearn for freedom.<sup>31</sup> White journalists suggested that Celia *must* have been mad to commit such a brazen act. Given that history, it should therefore come as no surprise that critics and skeptics including Barack Obama have labelled Black Lives Matter activists as irrational social justice warriors who cannot understand that yelling is a symptom of madness not an effective political tactic.<sup>32</sup> It should be clear that those critiques distract from a fuller appreciation of the motivations and goals of black radicals, past and present. Just as Celia rejected the racial and gender hierarchies of her day, Patrisse Cullors and her peers have made it clear that they "are not asking for our humanity or worth" or a seat at the proverbial table. Instead, they "are demanding that the breath in our bodies guarantees our right to life, our right to freedom, our right to love, dignity, and respect."<sup>33</sup>

In the same moment that Black Lives Matter offers reasoned vindications in the face of myopic critique, the University of Michigan has launched a new initiative entitled *The Celia Project*. It has hosted public talks and developed working papers related to a case that, in the words of its founders, "illustrates the centrality of state-sanctioned violence in the lives of enslaved women."<sup>34</sup> There is no question about the accuracy of that statement or the significance of this project in our current political climate. As Black Lives Matter continues to highlight the role of the state in the systemic devaluation of black life, teacher-scholars cannot afford to ignore the clear historical examples of state-sanctioned anti-black violence. We cannot overlook the parallels or even the differences between past and present. To do so—to address Black Lives Matter without understanding the story of Celia or offer dispassionate analysis of her life and death—wrongs our students. After all, many of them are making those connections on their own. I have learned that firsthand. Those eager learners deserve the opportunity to enhance their understanding of the realities of black suffering in America and the chance to see black resistance and radicalism as rational and worthy of serious consideration rather than condemnation. By teaching Celia in the age of Black Lives Matter, we can ensure that they have both. We can provide a space where students push beyond seeing a past in which black pain was the norm and "Black Lives Didn't Matter" to envisioning a world in which Black Lives [Do] Matter and social justice is a reality, not just a dream.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> "About the Black Lives Matter Network," Black Lives Matter, accessed May 21, 2016, <http://blacklivesmatter.com/about/>.

<sup>2</sup> Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, Revised Edition (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 73.

<sup>3</sup> The distinction between traditional intellectuals and organic intellectuals emerges from the writings of Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci. See Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971).

<sup>4</sup> Ula Y. Taylor, " 'Read[ing] Men and Nations: ' Women in the Black Radical Tradition," *Souls* 1, no. 4 (Fall 1999): 72-80.

<sup>5</sup> In this essay, the author has expanded on and revised a blog post entitled "Celia, #BLM, and the Diffusion of Black Thought" posted on the African American Intellectual History Society blog. It is accessible at the following link: <http://www.aaihs.org/celia-blacklivesmatter-and-the-diffusion-of-black-thought/>.

<sup>6</sup> Melton A. McLaurin, *Celia, A Slave* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 9-10.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-17.

<sup>10</sup> (St. Louis) *Missouri Republican*, August 15, 1855.

<sup>11</sup> McLaurin, 19.

<sup>12</sup> Depending on the class length, I have also split this exercise over two class periods, i.e. investigative work on day one and presentations/discussion on day two.

<sup>13</sup> Douglas O. Linder, "Celia, A Slave, Trial (1855)," Famous Trials (University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Law, accessed May 24, 2016, <http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/celia/celiahome.html>). On *State of Missouri v. Celia*, see also Annette Gordon-Reed, "Celia's Case," in *Race on Trial: Law and Justice in American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002): 48-60 and Hugh P. Williamson, "Document: The State against Celia, a Slave," *Midwest Journal* 8 (1957): 408-420.

<sup>14</sup> "The State of Missouri Against Celia, A Slave," October 10, 1855 in Linder, "Celia, A Slave, Trial (1855)."

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> McLaurin, 103.

<sup>20</sup> Gordon-Reed, 49.

<sup>21</sup>Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South*, Revised Edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 5.

<sup>22</sup> Excellent analysis of the legal understandings of Celia's crime is found in Wilma King, "'Mad' Enough to Kill: Enslaved Women, Murder, and Southern Courts," *The Journal of African American History* 92, no. 1 (Winter 2007): 37-56.

<sup>23</sup>James W.C. Pennington, *The Fugitive Blacksmith; or, Events in the History of James W.C. Pennington* (1849; Westport, CT: Negro Universities Press, 1971). Walter Johnson elaborates on this concept in *Soul By Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 19-20.

<sup>24</sup>McLaurin, 115.

<sup>25</sup> Sam Sanders, "Bill Clinton Gets Into Heated Exchange With Black Lives Matter Protestor," *National Public Radio*, last modified April 8, 2016, <http://www.npr.org/2016/04/07/473428472/bill-clinton-gets-into-heated-exchange-with-black-lives-matter-protester>.

<sup>26</sup>Jelani Cobb, "The Matter of Black Lives," *The New Yorker*, March 14, 2016. This question has become clearer since the Movement for Black Lives, a coalition of more than fifty organizations including Black Lives Matter, released "A Vision for Black Lives: Policy Demands for Black Power, Freedom & Justice." For an outstanding explication of the

platform, see Robin D.G. Kelley, "What Does Black Lives Matter Want?," *Boston Review*, August 17, 2016, <https://bostonreview.net/books-ideas/robin-d-g-kelley-movement-black-lives-vision>.

<sup>27</sup>McLaurin, 114.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*; King, 48.

<sup>29</sup> See Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom*, 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 40, 57.

<sup>30</sup>King, 48.

<sup>31</sup> Samuel A. Cartwright, "The Diseases and Physical Peculiarities of the Negro Race," *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 6 (September 1851): 643-652. See also, Thomas Szasz, "The Sane Slave: An Historical Note on the Use of Medical Diagnoses as Justificatory Rhetoric," *Journal of American Psychotherapy* 25 (1971): 228-239.

<sup>32</sup> Michael D. Shear and Liam Stack, "Obama Says Movements Like Black Lives Matter 'Can't Just Keep on Yelling'," *New York Times*, April 23, 2016.

<sup>33</sup>PatrisseCullors, "#BlackLivesMatter Will Continue to Disrupt the Political Process," *The Washington Post*, August 18, 2015.

<sup>34</sup> "About Us," The Celia Project, accessed on May 26, 2016, <https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/celiaproject/about-us/>.



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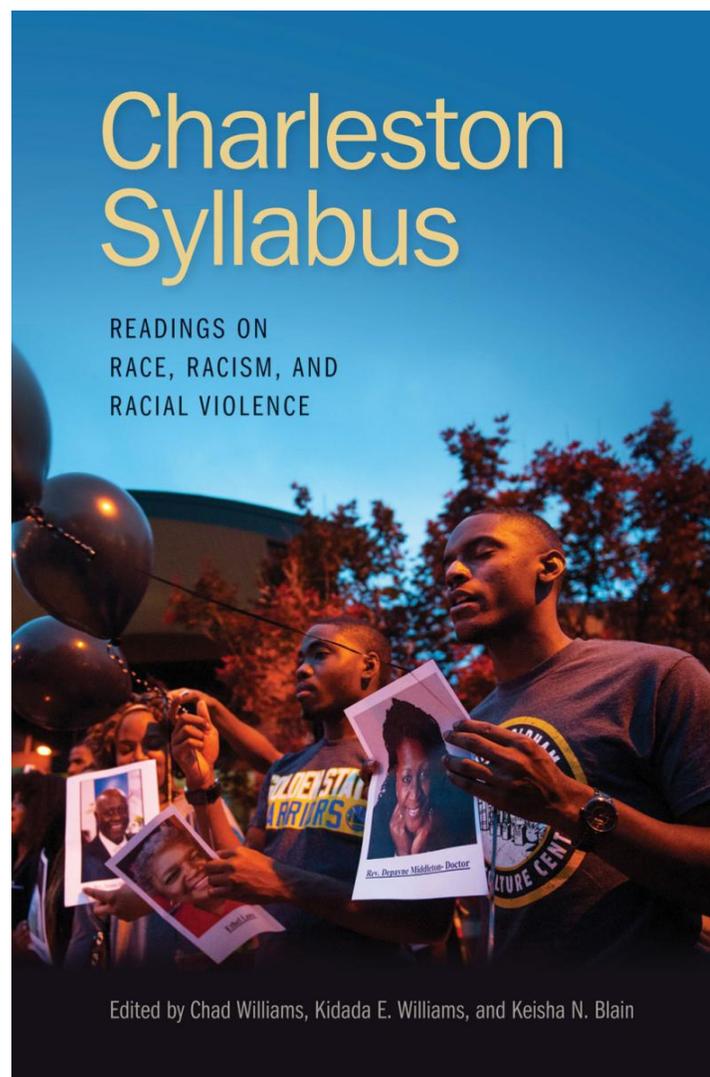
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# RADICAL TEACHER

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

## Interview on the #Charlestonsyllabus

by Chad Williams, Kidada E. Williams, and Keisha N. Blain



COVER OF THE CHARLESTON SYLLABUS, 2015 (IMAGE COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA PRESS)

## Introduction

On June 17, 2015, a white supremacist entered Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina, and sat with some of its parishioners during a Wednesday night Bible study session. An hour later, he began expressing his hatred for African Americans, and soon after, he shot nine church members dead, the church's pastor and South Carolina state senator, Rev. Clementa C. Pinckney, among them. The ensuing manhunt for the shooter and investigation of his motives revealed his beliefs in white supremacy and reopened debates about racial conflict, southern identity, systemic racism, civil rights, and the African American church as an institution.

In the aftermath of the massacre, Professors Chad Williams, Kidada Williams, and Keisha N. Blain sought a way to put the murder—and the subsequent debates about it in the media—in the context of America's tumultuous history of race relations and racial violence on a global scale. They created the *Charleston Syllabus* on June 19, starting it as a hashtag on Twitter linking to scholarly works on the myriad of issues related to the murder. The syllabus' popularity exploded and is already being used as a key resource in discussions of the event.

The organizers have recently developed a reader inspired by the #Charlestonsyllabus<sup>1</sup> project, a collection of new essays and columns published in the wake of the massacre, along with selected excerpts from key existing scholarly books and general-interest articles. The collection draws from a variety of disciplines—history, sociology, urban studies, law, critical race theory—and includes a selected and annotated bibliography for further reading, drawing from such texts as the Confederate constitution, South Carolina's secession declaration, songs, poetry, slave narratives, and literacy texts. As timely as it is necessary, the book is a valuable resource for understanding the roots of American systemic racism, white privilege, the uses and abuses of the Confederate flag and its ideals, the black church as a foundation for civil rights activity and state violence against such activity, and critical whiteness studies.<sup>2</sup>

The editors of this issue of *Radical Teacher* asked the authors to reflect on their efforts, and the *Charleston Syllabus'* relationship to the Black Lives Matter Movement. The following details this exchange:

### **How has your understanding of a "syllabus" shifted or changed as the #Charlestonsyllabus has evolved and developed?**

**Kidada E. Williams:** I wouldn't say my understanding of a "syllabus" has changed or shifted. I have always believed in sharing and translating the work I do in my classes with popular audiences. However, I will say that in shifting from the online version of #CharlestonSyllabus to producing a book for a general audience, we had to discount a lot of scholarly books and articles because the intended audience was other scholars and not ordinary people. In our college and university classes, professors have the time and

energy to decode and slash through jargon but the nonacademics attempting to improve their knowledge of histories of race, racism, and racial violence by reading this scholarship might not want to navigate dry "academese" and shouldn't be expected to. If we're being honest, some of us might not want to, either.

Considering the many inaccessible texts we declined to include made me think that more scholars, especially those who see themselves as racial justice activists, should not simply make their research available to the public but also produce more of it with them in mind. Black publics have been a driving force behind scholarship produced in the academy or adjacent to it. Writers of African American history and a more critical, honest history of the United States have usually come *from* black communities. Formally and informally trained scholars researched what happened and shared it widely, connecting the past with the present day, with the hope of improving the conditions of black people.

For me, the fact that we needed a #Charlestonsyllabus suggests that academics need to do more to ensure our work is reaching the people generally and in our communities particularly. In teaching our classes, we provide a critical public service, hopefully enlightening our students and training future educators. Many of us have been and still are giving community talks, serving as advisors for museums and exhibitions, writing op-eds, and sharing sources on social media. Unfortunately, this work was not sufficient to produce a historically knowledgeable public that could contextualize the Charleston massacre or police killings and African Americans' and their allies' historically-informed and heartbroken reactions to it. The deficiencies in so many Americans' historical educations were revealed in denials of slavery's role in Confederate secession and uprisings in Ferguson, Baltimore, or Milwaukee. This is why we decided to build upon the success of Marcia Chatelain's work in #Fergusonsyllabus<sup>3</sup> by creating #Charlestonsyllabus. Historically-informed people responded in droves, creating a global learning community that will hopefully advance change.

These online syllabi revealed the power of collaboration. So, while my idea of a syllabus has not changed, this project's initial success has made me think more about how historians can and should continue using technology and social media to harness our collective energies and foster more communal teaching and learning.

### **How have educators utilized the Charleston Syllabus thus far? Has it been used in non-traditional educational settings or classroom spaces? How can the information contained within spread to community education and even carceral settings?**

**Keisha N. Blain:** Educators across the country, and indeed the globe, have been using the Charleston syllabus—both the reading list and the book—in a variety of exciting and innovative ways. Since its debut, we have witnessed scholars in various fields and disciplines utilizing the list in a wide range of high school and undergraduate courses including History, Sociology and Political Science.

By some accounts, teachers ask students to select a primary source from the list and then write a response to the document, examining what it reveals about the history of racism and racial violence in the United States. In other cases, instructors ask students to journal about selected op-eds or other resources on the list—disclosing their personal thoughts and reactions to these texts. Some instructors asked students to follow the #CharlestonSyllabus on Twitter as a way to generate in-class discussions about the use of hashtag syllabi and their effectiveness for sparking public conversations on key social issues.

Beyond the traditional classroom setting, we are amazed by how the list has been used by religious leaders across the country to encourage parishioners to learn more about the history of race relations. One pastor not only created a webpage on his website to encourage church members to consult the list but also collaborated with the church librarian to create a display of some of the books in the lobby. Bookstores and libraries across the country have followed suit. Within only a matter of weeks of releasing the list, Charleston syllabus displays could be found in major libraries and bookstores across the country. Several librarians disclosed that they even relied on the reading list to order new books and resources for their institutions.

Now that the book has been released, we're excited to see it being used in a variety of settings in the United States and abroad. Someone recently sent us a picture of the book being used in International Baccalaureate (IB) classes at the Taipei American School in Taiwan. Several activists recently shared with me their plans to utilize the book as an educational resource in the local communities in which they organize. Officials at one correctional facility in Indiana are using some of the selections from the Charleston Syllabus in educational programs for inmates. They learned about the syllabus through a professor we connected with on Twitter who made significant contributions to the reading list. In the months and years ahead, the book as well as the list will continue to be a valuable resource for members of the public and we anticipate that they will both be used in many more community educational and carceral settings.

### **How do you feel radical educators and organizers can best make use of the resource— pedagogically, politically, culturally?**

**Chad Williams:** In the immediate wake of the Charleston shooting, we faced the question of how do historians respond to radical acts of white supremacist violence. The #CharlestonSyllabus emerged as an act of radical consciousness raising and protest against historically narrow or flat-out distorted understandings of the massacre, why it took place and its deeper significance. In this sense, educators and organizers should approach using the book as, on the one hand, a source of personal and collective empowerment and, on the other hand, a form of resistance. Indeed, centering race, racism and racial violence in how we teach and learn United States history is a bold endeavor. Doing so challenges romanticized notions of the American past and core conceptions of the nation's

identity. Recognizing that black people have grappled with, suffered from and survived the horrors of white supremacist violence since the beginnings of the trans-Atlantic slave trade to the present compels a shift in how we view American history and black people themselves. This has important political and cultural implications for our current racial moment. For those seeking to understand the roots and substance of the claim "Black Lives Matter," the Charleston Syllabus is a useful starting point.

### **What are some of your favorite, and perhaps most radical examples of readings or resources students/teachers should know about?**

**Keisha N. Blain:** *The Charleston Syllabus* book includes 66 crucial texts that we believe represent key primary sources and some of the best and accessible secondary works published on race, racism, and racial violence. One of my favorite texts in the book that may also be described as "radical"—insofar as it shatters many public perceptions about the black experience in the United States—is an excerpt of Akinyele Umoja's *We Will Shoot Back: Armed Resistance in the Mississippi Freedom Movement*<sup>4</sup> (2013). Oftentimes when we think about the black freedom struggle, we tend to romanticize nonviolent activism and forget that black people also embraced armed resistance in the struggle against white supremacy. Umoja's text offers a corrective on that point. But, even more, it charts the grassroots political activities that were vital to the movement—the stories of the courageous men and women who literally placed their lives on the line to protect others against racial terror. As Umoja's work demonstrates, armed self-defense played a critical role in the black freedom struggle and had deep roots in black politics long before the Black Power movement.

Alongside Umoja's excellent work, readers will find a vast array of resources—including scholarly essays, song lyrics, poems, and op-eds—addressing a variety of key topics in U.S. and global history such as slavery, religion, and racial identity. A significant number of the texts in the book (like the reading list) are specifically about Charleston or South Carolina in general. One of my favorite pieces on South Carolina is Cherisse Jones-Branch's essay, "To Speak When and Where I Can," which charts black women's political activism in South Carolina during the 1940s and 1950s. These women understood that the fight to end racism and racist violence could not be won without equal access to the vote. To that end, they utilized a myriad of strategies and tactics during the Jim Crow era in an effort to transform South Carolina's political system. This resiliency even in the face of resistance and discrimination is evident in so many of the texts included in the Charleston Syllabus.

### **How has the role of social media influenced educative practices and ways of facilitating exchange, especially in light of activist movements like #blacklivesmatter, #sayhername and others?**

**Kidada E. Williams:** I think social media is simply the latest incarnation of the community work or scholar activism many historians have always done. Scholars want to understand what happened in the past and see it as

their responsibility to share that information with the public. Sometimes that understanding of what happened or its significance for today comes from listening to people in the community. The technology simply connects more disparate people across great geographic or social distances.

What is also different today is that we are working and living in an era where the social activism of The Movement for Black Lives and African American Policy Forum<sup>5</sup> is intensified. Many organizers already know a lot about the histories we research and teach. Indeed, their historical educations and radical imaginations for the possibilities of a world in which black people are free are informing their organizing. In many ways, historians are simply filling in some gaps, clarifying existing knowledge, while lending to it the weight of historical evidence on such topics as police and vigilante violence, mass incarceration, the school to prison pipeline, violence against black women, and medical apartheid. Social movement historians are also sharing their expertise about successful practices and debilitating problems that aided or troubled earlier movements. Some of us are also using our platforms to support activists.

One thing I think crowd-sourced social media projects like #SayHerNameSyllabus, #WelfareReformSyllabus<sup>6</sup> #FergusonSyllabus has done is inspire and perhaps call on some educators to do a better job educating themselves, their students, and the public about the histories covered. The texts listed on these syllabi are not locked away in hidden history vaults; they're widely available. Indeed, many texts are available free in public libraries, digital history projects, or online at national history institutions like the Library of Congress, National Archives, and Smithsonian. And yet, each "syllabus" exposes educators (even some U.S. history teachers and professors) as lacking basic historical knowledge about black people in America. So what I hope is that educators will incorporate into their teaching<sup>7</sup> more texts to help students and the public understand the past or contextualize contemporary events and encourage their colleagues to do the same. I also hope that students who access the syllabi can ask their instructors to engage this work and these topics. If we can get more people to learn about the professionally researched history then our work of having a more historically enlightened public is done.

**Please share student responses. For example, as students reflect on historical forms of resistance, have they discussed a shift in contemporary movement building (i.e. social media/Internet), and what are their thoughts?**

**Chad Williams:** We are eager to see how students respond to the Charleston Syllabus book. The publication of the book was ideally timed for the 2016-2017 academic year. We know that faculty at a number of different colleges and universities plan to use the book in their classes. We hope to develop ways, whether through continued use of the #CharlestonSyllabus hashtag or other means, to foster student engagement around the book and the issues it explores.

Beyond the book itself, the #CharlestonSyllabus hashtag and its impact has inspired what now might rightly be described as an online syllabus movement. We have always credited Professor Marcia Chatelain and her #FergusonSyllabus for inspiring our initial idea for the #CharlestonSyllabus. The success of these two projects has subsequently motivated other scholars to create various syllabi of their own in response to issues ranging from the 2015 Baltimore uprising, the University of Missouri protests, the death of Sandra Bland, to the rise of Donald Trump. These resources demonstrate the potential of social media crowdsourcing and digital technologies as a form of radical pedagogy geared towards a larger public outside the narrow confines of academia.

Many students have embraced idea of the syllabus as a tool of critical consciousness raising and applied it to their activism as well. For example, in November 2015, students at Brandeis University occupied the campus administration building for twelve days in protest against the institutionalized marginalization of students of color. They labeled their movement "Ford Hall 2015" in honor of the 1969 occupation of that building by black students, which led to the creation of the Department of African and Afro-American Studies. Taking the idea of praxis in the model of Gramsci, Arendt and Freire seriously, the students developed a "Ford Hall 2015 Syllabus" designed to "communicate the urgency of cultivating an informed community to stand in solidarity" with the occupying students and function as a "pedagogical tool to teach while simultaneously circumventing the uncompensated labor that people of color perform in the perpetual defense of their humanity." They compiled a list of readings that addressed issues such as white privilege, allyship, intersectionality, and the nature of institutionalized racism. As college campuses continue to function as key sites of social movement building in the age of Black Lives Matters, we hope students understand and articulate the connections between their intellectual work and activist work.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.aaihs.org/resources/charlestonsyllabus/>

<sup>2</sup> This introduction is adapted from The University of Georgia Press' online description of the *Charleston Syllabus: Readings on Race, Racism, and Racial Violence*, Edited by Chad Williams, Kidada E. Williams, and Keisha N. Blain. Retrieved from [http://www.ugapress.org/index.php/books/index/charleston\\_syllabus](http://www.ugapress.org/index.php/books/index/charleston_syllabus).

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2014/08/how-to-teach-kids-about-whats-happening-in-ferguson/379049/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://nyupress.org/books/9780814725245/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.aapf.org>

<sup>6</sup> <http://ajccenter.wfu.edu/welfare-reform-syllabus/>



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# RADICAL TEACHER

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

## Teaching in Grief: Critical Reflections, Redefining Justice, and a Reorientation to Teaching

by Heather Cherie Moore



DEMONSTRATION IN BALTIMORE - JANUARY 15, 2015 (IMAGE: DORRET)

## After Malcolm: 51 Years Later

With a 3/3 teaching load during the academic year, I typically use weekends to re-read course materials, construct rubrics, and prepare my weekly lesson plans. But on Sunday, February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2016, I received news that shattered my world and completely reshaped my identity as a college professor. Every other year on this date, I typically celebrate the life and the legacy of Malcolm X on the date of his untimely assassination. Instead, at 7:30 p.m., my cousin, Nika, posted a simple message on one of my social media accounts that said "call me." This request was a bit unusual as our primary form of communication was usually (and rarely) via text message:

*Nika: "Hey baby cuz. How are you?"*

*Author: "I'm ok...I'm alive. Thankful for that. How are you cuz?"*

*Nika: "I don't know how to tell you this baby...but Ari is gone cuz."*

*Author: "WHO? I don't know what you are talking about Nika. What are you talking about Nika?!"*

*Nika: "Ari. He is gone baby. I know y'all said you were twins. I know you were close. I just wanted to make sure you knew."*

*Author: "Nika-please tell me you are playing cuz! Please! What happened?"*

*Nika: "He died in police custody."*

Once I ended the call, I paced around my home in disbelief and rubbed my forehead to relieve myself from this excruciating, invisible pain. Minutes later, I collapsed on my living room floor and screamed as loud as I could. I needed the world to hear this pain. I hollered for his 6-month old son who would never remember his father's voice and for his 11-year-old daughter who just lost her role model and her best friend. I wept for his wife and his high school sweetheart, the woman he loved for over 20 years. And I cried for Ari: my favorite cousin with the brightest smile, the deepest dimples, and the biggest heart.

Admittedly, as part of a large family, I do not have a close bond with many of my relatives. But Ari protected me and vouched for me when outsiders questioned my upbringing and my educational pedigree. I stared in a mirror that sits right beside my front door. Tears forced their way out of my eye sockets. As I looked at my reflection, I searched for my cousin's face. I desperately searched through my phone to see if I had any lost texts, social media messages, anything that would allow me to hear his voice. Then I wondered, *what were his last thoughts while he was incarcerated? Did he know how much he meant to us? Did he feel isolated?* And most

importantly, *did he know how much we loved him? How much we needed him back?*

After several hours, the tears dried and anger set in. Nika's last five words rang loudly in my ear: *He died in police custody.* While repeating these words, I immediately questioned my commitment to fighting injustice. I considered my identity as a young Black woman who was asked to contribute to a new, interdisciplinary program at a small liberal arts college. I thought about how often I justified the #BlackLivesMatter movement to white students who did not understand the need for such a social movement in a so-called "post-racial" America. Most importantly, I winced at the thought of Ari's final moments in his jail cell. He abhorred injustice in a variety of manifestations. He studied human rights activists like Malcolm X. But, I wondered if in those moments he, too, questioned the justice that he advocated for on a daily basis. And here I sit, on my living room floor, wondering if justice really exists or if it is simply an unreachable aspiration that we have yearned for since our introduction to the "New World." Before this tragedy, it was easy to speak about justice and injustice. It was easier to discuss the stories of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown because I was simply an academic citing and referencing a movement that I participated in as an outside protestor. But this was personal. I heard Ari's heartbeat in person and in real time. And in reality, I didn't run towards protest because I was raw with emotion. My commitment to fighting injustice was simply not strong enough to handle this.

On this Sunday evening, I wanted to cancel my courses for the remainder of the week. I needed to be surrounded by my immediate family and go check on Ari's wife and children. But in order to spend time with family during the upcoming weekend, I decided to assume my teaching responsibilities for the week. In prep for the workweek, I looked toward bell hooks's scholarship on healing, self-love, and critical pedagogy. She provided tough love from the "Sweet Communion" chapter of her book *Sisters of the Yam: Black Women and Self Recovery*. She stated, "I mostly want to remind her of the recipes of healing and give her my own made-on-the-spot remedy for the easing of her pain. I tell her, 'Get a pen. Stop crying so you can write this down and start working on it tonight'" (hooks, 1993, p. 150). I was certain that my grieving would continue, but I knew that reflecting on this untimely experience could prove cathartic.

## Teaching, Grief, and Challenging the Master Narrative

This article interrogates widespread definitions of injustice, pedagogy, and the #BlackLivesMatter movement. On the one hand, this article describes a new professor's struggle to teach a pilot Multicultural Education course that includes anti-racist and critical pedagogies. According to James Banks, Multicultural Education is "designed to restructure educational institutions so that all students, including white middle class students, will acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to function

effectively in a culturally and ethnically diverse nation and world" (Banks, 1993, p. 23). Specifically, I asked students to consider my own, first-hand experiences with injustice as they studied the field of Multicultural Education and became more "empowered," "knowledgeable," "caring and active citizens" (Banks, 1993, p. 23).

But on the other hand, I position the last three months of the course alongside a personal tragedy that radically informed the questions I posed, my interpretations of course scholarship, and my philosophy of teaching. I employ the self-narrative method and a grief framework to discuss my experiences during a new undergraduate course. Since the self-narrative method has become more popular across various interdisciplinary fields, I specifically utilize this method to question how I became a "culturally responsive educator in a diverse classroom" while I question the decisions I made in light of this tragedy (as cited in Kennedy-Lewis, 2012, p. 109). I describe my own personal engagement with grief and teaching as a "two-way discursive process. It constructs our experiences and, in turn, is used to understand our experiences" (Anderson, 1997, p. 213). I weave examples of key course texts, classroom discussions, and my idiosyncratic grieving process into my critical reflections on social justice, teaching, and loss. I question my own personal responses to teaching and grief within "local individual and broader contexts and within culturally driven rules and conventions" inside academe (Anderson, 1997, p. 213). This methodological framework is not uncommon in Education-related courses with a social justice bent or even among university educators who question "how we came to be teacher educators, what it is like to be a teacher educator, how we see our role, and how we think" (Puchner, 2014; Hayler, 2011, p. 2).

Furthermore, this self-narrative approach works to actively challenge the largely homogenous, master narratives of Black males in mainstream America, especially the recent images of Black men who die in police custody. Unfortunately, many martyrs who have become the face of the #BlackLivesMatter movement are only presented as criminals and so-called "thugs" who are products of their inner-city neighborhoods. But this article provides a glimpse into the man Ari was, the family he left behind, and outright challenges the media portrayal of him in his final hours. Lastly, over the course of a 3-month period, my teaching pedagogies were transformed through grief. Psychologists have studied individuals "grief reactions" and individuals' responses to tragedy (as cited in Shah & Meeks, 2012, p. 40). As described by geographers who have theorized grief, bereavement, and mourning periods, Ari's death "shocked me to my core and made me question everything about my beliefs, world view and life-decisions" (Maddrell, 2016, p. 168). This article contributes to scholarship on self-narrative and grieving frameworks from a first person perspective of a college professor during an untimely grieving period and an unexpected teaching transformation.

This Multicultural Education course was unique. Early in the semester, many of our class discussions were hypothetical—we interrogated student experiences in formal educational settings and their responses to key

educational terms like cultural capital, stereotype threat, acting white, and the model minority myth. But in February and early March, I began to push students to define justice and explain how that related to students of color inside American classrooms. My rollercoaster of emotions heavily impacted my teaching strategies—I spoke vehemently about educational injustices like the school to prison pipeline and how these realities supported systemic racism in our educational system and our nation. I described how the "school to prison" pipeline is no longer part of the hidden curriculum but rather is an acceptable ideology that has moved beyond the classroom into other institutions (e.g., television and social media).

Students in this Multicultural Education course watched me deal with various stages of grief. In February, I was mainly full of anger and sadness. During many classes, my eyes were bloodshot red and my soul was tired. In part, I was still adjusting to my life as a new assistant professor with a 3/3 course load. But, I also spent most of my days crying hysterically in my office often while preparing for my Multicultural Education course. Many of the key course terms were triggering; words like injustice, hidden curriculum, and meritocracy were not obsolete but rather were still part of public discourse in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The students saw my internal struggle: I failed to separate my personal and private lives inside the classroom. But my students purchased cards, sent their condolences via e-mail, and asked how they could support me in my grieving period. For the first time in my professional career, I *depended* on my students and teaching became my lifeline.

***Through unexpected grieving, and close engagement with core course materials in my pilot Multicultural Education course, I learned how to lean on my students during my undetermined grieving periods, learned the value of transparency in the classroom and how to truly be vulnerable with my students.***

I contend that academics in interdisciplinary fields can redefine their teaching philosophies based on their response to injustice. My identity as a college professor at a liberal arts college constantly evolved after my cousin's death. Through unexpected grieving, and close engagement with core course materials in my pilot Multicultural Education course, I learned how to lean on my students during my undetermined grieving periods, learned the value of transparency in the classroom and how to truly be vulnerable with my students. Through critical reflection, flashbacks, and discussion of course teaching materials in my Multicultural Education course, I discuss how my cousin's death radically transformed my pedagogical delivery and teaching strategies inside this particular course. While #BlackLivesMatter is considered a "global rallying cry" for historically underrepresented groups worldwide, I wonder *is there room for individualized*

*narratives on loss, justice, and teaching injustice in academia and popular media?*

While critical pedagogues like bell hooks and Paulo Freire undoubtedly informed my teaching experiences, my reflections are also informed by interdisciplinary scholarship in American Studies, Black Studies, and the voices of social justice educators. In the succeeding sections, I identify the two stages of my teaching transformation over the Spring 2016 semester. Each theme describes how my teaching identity shifted from late February to early May. In other words, these themes describe both my stages of grief and how the grieving process impacted my identity as a college professor.

## Stage #1: Confronting my Imposter Syndrome

After Ari's sudden death, my imposter perspective was heightened inside the classroom. As I entered the class on February 22nd, one day after I learned the news, I stumbled on my words and internally debated whether I should tell my students about my loss. Since Multicultural Education was a new course offering in the Community & Justice Studies program (and a new elective in Education Studies), I was overly self-conscious and hesitant to take risks in this course. My attitudes about teaching were in direct response to the race, gender, and disciplines the students represented in the course. At the time, I was a 29-year-old Black professor in the midst of a predominately white, mixed gender classroom. More than half of the students wanted to teach in K-12 classroom settings and a small group of students majored in STEM-related fields. Overall, I never wanted these students to believe that this course was less rigorous when I included my personal narratives as part of classroom discourse. I worried that I would be viewed as the Black professor who only discussed "Black" topics in popular culture and in American public schools. As I fought back tears and a deep lump in my throat, I told my students, "If I am not my usual bubbling self today, it is because I just learned that my favorite cousin died in police custody a few days ago. I am numb. I am very emotional. And I simply do not know what to do." My students were stunned. We held so many open conversations about injustice inside the classroom but in the face of this, their teacher had no scholarly recommendations and no lofty academic jargon to support this reality.

***Many students argued that there were pre-established boundaries and barriers between themselves and their professors due to titles, classroom expectations, and perceived roles in the classroom.***

Since high school, I have learned how to live comfortably outside my informal and formal educational networks. Admittedly, I was largely disconnected from my extended family networks. My working-class upbringing

differed from the upbringing of my relatives and individuals in my peer group. Some relatives ostracized me because I was raised in a nuclear family, attended prestigious schools with local and national reputations, and proudly displayed a diverse musical palate. I also did not find a home within the confines of my formal educational institutions. My long-term aspirations to attain a terminal degree and be a college professor did not match my grade point average. And as the product of a working class family, I knew nothing about the unwritten rules of the academy as both an undergraduate and graduate student. I was stuck between two worlds: I was not part of my extended family network and I was not privy to the inner workings of the academic environment. I certainly felt like an imposter who found it "hard to believe that they deserve any credit for what they may have achieved and, whatever their outward appearances, remain internally convinced that they are frauds" (Pedler, 2011, p. 90). My first-hand experience with imposter syndrome was evident in my interactions with family members and my assumed positionality in various educational institutions. Originally defined as a phenomenon, the term "imposter syndrome" was coined by psychologists Pauline Rose Clance and Suzanne Imes in the late 1970s (Gravois, 2007). Over the past 40 years, the term was firmly grounded in social sciences literature. Imposter syndrome can be defined as "individuals' feelings of not being as capable or adequate as others perceive or evaluate them to be" (Brems, Baldwin, Davis & Namyniuk, 1994, p. 183-184). My nihilistic response to these realities led to feeling like an imposter both inside and outside the academy. By all accounts, I still suffer from imposter syndrome in different spaces within the ivory tower.

But my relationship with my cousin Ari was slightly different. During several family functions, he would openly support my pursuit of a terminal degree and never outright question my educational training. When my family members would question why I attended "college" for longer than the typical 4-year period or make comments about my taste in music, Ari would always remark, "It's all good, cuz" or "Keep working hard cuz. You know I'm proud of you." In Ari's presence, my authenticity was never questioned—which was not always the case in the academic world. In the final years of his life, he was an avid reader and spent his last days researching ways to fight the multitude of injustices that plagued our communities. We even discussed our interpretations of Cornel West's "Nihilism in Black America" when we considered the violence in the predominately Black communities in our hometown. Immediately following his death, my imposter feelings in life and academia were pushed to the forefront.

I turned to my students for advice and I asked for their support. I wondered if bell hooks (1994) would appreciate this shift in my classroom when she asserted, "Professors who expect students to share confessional narratives but who are themselves unwilling to share are exercising power in a manner that could be coercive" (p. 21). We opened the course using this hooks's text and I asked students about their most meaningful educational experiences. Many students argued that there were pre-

established boundaries and barriers between themselves and their professors due to titles, classroom expectations, and perceived roles in the classroom. But when I read hooks's discussion of "vulnerability" inside the classroom setting, I reflected on my own teaching style. While my courses were discussion-based, I usually refused to be fully transparent with many of my students. In turn, some of my former students read me as unapproachable. In late February, my students conducted a critical media examination of the acclaimed documentary *Boys of Baraka* (2003) in preparation for their midterm examination. I looked forward to this date on the syllabus since this was the first time I had the opportunity to discuss my own scholarly interests. While watching the film, I could not help but wonder what destiny were these young men headed towards. *Could they be the author of their own futures, goals, and dreams?* I watched the film in a sober state but was reminded that injustices both inside and outside school settings were multi-faceted and uniquely intertwined. However, after Ari's death, I had to grapple with the very ideas that had become the foundation I set for this Multicultural Education course.

My deep commitment to a student centered classroom environment seeped into my imposter perspective. I began to question my teaching strategies and the syllabus I created several months prior. For instance, during our February 24th discussion of Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate's (1995) seminal work on Critical Race Theory in Education, I was called to consider the types of work I support and the type of educational training that my students received. I wondered if I was teaching a Multicultural Education course that supported "Multicultural paradigms [that] are mired in liberal ideology that offers no radical change in the current order" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 62). I questioned whether my students would be able to participate in discussions on educational reform for historically under-represented students. But it was my hope that our discussions of injustice and police brutality, and my transparency in light of Ari's death, would produce a critically minded student who could begin to deconstruct the mainstream American educational system. In our discussions of course materials on justice and educational reform, I shared my unanswered questions with students. Three days after I received the news of Ari's death, I asked my Multicultural Education students, "*What does culturally relevant pedagogy look like for an 11-year-old girl whose father died in police custody?*" In her critique of the flawed American educational system, Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) defines culturally relevant pedagogy as a practice "designed to problematize teaching and encourage teachers to ask about the nature of the student-teacher relationship, the curriculum, schooling, and society" (p. 483). But discussions of culturally relevant pedagogy must

acknowledge the nuanced perspectives of student identity while teachers "develop their cultural competence and critical consciousness" (Kim & Pulido, 2015, p. 19). But what exactly does critical consciousness look like in the face of injustice? If we cannot even actively incorporate culturally appropriate lessons for students of color inside mainstream educational classrooms, then how can scholars discuss the complex intersections of student identities in the face of traumatic experiences? As the instructor for this Multicultural Education course for some future teachers, I was embarrassed that I did not have all the



ELISABETH IRWIN H.S. STUDENT HOLDING A "HANDS UP, DON'T SHOOT" SIGN (IMAGE: KALLI JACKSON)

answers. In these moments, I truly felt like a student inside the classroom; I quickly learned that justice does not happen overnight and that my limited conceptualizations of justice were the result of my outsider perspective on movements like #BlackLivesMatter. Like many Americans, I commented about what I *would do* if I were a relative of one of the many martyrs who became the faces of this 21st century social movement. But when confronted by this reality, my ideas about justice shifted. I felt like an imposter because I did not have the answers to many questions and, in my grieving period, I still felt like an outsider in a predominately white academic space.

## Stage #2: Public and Private Faces of Pain

The public images of people of color, who have become synonymous with the #BlackLivesMatter movement, portray them as criminals, as thugs, and as unruly youth who somehow earned their fates. Soon after the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag was created (after the murder of Trayvon Martin), the American public watched as this teenager was put on trial more so than the assailant, George Zimmerman. Zimmerman's defense team suggested that Martin was shot in self-defense since the latter's "autopsy revealed traces of THC, the active ingredient in pot" (Capeheart, 2013). Many of the widely

disseminated images of Trayvon Martin in print and social media depicted him as a youth who *deserved* to die. A similar picture was painted of Michael Brown, a recent high school graduate in Ferguson, Missouri. During the first police press conference after Brown's body lay in the street for several hours, CNN repeatedly showed a clip of Brown allegedly assaulting a convenience store owner. These examples, in particular, put these young men on trial after their murders instead of questioning the motives of the shooters. Black people who suffered from a form of police brutality were put on trial in public for their imperfect public personas. But organizers in the #BlackLivesMatter movement challenge this mediated agenda by circulating personal stories and supporting the families they left behind.

In February and March, Ari was also tried in the "court of public opinion" after his death in police custody. A final image that accompanied one news article from a local newspaper showed an officer pulling his locs from his face with a gash under his right arm. These public images did not match the person I grew up with or the man I knew. My cousin was not the "combative jail inmate" as described in newspaper accounts nor was he the man who *deserved* to die as was implied by commentators (Remoquillo, 2016). Rather, Ari was a proud father and a family man with a serious passion for cooking. At public events, he was the first person to sit next to me and make sure I felt supported and loved. He was always by my side—smiling, laughing, and sharing his wit. My memories of Ari directly challenge the public representations of Ari as a monster, a killer, and a threat to society. And once the local news outlets began to discuss his arrest and subsequent death in police custody, I knew that the fine line between my public and private domains as a professor would eventually be crossed.

***Although I subjectively identified as a woman of color, I wondered if the course material taught students how to question the American educational system instead of stereotyping the students in it.***

In graduate school, I always believed that the epitome of teacher professionalism was the ability to separate your public (teacher) image from your private battles. My sensitivities to the public and private domains of teaching were certainly heightened by the various facets of my intersectional identity. For instance, as a new tenure track professor in a new interdisciplinary program at my liberal arts college, I was keenly aware of the pressures placed upon new faculty to perform well inside the classroom setting. But as a 29-year-old Black woman who was fresh out of graduate school, I recognized that my public image conflicted with the public views of the professorate and academia. Popular anthologies like *Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia* (2012) support these views and describe the successes and lived struggles of women of

color in the ivory tower (Gutiérrez y Muhs, Niemann, González, & Harris 2012). I was self-conscious about my identity in this particular setting, especially while teaching a pilot Multicultural Education course, the first of its kind in the recent history of the school. Although I subjectively identified as a woman of color, I wondered if the course material taught students how to question the American educational system instead of stereotyping the students in it.

During our class discussion of Critical Race Theory in Education, I privately questioned whether Ari's life would have been spared if he were a non-critical, unquestioning, non-threatening Black man. In his critique of *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954), Derrick Bell's (1980) interest convergence suggested that "the interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites" (p. 523). While this term was originally utilized in Bell's analysis of public education post-Brown, it is used contemporarily to discuss other significant moments in the racial progress of this nation. But privately, the scholarship that we read in our course made me question educational reform and the possibilities of a just America for all. In Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate's (1995) "Towards a Critical Race Theory of Education," they explain that "for the critical race theorist, social reality is constructed by the formulation and the exchange of stories about individual situations" (p. 57). I questioned how Ari's real commitment to justice for historically marginalized groups conflicted with America's master narrative of Black men as violent and destructive. While teaching the Critical Race Theory in Education unit, I found several pieces of journalism that portrayed Ari as a violent Black man who fit America's master narrative. Initially, I wondered if Ari's final images were selected to both fulfill a stereotype of Black male rage and also converge with the interests of the predominately white, rural police department. Additionally, I studied one of his social media accounts and wondered if the police department viewed his page before his untimely death. Ari spoke at length about police brutality, participated in #BlackLivesMatter vs. #AllLivesMatter debates, and fought against micro and macro forms of injustice. After my weekly classroom meetings, I considered the most painful questions of all: *Were the pre-selected, final images of my cousin a loose form of interest convergence? Will we ever be able to achieve racial equality before we can even think about racial equity? Was Ari's portrayal as a reckless, unkempt Black man who was committed to social justice and social action for historically marginalized groups a ploy by this police department to dissuade the public from questioning the real story? Did the public images circulated of Ari showcase the private, limited, and stereotypical perspectives of the police department?* Prior to this moment, I never considered how my external realities could seep into my identities as a teacher and scholar. I tried (to no avail) to keep my private life outside the classroom, but in these instances, the classroom scholarship spoke directly to my identities as a teacher and scholar in grief. At this point in the semester, my Multicultural Education students were amazed by the amount of theory in the interdisciplinary field of Education that they were not exposed to prior to this course. I

learned from other faculty in the Education Studies program that my students were now well-versed with terminology like “cultural capital” and “culturally relevant pedagogy,” and proudly debunked myths about Multicultural Education among other students. But I wondered if my students would be sincerely transformed by what they learned.

At the end of the semester, students constructed social justice lessons that became student action plans. According to the original course syllabus, I asked students to “create and deliver a mock, K-12 lesson on one of the following themes: state sanctioned police brutality (Tamir Rice), domestic terrorism (Newtown), international terrorism (9/11), homelessness (Skid Row), or privilege (the affluenza case).” In preparation for this assignment, I asked students, “*how would you discuss police brutality inside K-12 classrooms? For instance, how would you discuss Tamir Rice’s murder with 13 year olds in Cleveland?*” This assignment pushed us to move beyond hypothetical conversations about education, popular news stories, and social movements like #BlackLivesMatter. But, rather, it forced students to grapple with some of the real questions that K-12 teachers may ask themselves inside and outside their classrooms. Many of my students were preparing for a career in teaching and they questioned how they would structure their classrooms after learning about educational inequities and the experiences of culturally diverse students. By semester’s end, my Multicultural Education students no longer viewed K-12 classrooms as a safe place where youth are taught sterilized, white-washed forms of American history, but believed that our K-12 classrooms are spaces where America’s children should be pushed to critically assess inequity and justice.

## Acceptance and End of Semester Reflections

Prior to the start of the academic year, I would have never imagined that I would undergo a significant teaching transformation during my first year on the tenure track. I worked to be a better teacher who incorporated contemporary artifacts inside the classroom. Discussions about the Occupy movement and #BlackLivesMatter, in particular, resonated with my social media literate undergraduate students. But my constant self-reflexivity both inside and outside the classroom made me question my course materials and my constant references to contemporary social movements like #BlackLivesMatter. As a Black woman, I felt deeply connected to this social movement given my research on Black male students and their representations in American popular culture. I remembered my visceral response to the Zimmerman verdict, the Twitter retweets of Michael Brown’s body, and Sandra Bland’s final voyage in Texas. I spoke openly about this movement and felt deeply connected to the organizers and participants. But after Ari’s death, I became more reclusive. I could no longer listen to or even watch footage of men like Eric Garner or films like *Fruitvale Station* (2013). And, quite frankly, I did not desire to know about Ari’s final moments because the

stories would not bring him back. Each day, I wondered what my life would look like without his protection, his genius, and his example. But I could not predict how this experience would inform my teaching and my views on educational inequity.

“Teachable moments” can truly transform the classroom environment (Spencer, 2009, p. 83). For instance, at the onset of my course, my students described how their educational experiences differed from those of historically underrepresented students in urban America. At the onset of the semester, I wanted to teach students about the foundations of Multicultural Education and the need for all future teachers to engage with scholarship from Paulo Freire, bell hooks, and James Banks. Over time we had more open conversations about #BlackLivesMatter and how this social movement connects to educational inequities like the “school to prison pipeline.” Specifically, I drew connections between the police brutality that occurs outside the classroom and the policing of culturally diverse students in our public schools. I showed students visual examples of alternative and new charter schools in Chicago and New Orleans that use force and security as key part of the “deep structure” of these public school settings (Banks & Banks, 1995, p. 154; VICE News 2014; OWN 2013). We also discussed the violent assault of a Spring Valley High School student by a school security officer (Newswen 2015). Later they began to create action plans and discuss how they, too, could work individually to transform our educational system. I never expected that I would undergo a transformation with my students. I was more transparent, more vulnerable, and more eager to learn from the example they each set forth. By late February, the classroom space shifted. The students asked more questions about educational inequities and regularly used terms like “educational injustice” to describe the state of the American educational system. Unknowingly, my undergraduate students interpreted contemporary educational inequities as a violation of human rights. By semester’s end, they recommended that this course become a requirement for all Education Studies students at the college. I strongly believe that our conversations about educational injustice may have been the result of their professor’s firsthand experience with loss and grief, and her personalized reflections on injustice.

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# RADICAL TEACHER

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

## Hashtag Activism and Why #BlackLivesMatter In (and To) the Classroom

by Prudence Cumberbatch and Nicole Trujillo-Pagán



PROTEST MARCH IN RESPONSE TO THE SHOOTING OF PHILANDO CASTILE, ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA ON JULY 7, 2016  
(IMAGE: FIBONACCI BLUE)

In the wake of the murder of Trayvon Martin and the acquittal of George Zimmerman, the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter was started by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi.<sup>1</sup> The case led to multiracial protests across the country and Twitter became a way of organizing and discussing these experiences. The subsequent media attention to the murders of unarmed black and brown people encouraged further protest using not only the streets, classrooms, and campuses, but also social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Tumblr, Snapchat, YouTube). Of these, Twitter is the world's largest microblogging service and gained singular political importance among Black audiences (Freeson, et al. 2016). Albeit limited to 140 written characters and 6 seconds of video, people across the world nonetheless engaged in hashtag activism and developed a rich discourse bridging social, economic, and political boundaries. Since the popularization of #blacklivesmatter, other hashtags have also emerged to challenge prevailing narratives denigrating Blacks and Latinos, cisgender people of color, transgender and gender nonconforming victims. Hashtags like #Ferguson, #SayHerName, #DangerousBlackKids, #StayMadAbby, #NotMyAbuela, #Ferguson, and #BringBackOurGirls provide evidence of how dialogue occurs almost instantaneously across place and space. More than just symbols and letters, #blacklivesmatter, other hashtags, and the social movement that followed fostered a new global space for conversations about race and the meaning of social justice in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Protests that rely on social media are not limited to those demanding racial justice. Instead, Twitter is also a resource for conservative communities. Perhaps now more than ever before, civil society finds its greatest expression online. It has changed the conversation on race following the election of Barack Obama in 2008. While many celebrated the election of the first Black President, others claimed to be "average" citizens and banded together in order to "take back" their country. Now in 2016, these conservative communities use Twitter hashtags to foster political support for groups like the alternative right and #MakeAmericaGreatAgain. Founded in 2006, Twitter proved to be the perfect outlet for these "average" citizens to express themselves. They have amplified the coded (ostensibly "colorblind") language characterizing the post-Civil Rights Era discourse on race in order to criticize the investigation of voter suppression and police violence (Bonilla-Silva 2013). In this way, these communities seek to protect the status quo and justify police actions. The targets of violence may still be people of color, but the weapons have moved beyond the physical to include virtual and discursive spaces.

"Hashtag activism" amplifies voices that are often ignored by media, but terms like "slacktivism," "hashtivism," and "clicktivism" attest to debate about its legitimacy as a social movement.<sup>2</sup> Some argue Twitter does not necessarily promote political engagement with established institutions. This debate may be a product of how Americans understand social movements. In contrast, European scholars consider new social movements "less as organizations of common interest and more as new forms of *collective identity* engaged in *discursive struggles* that

not only transform people's self-understandings but also contest the legitimacy of received cultural codes and points of view" (Carroll and Hackett 2006, 87). A critical part of this discursive struggle involves social media, which creates a virtual space to challenge, reframe, and reinscribe representations of who is victimized. Communities like Black Lives Matter (BLM) challenge the legitimacy of an ostensibly "colorblind" judicial system. These communities also redefine social justice and give voice to those who identify as LGBTQ and/or are gender nonconforming and those who have been historically marginalized in traditional civil rights movements.

***A critical part of this discursive struggle involves social media, which creates a virtual space to challenge, reframe, and reinscribe representations of who is victimized.***

More than building awareness around specific social issues or even fostering public discussions on race and social justice, #blacklivesmatter has been used to facilitate the organization and planning of protests against racial profiling and police brutality in the United States and to build solidarities in different parts of the world. Youth have asserted the power of their physical voice by using "the politics of interruption." For example, protesters have literally grabbed the microphone from scheduled speakers in order to challenge apathetic college administrators, unresponsive politicians, and law enforcement (Sanders 2015; Gutierrez, 2015). In the contemporary moment, young people have the ability to seize upon a globally-connected voice that is more participatory and unmediated by traditional institutions. Organizationally, this unrefereed access to one another distinguishes the youth of today from their Civil Rights era predecessors who relied on public spaces, newspapers, and television to transmit their practice of non-violent civil disobedience and disruption of commerce to a global audience. People use social media to "write back" to a situation. This expanded protest arsenal includes images as "voice." Twitter users challenge the way mainstream media stages images. They express solidarity by posting selfies of themselves wearing hoodies to indicate they could be Trayvon. Bonilla and Rosa argue, "Whereas, in face-to-face interactions, racialized young people...might not be able to contest the meanings ascribed to their bodies (or impede the deadly violence exerted on them by the police), through their creative reinterpretations on social media, they are able to rematerialize their bodies in alternative ways...[They assert]...the fundamental value and particularity of their embodiment both on- and off-line" (Bonilla and Rosa 2015, 9). Through both text and image, users constitute themselves as political actors.

Inspired by these social media grassroots movements and their innovative praxis, radical teachers have adapted their teaching to help students participate self-consciously in these communities. They have created syllabi and edited volumes that historicize and contextualize phenomena

surrounding specific events, such as the Charleston Massacre in 2014 (Williams, Williams, Blain 2016). Others draw from a longer tradition that recognizes the critical role of discussion in learning. Some have incorporated Twitter into their classrooms by calling on students to post reactions on discussion topics. Others have used quantitative analysis to study hashtags as a new form of political engagement (Freelon, McIlwain, and Clark 2016; Denby 2016). While many academics have developed their own social media following, with colleagues highlighting trending topics, offering social commentary and/or crowd-sourcing information, the use of social media in the classroom links students to broader communities engaged in discussions of current events.<sup>3</sup> The incorporation of #blacklivesmatter and other similar hashtags into the classroom also reveals a dialectic that is a memorial space and a roll call of martyred bodies with an affirmation of multiple lives and an increasingly diverse black body politic.

Like their political antecedents, #blacklivesmatter and the hashtags (and photos) that followed point to the brutality wreaked upon black/brown bodies and the continuation of institutionalized racism, which fosters a unique opportunity for radical teachers and students to use testimony in order to move beyond the classroom to the streets in order to participate in the creation of knowledge. According to Professor Jeffrey Stewart, "Black Lives Matter has shifted the focus of Black Studies Programs, from focusing on the positive contributions to integrating the real problems of black people into what has been historically an empowerment narrative."<sup>4</sup> Undergraduate students too often come to the classroom without a basic knowledge of African American history. For example, while they are familiar with figures like Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks, the narratives they know suppress the strategies, sacrifices, and dangers political activists face in the struggle to accomplish a political end. A radical tradition uses social media to integrate education and the student into a contemporary movement, moving students from a lack of racial consciousness to self-efficacy, e.g., a belief in their ability to influence the events that affect their lives (Bandura 2010).

***As students develop awareness of issues involving racial injustice, racial violence, economic injustice, and police brutality, teachers who choose to use their classrooms as spaces for teaching about social justice increasingly find themselves under scrutiny and attack.***

As students develop awareness of issues involving racial injustice, racial violence, economic injustice, and police brutality, teachers who choose to use their classrooms as spaces for teaching about social justice increasingly find themselves under scrutiny and attack. For example, in New Jersey, an elementary school teacher was fired for "letting students write get well cards to imprisoned journalist and former Black Panther Mumia Abu-Jamal"

(Holloway 2015). At the same time, social media allows us to know about these cases in ways that afford teachers some modicum of support from a community that is broader than their own institution. For instance, when a law professor received a complaint for wearing a BLM t-shirt on campus, her response to the aggrieved student generated attention from the academic world as well as social media (Jasick 2016). Fear of negative teaching evaluations and critiques from colleagues have also served to stifle classroom conversations about race, gender, and sexuality. This political context bolsters Twitter's ability to serve several purposes. It meets radical teachers' practical interest in teaching about a new civil rights movement and its praxis, while simultaneously protecting their jobs. It also allows radical teachers, like Zelli Imani, to become participants in #blacklivesmatter by drawing on the "power of the story" in order to "make Twitter matter" (*New York Times*, 11 August 2015).

This paper now turns to a discussion of other forms of activism that are more closely aligned with the labor of teaching. In particular, we consider two emerging trends in teaching: using social media to historicize the "new" civil rights movement and emphasizing discussion and testimony as a new praxis.

## Historicizing the "New" Civil Rights Movement

Some say BLM is "Not Your Momma's Movement" (Crowder 2015; Stockman 2015). Others believe the resurrection of what many refer to as the "New Civil Rights Movement of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" began with #BlackLivesMatter on Twitter. The emblematic debate echoes the dialogue between historians who see the Civil Rights Movement as a phenomenon of the 1950s and 1960s and those who emphasize its historical antecedents, e.g., "the long Civil Rights Movement" (Hall 2005). The significance of differences, and the relative utility of comparison, is a common concern in historiography. On the one hand, every new historical moment undoubtedly has new features that limit its comparison to earlier ones. On the other hand, the current moment only gains meaning in and through its relationship with a historical legacy. The struggle continues and, as Crowder ultimately suggests, there is always historical continuity. In this way, the debate about current police brutality can be seen as temporally specific and limited to a "few bad apples" who lack appropriate training or, alternately, as part of a much longer historical pattern of racial domination and injustice. The fact that the connection between past and present was a crucial one in #blacklivesmatter is evidenced by the single most tweeted split image of confrontation between police and protestors: a picture from the 1960s is on the left and one from Ferguson in 2014 is on the right (Freelon, McIlwain, and Clark 2016). Clearly, #blacklivesmatter has been a reality for at least 150 years.

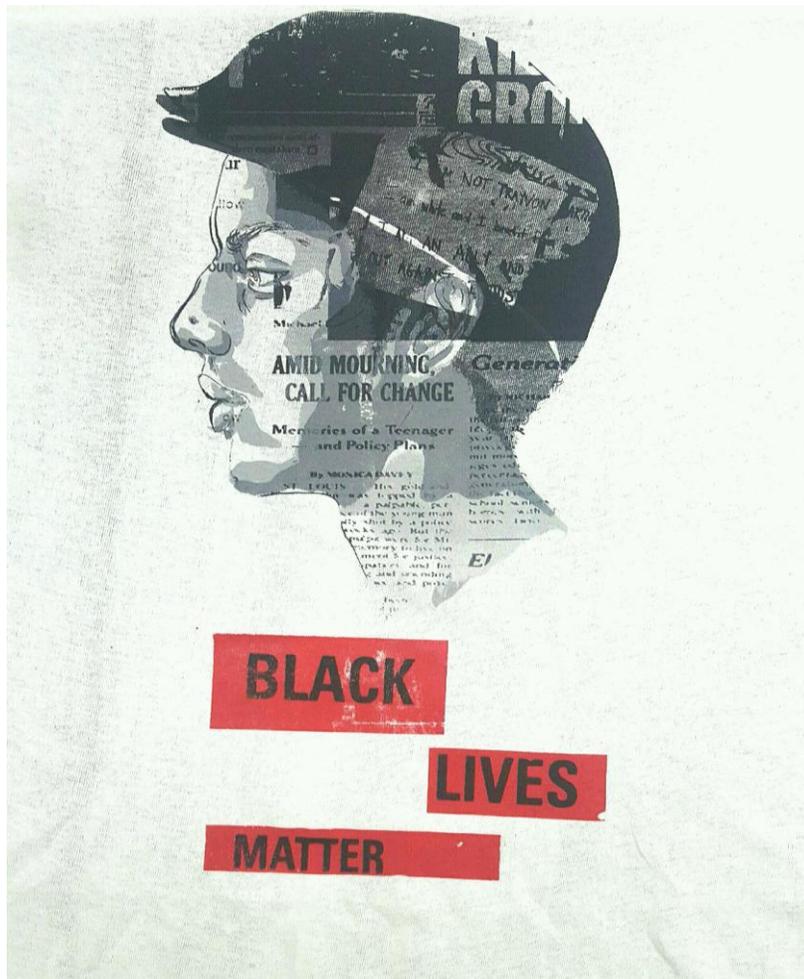
Understanding the relationship of past and present is a challenge for Americans, who are often accused of lacking historical memory. This historical amnesia is only compounded for Millennials who have been influenced by

"post-racial" discourse that insists racism is "a thing of the past" and who fail to connect current race-based social justice movements with their historical antecedents. They were raised on a K-12 curriculum that focused on multiculturalism and an empowerment narrative, e.g. "we shall overcome," rather than the sacrifices, struggles, and failures of the traditional civil rights movement. One example of this is the narrative of Trayvon Martin. In as much as George Zimmerman felt he had the right to kill an unarmed black teenager, so too did lynch mobs believe that they had the right to take the law into their own hands. Black newspapers and intellectuals, like journalist and antilynching activist Ida B. Wells, produced a counternarrative to these acts of violence by arguing that lynching was a manifestation of the desire of white men to retain supremacy rather than in response to black criminality or for the protection of white womanhood. Similarly, social media offers an opportunity to provide information immediately and present an immediate pushback against negative characterizations put forth by law enforcement officials. By drawing upon students' familiarity with social media forums, instructors can use their [students'] tools to facilitate conversations, encourage students to engage more critically with the material, and bridge the knowledge gap.

One example of how instructors can do this is by thinking about social media as a new type of archive that has memorialized an ever-growing list of names of unarmed young black men and women, who were murdered simply because they were perceived to be a threat by an armed, adult white male. The deaths of Trayvon Martin, Sandra Bland, Eric Garner, Oscar Grant, Freddie Gray, and Renisha McBride are just a few of the most high-profile cases. These young black men and women have joined a roll call of African American martyred bodies, well known and unknown, a list that historically includes Emmett Till, James Cheney, Medgar Evers as well as Martin Luther King, Jr., and countless others whom we will never know but who weigh upon our collective racial consciousness and shape our understanding of what it means to be a person of African descent in the United States.

Through social media we readily have access to a rich variety of representations of victims and sometimes perpetrators created by themselves. Virtual communities as well as traditional media have access to the various Facebook pages of victims and members of their families. Presenting the images of a murdered Emmett Till in black media of that time in dialogue with the contrasting photos of Trayvon Martin wearing a hooded sweatshirt and those of him riding a horse and looking like the teenager he was offers a new opportunity for a discussion of the historical representations of young black men as dangerous. The murders of young black men such as Jordan Davis (whose

killer was eventually re-tried and sentenced to "life in prison without the possibility of parole" Pantazi 2014) and the general failures of the judicial system to secure convictions inspired users to post photographs of black boys using the hashtag #DangerousBlackKids (Jeltson 2014), which demonstrated a tragic reality: black children, infants and toddlers included, are disciplined more frequently and with greater severity than other



"BLACK LIVES MATTER," SONIA DE NICOLO, 2015

racial/ethnic groups. By juxtaposing the images and placing them in personal, familial, and domestic contexts, social media becomes more than just a site for conversation. For students and teachers, seeing a young black man or woman in their graduation cap and gown can be a particularly resonant representation of what has been lost. Social media (and #blacklivesmatter) become a place for analysis where students can not only engage a broader political community, but also see contemporary moments as part of larger historical debates.

In many ways, social media is the newest manifestation of a longer tradition of bearing witness that has been a crucial part of the struggle for racial justice. When Sojourner Truth asked her famous question "Ain't I A Woman?" she challenged her mostly-white abolitionist audience to see her as a mother and a woman as well as a political activist, more than just a former slave whose life was worth only the value that her labor produced, and

therefore, as equal to those who heard her testimony. From slave narratives like Frederick Douglass's and political statements by black abolitionists like Maria Stewart in the antebellum era, through Mamie Till's public display of the body of her murdered 15-year-old son, Emmett, to the broadcasting of videotapes of police brutality in the contemporary moment, testimonies in pursuit of civil rights have relied on writing, public discussion, and technology (for their distribution). In the African American historical tradition, truth telling serves multiple purposes to highlight and demonstrate the humanity of the speaker and to bear witness to the cruelty of disparities of status. In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the Civil Rights movement used these images, such as those of Freedom Riders brutalized as they challenged segregated waiting rooms in bus stations and fire hoses and police dogs attacking peaceful protesters, in order to shock the nation out of its complacency and give a new understanding of the injustices experienced by African Americans.

In my (Prudence Cumberbatch's) Brooklyn College course entitled "#sayhername: African American Women's History," students were asked to consider how the idea of "sayhername" has historical antecedents, in which generations of black women struggled not only for freedom and equality for the race but also to create space for black women's voices. The texts ranged from classics like Darlene Clark Hine's "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West" and Evelyn Higginbotham's "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," to recent books such as TalithaLeFlouria's *Chained in Silence: Black Women and Convict Labor in the New South* and articles including Brittany Cooper's "A'n't I A Lady?: On Race Women, Michelle Obama, and the Ever-Expanding Democratic Imagination." The course was designed to deepen students' knowledge of these critical interventions by generations of black women while at the same time sharpening their knowledge of the theoretical frames through which to study and advance that intervention. The underlying goal was to give students a framework to understand our current complex social environment through the lens of intersectionality, cultural studies, and the politics of interruption while at the same time learning the individual and social challenges black women face in the age of mass incarceration. By linking the call to "sayhername" to its historical antecedents, students could study the generations of African American women who worked to rewrite the Black American narrative to construct independent identities as "race women," and thereby claim a position they had as "race leaders." By linking the past to the present, and seeing both through new theoretical frames, my students had the opportunity to understand their role in positioning African American women as change agents.

As we covered both the contemporary moment and historical topics found traditionally in an African American Women's history course, it was clear that students were familiar with the political uses of social media and were quite comfortable in analyzing its messages. Sitting in a seminar room filled with laptops covered by stickers with political slogans including BLM, I was immediately made aware that my students were both aware of the current

political situation and, indeed, considered themselves political actors. However, surprisingly, many had never heard of the black clubwomen's movement or Shirley Chisholm or were even aware of the women behind the hashtag Black Lives Matter. In their facilitation of classroom discussions, students were encouraged to and did use a vast array of materials, from movie clips and YouTube to Blogs, Instagram, and Twitter posts to engage both the historical and the contemporary to bridge their knowledge gap. These students proved adept at reconceptualizing historical moments, analyzing images of black women within the context of a longer trajectory, and making connections between the historical and contemporary. For many, the course was revealing – not only in terms of how little they had learned about black women's activism prior to this seminar but about the possibilities of recentering black women in the larger narrative of African American history. For instance, in bringing together the past and the present, one student wrote:

*Under slavery, the robust health of the black female body increased the white man's profit. In the antebellum period, the attractiveness of the black female body also must have increased the chances of being raped; there is evidence for this in Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave* and Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. While it indicates a monumental shift in the state of civil rights in the United States, the white gaze of much of the media treats Obama when she is speaking from a podium in much the same way that the white gaze of the slave owner treated the slave on the auction block. The United States is struggling to navigate how to treat the African American woman who is the most powerful female representative of the nation when that same nation was built on the lack of power held by the African American woman. (Dummett 2016)*

By the end of the semester, for my students, #SayHerName had taken on a new meaning. This was evident, not only in their essays, but more so in their reading responses. It was here that they consciously admitted both their lack of knowledge but also the ways in which the course readings changed their perspectives on the place of black women in history. Their engagement in social media filtered through their insights as they made links between the past and the present. For example, our prior discussions of black feminism as it manifested in various generations informed our casual conversation at the beginning of class about Beyoncé's film *Lemonade* and they offered their own readings of the film as well as responses to commentaries they read on Twitter, Facebook, and blogs. By bringing social media into the classroom, students were made to feel the relevance of history while it also encouraged them to be politically honest. Instructors, who either actively use social media in their classes or follow the conversations in these forums, are afforded the opportunity to facilitate discussions that encourage pedagogical risks while also bridging a cultural

and political wall that often separates those in front of the classroom from their students.

## Testimony and Discussion as a New Praxis

While my students view social media as “raw,” meaning unfiltered discussions, those with access to Twitter and Facebook viewed the former as faster and more accessible as opposed to the latter, which they considered to be more of a closed community. Some asserted it was difficult to “get personal” on Twitter; therefore it was easier to express their opinions and engage in this new form of online activism. One student expressed an appreciation for the incorporation of social media in the classroom because it provided a way to broach difficult topics and have uncomfortable conversations while simultaneously raising issues that students wanted to learn more about. Others appreciated how Twitter could be used to bring a larger community to the classroom and to their college experience.

In a very practical sense, Twitter use has had a significant effect on engaging students in discussions that go beyond the classroom, which in turn has been linked to improved grades (Junco et al. 2010; Prestridge 2014). The role of grades and assessment raises the seemingly mundane conundrum of the instructor’s role in the course. On the one hand, the instructor clearly has a central role in building active and participatory discussions vis-à-vis social media. On the other hand, the instructor ultimately retains their authority to establish learning outcomes and evaluate each student’s performance according to their own guidelines. In this relatively traditional scenario, the instructor’s authority necessarily competes with that of the student, who is central in the process of creating knowledge about how race matters. After all, it’s the power of the student’s story that is at issue. “Teaching” #blacklivesmatter therefore encourages radical teachers to consider a fundamental paradigm shift in which they should think beyond their role as an authoritative figure who holds knowledge as if it were property. Instead, #blacklivesmatter encourages radical teachers to see themselves as co-participants in the construction of knowledge. In this analysis, radical teachers are responsible for coordinating learning and assessment in innovative ways.

Studies indicate that students may not appreciate the importance of their Twitter discussions, particularly insofar as they make them participants in the creation of knowledge (Manca et al. 2014). This importance may be further diminished when learning is assessed in ways that are determined solely by the instructor. Instead, the radical potential of using Twitter in classes is that it offers radical instructors an opportunity to contribute towards students’ sense of self-efficacy. More specifically, students can influence their lives in very immediate ways when they not only bear witness to their experience vis-à-vis twitter, but also when their peers recognize their shared role in creating collective knowledge and when instructors concede their role in shaping the process of evaluation. For

instance, the frequency and/or nature of responses to tweets is indicative of a student’s engagement with a discussion and shifts in their awareness relative a particular issue. The very immediate affirmation of students’ collective contribution is a profoundly political act. Recognizing and validating students’ voices is particularly powerful in cases where students are youth of color who have been assumed to fall on the “wrong” side of the digital divide.

While lack of access to a tablet, desktop, or laptop computer has rendered African-American youth at a disadvantage relative to their White peers, the smartphone has somewhat mitigated access to the internet. A recent study found that 92% of teens report going online daily and 85% of Black teens have access to a smartphone (Lenhart 2015). Studies also found that while ownership of desktop and laptop computers has changed little in the past ten years, cellphone ownership and use is near saturation for most groups (including Blacks) and has shifted the communication and information landscape for youth (ibid; Anderson 2015). A 2013 study found there were no significant racial differences in the extent to which youth accessed the web. This access has contributed to the development of an online black culture that is often referred to as “Black Twitter,” which speaks to the high frequency of tweets that relate to race and that trend on Twitter. André Brock considers Black Twitter a community of users that is both social and cultural, and that transgresses “popular conceptions of Black capitulation to the digital divide” (2012, 546). In summary, the use of Twitter enables radical teachers to meet their students “where they’re at.”

### ***Under the umbrella of BLM, integrating social media into the curricula can facilitate integration of social justice into the classroom in a holistic way.***

Under the umbrella of BLM, integrating social media into the curricula can facilitate integration of social justice into the classroom in a holistic way. With the space to share their ideas both within and outside of the classroom, students can engage both the historical and the contemporary in a way that is useful and encourages critical thinking. Recognizing that the majority of tweets relate to current events, one exercise we use to teach about the changing meanings of race is for each to inventory 25 tweets related to #blacklivesmatter (or other hashtags related to race) at a specific day each month during a semester (Anderson and Hitlin 2016). Students write a 3- to 5-page summary of tweets related to race once a month over the course of a semester. Their final comparative analyses invariably reveal that how we are thinking about race, what we magnify and focus on, are specific to a time and a context. This becomes important evidence of how the meaning of race not only changes over time, but also is informed in very direct ways by students’ actions (through dialogue). They also work with their sample of tweets during the semester as data to discuss

political influence and refine their awareness of how social issues are not simple matters of right and wrong. By the third month in the semester, students use their analysis to discover how competing frames are developed and used by groups in order to advance a specific interpretation of events.

A final exercise that contributes to the goal of social justice begins with their first snapshot analysis at the beginning of the semester, where we encourage students' conscious awareness of their own relationship to a broader collectivity. We believe this exercise is not only about building solidarity with users advocating social justice, but also giving students the opportunity to reflect meaningfully on how they participate online. First we introduce C. Wright Mills's concept of the "sociological imagination" that insists on recognizing how personal troubles are tied to public issues and vice versa. We ask students two questions about the 25 tweets they choose to analyze: First, how are your experiences or opinions reflected (or not) in your sample? Second, how does social structure produce or impede the desired outcomes identified in your set of tweets?

We believe "teaching" #blacklivesmatter involves being explicit about our political goals, which are:

1. Fostering the education of youth on matters of social justice,
2. Disrupting the authoritative voice of schools and universities, e.g., traditional bastions of privilege and authority,
3. Appropriating institutional authority in order to lend legitimacy and give voice to the experiences of actual and potential victims of police brutality and state control,
4. Encouraging new, porous, and democratic forms of activism beyond and/or in collaboration with established organizations (Dewey 2014), and
5. Bearing witness and collecting testimony in a public form that challenges injustice and that demands social change.

These goals are particularly important to the political ideal of democratic participation in civil society. Freelon, McIlwain, and Clark's 2016 study of Twitter conversation on keywords related to BLM found only a small minority of tweets were original. They also found that youths' discussion of police brutality on Twitter differed from that of activists. These insights underscore the fundamental importance of democratizing #blacklivesmatter by encouraging the participation of users in forms that affirm unique contributions from youth and from students. Some users claim Twitter is all they have to build solidarity around threatening experiences. Radical teachers should celebrate the power of their students' stories and encourage their voices.

## Conclusion

In 2013, President Obama, who had been constrained with regards to making comments about race and racial bias, made the following statement: "Trayvon Martin could have been me 35 years ago" (Cohen, 2013). His words attested to the political influence of personal testimony, particularly when used to identify with victims of police brutality. By portraying himself as a potential victim, his well-circulated comment resonated with many people of color and "escalated a nationwide debate on the [Zimmerman] verdict that has prompted protests, including some that turned violent" (Cohen, 2013). His comments also attest to how the politics of race are reliant on personal testimony and the power of the personal story. The voices that speak through Black Twitter undoubtedly challenge mainstream media portrayals of a "post-racial" America and "colorblind" justice.

This paper indicated the ways both testimony and images give voice to diverse experiences of how #blacklivesmatter. Tellingly, the studies that have been conducted of social media related to #blacklivesmatter, Black Lives Matter, and BLM find retweets common and centralized around hubs. Ironically, social media offers the immediate potential of democratizing voice. Radical teachers therefore play a critical role in disrupting "business as usual" when it comes to discussions of authority, discipline, and related phenomena like the carceral state, state violence, police brutality, representation, and framing. Whether it be by juxtaposing past and present, rewriting the narrative on black lives, or challenging the ways they are represented, students must be reminded of their ability to influence their lives by seizing their story and their voice.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In "Beyond The Hashtags," Freelon, McIlwain, and Clark point out the hashtag was relatively insignificant until it became a part of the Ferguson protests and developed into a chapter-based organization (Black Lives Matter). The organization incorporated more conventional forms of activism and "has more in common with traditional advocacy institutions like the NAACP than with porous,

digital-first activist networks like Anonymous" (2016:9). This article focuses on the hashtag and online activism.

<sup>2</sup> In his May 2016 commencement address at Howard University, President Obama applauded the efforts of the "new guard of civil rights leaders" and the "activism of young people....from Black Twitter to Black Lives Matter" who brought attention "to the real problems, for example, in our criminal justice system." However he followed this comment with the statement: "But to bring about structural change, lasting change, awareness is not enough." His strategy for confronting the problems of the nation reflected his personal history as an organizer, including a discussion on the importance of voting: "Change is the effort of committed citizens who hitch their wagons to something bigger than themselves and fight for it every single day." Politico Staff, "Obama's full remarks at Howard University's commencement ceremony," May 7, 2016 <http://www.politico.com/story/2016/05/obamas-howard-commencement-transcript-222931#ixzz4A4f91p4V>

<sup>3</sup> In addition to having their own social media accounts on sites such as Twitter and Facebook as well as blogging and having their own professional websites, academics are active participants in online conversations through the use of hashtags. "TwitterHistorians" is just one example, but those who attend conferences and talks are using hashtags to highlight those events.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Jeffrey Stewart, Professor of Black Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara, April 2016.



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# RADICAL TEACHER

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

## #SayHerName Loudly: How Black Girls Are Leading #BlackLivesMatter

by Ileana Jiménez



THE LITTLE RED SCHOOL HOUSE AND ELISABETH IRWIN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS CHANT IN WASHINGTON SQUARE PARK AS PART OF THEIR #BLACKLIVESMATTER WALKOUT IN DECEMBER 12, 2014 (IMAGE: ILEANA JIMÉNEZ).

In the early winter of 2014, students at Elisabeth Irwin High School, the same school from which Angela Davis was graduated in 1961, walked out of the building holding #BlackLivesMatter signs.

They chanted in unison. They marched from Charlton Street in downtown Manhattan to Washington Square Park to a local police precinct in the West Village to Union Square, then up the concrete canyons in midtown, and continued their march back to the Little Red School House & Elisabeth Irwin High School (LREI). Nearly 200 students were led by boys of color, Black and Latino. The students who marched with them were Black, Latino, Asian and white; they were girls and boys, both transgender and cisgender, queer and straight. Their Black, brown, white, queer, and straight teachers walked along beside them, including their straight, white, male, Jewish principal.

I marched with them, too, their queer, feminist, Puerto Rican teacher from the Bronx whose father is a retired New York City police officer. When we placed our bodies in front of the precinct for our die-in, the silence resounded. I was doing exactly what my father had taught me to do: to stand up (or lie down) for justice. I was just doing it quite differently than he had ever imagined.

Black girls marched too.

Like their peers, they held signs and chanted and marched. Some signs read "Hands Up, Don't Shoot" and "Injustice Anywhere is a Threat to Justice Everywhere." As I marched alongside them, I noticed only one Black girl carrying a sign that read "Am I Next?" There weren't any other signs that directly called out violence against black girls and women. No signs signaled violence against Black queer and transgender communities. There certainly weren't any signs that read #SayHerName. That was because the African American Policy Forum (AAPF)—the New York-based racial justice think tank co-founded by Black feminist legal theorist, Kimberlé Crenshaw—had not yet coined the hashtag, #SayHerName, until a few months later in February 2015. Even so, Black feminist media had already been writing about violence against Black women and girls, including #BlackLivesMatter co-founder, Alicia Garza, in an October 2014 piece titled "A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement," in which she wrote:

*It is an acknowledgment that Black women continue to bear the burden of a relentless assault on our children and our families and that assault is an act of state violence. Black queer and trans folks bearing a unique burden in a heteropatriarchal society that disposes of us like garbage and simultaneously fetishizes us and profits off of us is state violence . . . the fact that Black girls are used as negotiating chips during times of conflict and war is state violence. (Garza 2014)*

In the same way that Black women have always been erased from the historical record of the Civil Rights Movement as well as from women's and gay rights movements, the queer Black women who founded #BlackLivesMatter—Patrisse Cullors, Garza, and Opal Tometi—have also found themselves erased in multiple

ways. As Garza points out, "being Black queer women in this society (and apparently within these movements) tends to equal invisibility and non-relevancy."

While I don't believe my students intended to repeat the same toxic cycles of racialized sexism and homophobia that Garza points out in her article, I definitely saw this erasure in our students' walkout signs as an opportunity to revise my curriculum, not only in my feminism elective designed for juniors and seniors, where I started to include the African American Policy Forum's report, *Say Her Name: Resisting Police Brutality Against Black Women*<sup>1</sup>, and other #SayHerName articles, but also in my American literature course for sophomores, where my team teaching colleague and I included more connections to #BlackLivesMatter. These conversations are for all young people, not only those who have access to special topics electives. Garza reminds us that "Black Lives Matter affirms the lives of Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, Black-undocumented folks, folks with records, women and all Black lives along the gender spectrum." If we truly intend to create liberatory spaces for liberatory thinking and action, then all of our K-12 classes must heed Garza's call to affirm and include all Black lives.

***Garza reminds us that "Black Lives Matter affirms the lives of Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, Black-undocumented folks, folks with records, women and all Black lives along the gender spectrum."***

My concern about the student protest signs was short-lived. Black girls at LREI came back to school with an urgency and a sustained energy around #BlackLivesMatter that surpassed that of the boys who led the march. Three Black girls in particular, Kalli Jackson, Ellana Lawrence, and Labeebah Subair, took the helm. Like Black women during the Civil Rights Movement and now in #BlackLivesMatter, these three girls made no excuses for their leadership. Politicized as ninth graders by the walkout in 2014, they returned as sophomores during the 2015-16 school year ready to get their peers in formation. They wrote poetry, made films, choreographed dance pieces, and organized assemblies, all in the name of #BlackLivesMatter and #SayHerName.

Founded in 1921 by white lesbian educator Elisabeth Irwin, the Little Red School House and Elisabeth Irwin High School started as a public school experiment within New York City's then Board of Education. Since its founding, LREI has survived the slings and arrows of Tammany Hall, the Red Scare, and beyond. During the Depression, LREI became an independent school in 1932 when the Board of Education shut down experimental education in its public schools. Today, LREI remains an activist school committed to its experimental past when students proudly wore blue overalls with proverbial red diapers (O'Han 2016). The school continues to attract both students and teachers who want to make an impact on a world still broken by

institutionalized oppression and structural violence. Elisabeth Irwin herself was close to Eleanor Roosevelt and worked with the First Lady to highlight the school's focus on social change. As Ellana notes, "Before coming to LREI in ninth grade, I attended a public school in Queens. I decided to come to LREI because I admired how EI encourages students to fight for social justice as well as to always be socially aware."

I came to LREI for exactly that same reason. A closeted Latina in girls' schools for the first seven years of my career, I sought out LREI at 29 and I am now 41. It was one of the most liberating decisions of my life. After years of trying to bring intersectional feminism to girls' schools between 1997 and 2004, I was ready to be in a school that had social justice in its DNA. In fact, once I learned that Irwin was a fellow Smith alum, I knew that LREI would become a home and not just a job. And it is my home. In the 13 years that I have been at LREI, it has allowed my teacher-activism to flourish. It was at LREI where my former Black feminist principal, Ruth Geyer Jurgensen, supported me when I started my blog, *Feminist Teacher*, in 2009, and it was she who wholeheartedly approved of the intersectional feminism and activism

*Outsider*, I wanted to gather Black girl feminist activists in conversation as well. During our time together after school, Kalli, Ellana, and Labeebah talked about their education at LREI and their entrance into #BlackLivesMatter and #SayHerName activism. Throughout our conversation, they frequently used the term "master narrative," which they learned during their sophomore year study of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. Kalli and Labeebah studied this novel with me, and Ellana with a colleague. Morrison once told journalist Bill Moyers in a now famous 1990 interview that the master narrative is the "white male life" we have all internalized as the universal norm (Moyers 1990). This term provides the girls with a touchstone for naming white privilege and supremacy. Naming how the master narrative functions in their everyday lives fuels their feminist call to action in #BlackLivesMatter.

During our conversation, they were mindful of the shift they had made from being either one of a few Black girls in a predominantly white private middle school or being a Black girl in a predominantly Black public middle school with white faculty to later being a part of the 32% that are students of color at LREI. Kalli identifies as Black and Chinese; Ellana identifies as West Indian and Asian; and Labeebah identifies as Nigerian and Muslim. Although they are now at a predominantly white school, all three noted that LREI has provided them with the academic and artistic platform to be activists today. As Kalli notes, it is because she can see herself in the curriculum at LREI, that she is able to claim her Black feminist identity: "I think because I am now at LREI where we talk about Black feminism, I had to get involved because it would be stupid not to be on my own side . . . I'm not getting an education that is teaching me to leave myself out or dislike myself or not care about my own history. I go to a school that allows me to have the resources to look for my own history and find myself in what I'm learning."

As their conversation progresses, Kalli, Ellana, and Labeebah trace how their Black consciousness has shifted into a Black *feminist* consciousness via the books they have read at school, such as their study of *The Bluest Eye* with their tenth grade peers and their independent reading projects on works such as James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, Davis's autobiography, and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Labeebah points out that reading Davis's autobiography was that much more powerful because Davis is both an LREI alum and a Black feminist: "This school community, her peers and her teachers, encouraged her to be an activist, or at least planted the



ONE BLACK GIRL HOLDS AN "AM I NEXT?" SIGN DURING LREI STUDENT WALKOUT FOR #BLACKLIVESMATTER (CREDIT: ILEANA JIMÉNEZ).

course I still teach to juniors and seniors that led me to build a movement with other feminist teachers across the country and around the world.

At the end of their electrifying sophomore year of activism and art, I gathered Kalli, Ellana, and Labeebah during the spring of 2016 to discuss how they see the role of Black girls in #BlackLivesMatter and #SayHerName both at school and beyond. Inspired by feminists in conversation with each other in collections such as Audre Lorde's *Sister*

seed. Knowing that she went to this school and knowing that she is such a major figure in Black women's activism is important, it just resonates."

Ultimately, Kalli, Ellana, and Labeebah recognize that they too are a part of a larger genealogy of Black queer and feminist voices. We see this in Kalli's prose poem, "#IfIDieinPoliceCustody," and Ellana and Labeebah's film, *Unfound Justice*, both of which had their debut at LREI during their sophomore year. Kalli first read her poem at a school coffeehouse event and Ellana and Labeebah screened their film during a school assembly on #BlackLivesMatter; it later won the Runner Up Documentary award in the 2016 New York Alliance Film Festival. These readings and screenings catapulted the girls into their current position as the leading #BlackLivesMatter activists in the school.

As feminists of color in a predominantly white school, Kalli, Ellana, Labeebah, and I know that we are not in a utopia at LREI. Nor did Irwin intend it to be. She wanted LREI to be a messy place where both students and teachers worked together to make that moral arc bend towards justice. The entrance to our high school is framed by Irwin's vision: "The school will not always be just what it is now but we hope it will always be a place where ideas can grow, where heresy will be looked upon as possible truth, and where prejudice will dwindle from lack of room to grow. We hope it will be a place where freedom will lead to judgment—where ideals, year after year, are outgrown like last season's coat for larger ones to take their places."

My students and I know that there is more work to be done both at and beyond our school, so that we can reach those larger ideals Irwin envisioned. Ever mindful that they too are not immune to the racialized sexism of the past and present, Ellana observed, "I've only known of Black girls who have stepped up," followed by Labeebah agreeing, "boys seem to follow after it has been initiated."

Here's what else they had to say.

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**In what ways are you #BlackLivesMatter activists? And why should we address #BlackLivesMatter in school?**

**Labeebah:** We need to do this work as girls of color because no one else will. Not doing this work is succumbing to white supremacy. Not recognizing that the trend of killing Black people is enforced by the master narrative can only make the situation worse.

Doing the work of seeking justice is not only the work of school, not just at LREI, but everywhere. We are the upcoming generation, and if students aren't learning about #BlackLivesMatter, we are simply perpetuating the negative feedback cycle of oppression. It's also not just a Black people issue, as not only Black children should have to know about #BlackLivesMatter; it should be something

that everyone has to learn. Everyone is part of the system; Black people are being oppressed, minorities are being oppressed, but if only the people—how do I explain it?



ELLANA LAWRENCE, KALLI JACKSON, AND LABEEBAH SUBAIR ARE LEADING THE #BLACKLIVESMATTER AND #SAYHERNAME ACTIVISM AT LREI (CREDIT: ILEANA JIMÉNEZ).

(looks at Ellana)

**Ellana:** If only the people who are being oppressed are the only ones learning about it, how can we change the system?

**Labeebah:** Yeah.

**Ellana:** I feel that it is my responsibility knowing that at any given moment, one of my relatives or friends could be a victim of police harassment or police brutality, and that makes me uncomfortable. Because I have the ability to stand up and say something, I should use that to its full advantage.

**Kalli:** I think the #BlackLivesMatter movement needs to be addressed in schools for the same reason that we need to read *The Bluest Eye* in your English class and take your feminism class as juniors and seniors, to include people who got ignored and pushed away and excluded from their own education for so long.

I went to another private school [before LREI] that was predominantly white—well, this school, LREI, is predominantly white too—and I was one of two Black girls at that school in New Jersey. We never talked about race ever, unless it was Black History Month. I really didn't like the fact that I was Black when I was in middle school because it was so different from everyone else. I used to hate talking about Black history in school because as the only Black girl, it was uncomfortable since I got singled out with questions like, "Didn't Malcolm X want to kill all white people?" I think because I am now at LREI where we talk about Black feminism, I had to get involved because it would be stupid not to be on my own side.

**Labeebah:** Yeah, I don't know, I went to a public school that was majority Black and it was sad because we didn't talk about #BlackLivesMatter either. Although we knew that things were happening and the Trayvon Martin thing got really famous, we never really talked about race. It was *white* history that we were studying. Also, most of our teachers were white but the student population was predominantly Black, and we still never really learned about it. You would assume that being in a school that was predominantly Black, you would expect us to know more about it or be willing to learn more about it. After I came here to LREI, I started realizing the importance of #BlackLivesMatter. But before that, I didn't know about it that much.

**Given that you are all #BlackLivesMatter activists in high school, how do you want your teachers to do this work?**

**Kalli:** This year [with you] was the first time in an English class where I got to read a Black author and I've been going to school for over a decade, so I feel like that's kind of ridiculous that this is the first time out of so many years that I've gotten to read a book by a Black author as homework, as something that I get to analyze and have discussions about. The only thing that we get to discuss over and over every year at any other school is white male history. That just goes back to what we were talking about in English about window and mirror experiences, where only one group of people gets to see themselves in literature and gets to see themselves depicted as heroes, or gets to see themselves depicted as having depth and layers, and as people who can triumph and succeed, while Black people or people of color are side characters who don't have a lot of dimension or who don't get a story or who don't get a story told.

I think that if we did have that in other schools and we got to talk about it, then we would be able to open up discussions about institutionalized racism. It really doesn't matter whether you are a person of color or not; it needs to be a discussion that you have because unless everyone knows about racism, then it's never going to go away.

**Exactly. You recently performed a poem you wrote titled "#IfIDieInPoliceCustody" at our school's coffeehouse. How do you see this poem as part of your #SayHerName activism?**

**Kalli:** One night I was thinking about how frustrating it is to be talking about how angry we are that Black lives don't



LREI STUDENTS CARRY A #BLACKLIVESMATTER SIGN INTO UNION SQUARE (IMAGE: ILEANA JIMÉNEZ).

really seem to matter in America but we also still do not really care about Black women's lives either. I was just really upset about it in that moment and I wrote about what I was thinking and how I felt.

I saw on Instagram and Facebook that people were using the hashtag, #IfIDieInPoliceCustody, and Black women were posting videos saying what they wanted people to know if they died in police custody, and it felt sad. I felt that the purpose of the hashtag was really important but I also felt that the hashtag didn't get that much attention. Since those videos were really impactful and since police brutality is a reality for Black women in America, that was why I wrote the poem and performed it at the coffeehouse. I wrote things that I've heard people say or that I've heard family members talk about or heard talked about at the dinner table. Even the fact that for Black families that's a dinner table conversation is already a reason that it needs to be a discussion that we are having with everyone.

## #IfIDieInPoliceCustody

byKalli Jackson

*If I die in police custody . . . do not let them say it was a suicide. Do not let them choke the air out of my throat, tase the life out of my body, beat my bones to shattered glass, put bullet holes in my being, and then have the nerve to say I took my own life. Do not let them say the dog ate their homework. Because they are the dogs. And they ripped through me because I was a piece of dark meat, nothing but flesh to sink teeth into. But the only teeth that do the sinking come out the mouth of a gun barrel. Do not let them murder me and then let me take the blame.*

*If I die in police custody. . . please know the first thing I checked for was the police officer's hands. I wanted to know what color they were. I wanted to know if my life was in them. I wanted to see if their palm lines took the form of a noose. I wanted to see how their knuckles looked wrapped around a trigger. I wanted to see what marks their fingers around my neck would leave. Please know that I also checked my own hands, to know what they would see when I put them up. I went to a palm reader once. She told me my lifeline was deep, I was meant to live long enough to tell many great stories. I wondered if they thought their bullet would make a great punctuation mark.*

*If I die in police custody . . . do not let them forget my name. Refuse to let them swallow the syllables as soon as they finish pronouncing me dead. When they encase my body below a patch of dirt, do not let my name become letters lost on tombstone. Don't plaster a hashtag in front of it as if likes on a post might make up for the days lost. But don't stop saying the names of the girls who never got a hashtag. The dead girls whose names were never said loud enough to be noticed. Ask them what happened to Sandra Bland, Kendra James, Kathryn Johnston, Natasha McKenna. Ask them what happened to Tanisha Anderson, Aiyana Stanley-Jones, Tarika Wilson. Ask them why Dylann Roof got Burger King for shooting up a Black church, but Rekia Boyd was killed for holding her cellphone. Ask them why only one of those two names is recognizable. Say my name over and over until the inside of your mouth resembles a graveyard.*

*If I die in police custody . . . don't say I was "a good person." It doesn't matter what kind of person I was. My hands were up and empty. If I die in police custody. . . please know that it didn't hurt. After so much pain, you start to go numb. The pain of being hated for your skin, being hated for its color, being hated for no reason. Remember that it hurts ten times more to live in a body that was never meant to survive in the first place. A body that was whipped and lashed so much that its back looked like a sheet of music, crying out for relief. A body that was hosed down by the fire department at a pressure that could dampen bones and drown out screams. A body that turns on the TV and sees its brothers and its sisters and its children's corpses on display. When Trayvon was murdered, I took a bullet too. It ripped through my heart and my hope when spilling out the hole it left.*

*If I die in police custody . . . promise not to learn to forgive them. Do not let anyone tell you that I am "in a better place" or that "everything happens for a reason." We know the reason. It's the white man behind the silver badge that promises, "to serve and protect." It's the same man who promised us forty acres and a mule. The same man who smiled pretty as he deemed us three-fifths a person and called it a compromise. Do not let them tell you any different. Do not stand at the podium during my funeral, and cry softly as you whimper through my eulogy. Stand tall with the spine only a black woman can carry, fill your lungs with all the air I'll never breathe again and get mad. Get enraged. When they call you an Angry Black Woman, show them an earthquake. When they tell you not to make everything about race, show them a thunderstorm. When they are found not guilty with the charges of my murder, show them a natural disaster. Raise hell. Make noise. Be heard.*

*If I die in police custody . . . I did not kill myself.*

**Ellana and Labeebah, you both made a film titled "Unfounded Justice" featuring the #BlackLivesMatter walkout we did as a school in December 2014. It was selected as a semi-finalist and later won an award at the 2016 New York Alliance Film Festival. Can you talk about the process of making your film?**

**Ellana:** We started it in ninth grade as an honors project with our art, media, and life skills teachers. We were inspired by the walkout. Definitely that was the first protest or any kind of activist work that I've ever done and I was overwhelmed with so many different emotions that I couldn't forget about it, even thinking back on the cheers and chants that we did that day gives me chills. So after experiencing that, we wanted to further our understanding



LREI STUDENTS CONDUCT A DIE-IN IN FRONT OF A NEW YORK CITY POLICE PRECINCT IN THE WEST VILLAGE, DECEMBER 12, 2014 (IMAGE: ILEANA JIMÉNEZ).

of the work by interviewing our peers and family members. This is something that is very close to us. It's not something that we are out of touch with.

**Labeebah:** I think it was also knowing that you have a voice. Before, I felt that it was taboo to talk about. But after the walk-out, it was like ok, this might be something that people in our surroundings are interested in, but not everyone, because you can't make that generalization. I guess that knowing we had the right to do that, and that we could assert our own voice was really our inspiration.

At first we started interviewing anyone in the school. We believe that it wasn't just like a Black people issue. (Ellana: Yeah). Then we made it only Black people because we felt that—and this goes back to the single story idea that Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie talks about—we felt that people telling different stories about being Black and their police brutality experiences was a form of advocacy for Black people.

In the end, we realized that most of the people we interviewed were young men, so it was just Lutfah, my sister, and she was the only female. Everybody else was male. We realized we were focusing on only young men and I think that that's something we should've changed. We can go back to do that.

**What was it like for you to be marching in a #BlackLivesMatter walkout protest with your teachers and your peers? What was coursing through your body as you were marching?**

**Ellana:** It was very, very empowering. I think knowing that we had the institution behind us drove us as well. Knowing that we had that support behind us made everything better.

**I know that it was emotional for me, especially when we did the die-in at the precinct. My father was a New York City police officer and he's retired now. First my father was an officer in the Bronx and then he got moved to Brooklyn to be in Internal Affairs, which means he was busting cops who were—**

**Ellana:** Abusing power.

**Yes. It was moving for me to be lying down on the street, and feel my father there. I was both resisting him and also supporting him in some ways. Since he was a Puerto Rican cop in New York, I wondered what kind of racism he went through as a Latino man to uphold the master narrative. How much did he buy into? Because that happens. How much did he resist? I don't know; I've never asked him. That was what was going on for me. So, I have wondered through all of this, is it important to see that your teachers are activists too?**

**Kalli:** Yeah, because your teachers are the ones who are part of the education system in America. We talked in English about how the master narrative is responsible for feeding children messages to dislike themselves. I'm not getting an education that is teaching me to leave myself out or dislike myself or not care about my own history. I go to a school that allows me to have the resources to look for my own history and find myself in what I'm learning. I think that you need your teachers to show that they are active in this movement or show that they are active in caring about your history and your education and not just go the easy way with whatever textbooks they are making in Texas or places where people of color are left out of the conversation.

**Labeebah:** But even though we go to a progressive school, teachers have power over the students, so there is still that hierarchy, so being that that's true, if teachers are not willing to be part of this movement, or willing to teach students about it, then there's no way that we are going to reach our age group. Teachers really do need to be a part of it.

**Ellana:** Even when I was in public schools in elementary and middle school, our teachers never spoke about race until about eighth grade. If I had been taught about race in middle school or elementary school, I would've been inspired from an even younger age instead of being inspired when I was in ninth grade [at LREI].

**As part of your end-of-year tenth grade project, you were all asked to read an independent reading book, and each of you selected a major African-American**

**writer after our shared reading of *The Bluest Eye* with your classmates. Kalli, you are reading Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*; Labeebah, you are reading Angela Davis's autobiography; and Ellana, you are reading James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*. How do you see these selections as part of your education as young activists?**

**Kalli:** Reading a book that is outside of the master narrative is activism in itself. You are giving yourself the opportunity to learn something about who you are and who your people are, written by someone who is like you. I think you are helping yourself by doing that, you are educating yourself by doing that, and giving yourself the tools you need to set yourself free from all of the systems that are trying to put you into this one box.

**Labeebah:** This goes back to windows and mirrors. You definitely see the mirror. As Kalli said, the master narrative puts forth the white male narrative in literature rather than the story of the Black female or Black people in general. I feel that reading literature that propels your own activism makes you knowledgeable. For me, it's more of a historical thing. It makes me more knowledgeable about how people in the past dealt with racism.

While I read Angela Davis's autobiography, I learned that she provides a solution. She seems to be saying, this is how you go about activism. This is how you should unite. Right now in the book, she's talking about how people of color see white people as the enemy. She's talking about how, if we don't step beyond that, how the master narrative kind of makes us feel this disassociation from white people, it makes us feel this disconnect that creates a barrier that doesn't allow us to have our own voices and to be the activists that we can be. Her solution is for us to unite more.

**Does it make a difference to you that she went to this high school?**

**Labeebah:** Oh, yeah (laughter). When she was talking about being in prison, like how it was so close to here, I was like, woah. I couldn't even imagine, it was hard for me to imagine even the geography of everything. I feel like LREI was the beginning of her Communist ideology and she went beyond that. Knowing that she went to this school, even though it might not be the same as when she went here, she talks about how most of the teachers---and this goes back to teachers being activists---she talks about how most of the teachers here were on the blacklist, so they couldn't even teach at regular public schools. She came from Birmingham, Alabama, so coming here was like the total flip side of the type of education she was receiving. This school community, her peers and her teachers, encouraged her to be an activist, or at least planted the seed. Knowing that she went to this school and knowing that she is such a major figure in Black women's activism is important; it just resonates.

**Ellana:** Yeah, *The Fire Next Time*, oh my God, the amount of stuff I highlighted and put in brackets, I'm pretty sure I highlighted the whole book. It starts off with him writing a letter to his nephew and one of the lines, I think, is that

they [white people] don't expect you to strive for excellence. This is not something that I heard often as a child. I would speak to my father about race a lot and I still do, but to hear it in a piece of literature, it's something that I've never heard writers write about before. It gives me more of a reason that Baldwin should be put into the curriculum in schools. It can help inspire kids to think in a different light. I would say that *The Fire Next Time* is making me think about race in a different light than what I was thinking about previously and my experience of going here as well. In the book, he talks about a time a police officer comes up to him and calls him the 'n' word and beat him, and that definitely resonated with me. Baldwin talks



STUDENTS AT LREI GATHER BEFORE THEIR #BLACKLIVESMATTER WALKOUT ON DECEMBER 12, 2014 (CREDIT: ANA MAROTO).

about religion and how for him, religion was a distraction from race, and I don't think I've ever heard that statement before. My perspective of the world has changed by reading this book.

**Labeebah:** When we talk about race, or when we talk about systems of oppression, as a student, I feel like we are stuck in this bubble believing that it's just America.

**Ellana:** Yeah, yeah.

**Labeebah:** In her autobiography, Angela Davis talks about how she went to Germany and France, and it makes me realize that racism does not exist just here, it's all over the world.

**Ellana:** It's a huge system.

**Labeebah:** The master narrative. It's so slick. It's just like right there, I'm going to control your world and I'm going to put you at the bottom.

**Ellana:** It's so hard to see sometimes.

**Labeebah:** Reading Angela Davis makes you realize that the majority of the human population doesn't realize this.

**Ellana:** Yeah, it's right in front of your eyes, but not there at the same time.

**Kalli:** I think the scariest part of it is how early it starts, from the minute you are born, from the moment they decide they are going to wrap you in a blue or pink blanket. When I was doing volunteer work with kids, there was a little black girl who said Beyoncé is racist; this was right after the Super Bowl. I asked her why she thought Beyoncé was racist. She said, "Because she put the Black Panthers in her choreography," and I said, "What's wrong with the Black Panthers?" and she said, "I don't know, but on the news, they said 'that's racist' and the news is never wrong."



ELLANA LAWRENCE HOLDING A #BLACKLIVESMATTER SIGN, DECEMBER 12, 2014 (IMAGE: KALLI JACKSON).

**That's it; that's the master narrative right there. All of what you are reading is a part of movement building. In other words, you have to read what came before you, so that you can build on their work. How do you see yourselves moving forward as activists?**

**Kalli:** The next step is to keep reading and writing and producing things that we are trying to illustrate. The best way to get other people to hear about it and listen to it and try to understand it is to keep writing, keep making films, and creating things so that others can view what our experience is like. You have to put it out there.

**Ellana:** Education.

**Labeebah:** Just as much as white literature and history is forced down everyone's throat, I feel that this is just as important, we need to make it something that is not a taboo, that everyone should learn about. Making people aware that the master narrative is so present.

**Ellana:** Bringing it up in school is a great way to get students involved from a young age. The master narrative is very real.

**Labeebah:** And not just in school.

**In what ways do you hope other Black girls will become a part of Black feminism and #BlackLivesMatter? How do you hope that your activism will inspire them to be young Black feminists within the movement?**

**Ellana:** I hope other Black girls will become part of Black feminism and #BlackLivesMatter by becoming informed about the movement. I hope my activism will encourage them to take action and bring awareness to issues such as police brutality.

**Labeebah:** I hope that other Black girls continue to involve themselves in Black feminism and the #BlackLivesMatter movement in any way possible, whether it be through the arts, research, etc. This is extremely important because, as Black girls and women, we are at the bottom of the social hierarchy. I hope that my activism inspires other girls to unite because without the unity of Black girls, we make ourselves even more subject to systemic oppression. I believe that we have a voice, and through my work and that of others, I hope that we assert ourselves effectively enough to make a change.

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As Kimberlé Crenshaw said at a women's studies conference in November 2015 and I documented in this tweet, the "deaths of black women are not seen in relation to [the] vulnerability of black people writ large." The AAPF further elucidates this point on their #SayHerName site: "Although Black women are routinely killed, raped, and beaten by the police, their experiences are rarely foregrounded in popular understandings of police brutality" (African American Policy Forum 2016). I see Crenshaw's words as not only a call-to-action to activists, politicians, and academics but also to teachers, counselors, and administrators. If the deaths of Black women are not seen in relation to the larger "vulnerability of black people writ large," then by extension, that means that the deaths of Black girls -- whether physical or emotional, developmental or spiritual -- are also invisibilized, including at school. While school is one of the first places where Black girls, both queer and straight, cisgender and transgender, are both erased and policed, school can also be a potential site of affirmation, healing, and transformation. It can be a site for visibility. It can be a site for Black girls to write themselves back into the narrative. Back into claiming their names, their stories, and their lives. As Kalli said in our conversation, "You have to put it out there."

Kalli, Ellana, and Labeebah are "putting it out there" by writing themselves into a Black feminist narrative that we all need to be accountable to as educators. Even as

sophomores, they remind us that intersectional feminism should permeate curriculum design and pedagogical practice, not only in high school but in all K-12 classroom spaces. As Ellana points out rightly, "If had been taught about race in middle school or elementary school, I would've been inspired from an even younger age instead of being inspired when I was in ninth grade." We cannot afford to continue the cycle of erasing Black girls' visions for racial and gender justice, as this is yet another form of violence against their minds and bodies, and yet another way that we refuse to #SayHerName. Black girls at LREI and across the country are planning their own feminist revolution in schools and we must listen to and get in line with them. Their work is a model for what we can all do to mobilize around #BlackLivesMatter to #SayHerName loudly.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> <http://www.aapf.org/sayhernamereport>



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# RADICAL TEACHER

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

## The Architecture of American Slavery: Teaching the Black Lives Matter Movement to Architects

by Catherine Zipf



FIGURE 1. DEWOLFE TAVERN, WHERE SLAVES AND SLAVE GOODS WERE ONCE STORED (IMAGE: CATHERINE ZIPF)

When I signed on to teach a course entitled *The Architecture of American Slavery* at Roger Williams University in spring, 2016, I did not expect the Black Lives Matter movement to be relevant. I thought the course would be about the infrastructure surrounding American slavery, and its present-day remnants. But as it turns out, the Black Lives Matter movement is tied to the architectural legacy of American slavery in more ways than I had thought.

I spent the 2015-16 academic year filling in for a good friend and colleague as a Visiting Associate Professor in Historic Preservation at RWU, in Bristol, RI. I have taught preservation classes off and on during the fifteen years I have lived in Rhode Island. Outside academia, I am deeply involved in researching the history of Rhode Island's built environment, particularly its sites associated with African-Americans and women. As such, I am constantly searching for interesting projects with pedagogical applications. Relative to the depth of its history, Rhode Island is vastly under-researched. Finding things to study is not hard.

Rhode Island's African-American spaces are especially under-researched. With a white population of 96.3%, Bristol, RI, is not particularly diverse. The next largest racial subgroup is Hispanic, at 1.3%. African-Americans make up 0.6% of the population.<sup>1</sup> As a result, white-oriented architectural history tends to dominate. Yet, Bristol was ground zero for the RI slave trade and home to the DeWolfe family, who ran one of the most profitable slave-trading enterprises in the country during the Colonial era. DeWolfe buildings dot Bristol's landscape, creating an interesting and often uncomfortable relationship with present-day life. For example, the DeWolfe warehouse, where slaves and slave goods were stored, is now an upscale restaurant (Figure 1). The history of the DeWolfes themselves is well told, but the African-American side is left out. I have long thought that a class on Bristol's African-American architecture would be really interesting.

When it looked like my spring semester schedule would have room for a special topics class, I pitched the idea to my dean, Stephen White. Originally titling the course *The Landscape of Northern Slavery*, I briefly outlined a syllabus that would explore the spatial aspect of the town's slave trading past. It was an "off" idea and somewhat controversial, not one I thought he'd go for. However, Steve really liked it—a lot, and far more than any of the other ideas I had. He not only saw the merits of the class but didn't object to its material. And, he was extremely enthusiastic. His support was key, as was the interest of the students. Like every professor offering a special topics class, I feared that the course wouldn't make minimum enrollment. But, it filled in the first two days of registration.

Like its hometown, RWU ("R-Dubs") also does not have a diverse student population. 73% of the university is white, 5% Latino, 2.5% African-American, 2.2% Asian and 1% Native American (the remaining percent is unknown). Its minority populations are below the national averages.<sup>2</sup> Its faculty is not much better: 89% is white, 2.8% Latino, 2.5% Asian, 2.4% African-American, and .5% Native American. Given these demographics, it came as no

surprise that I had only one person of color, an international student from Turkey, among my 19 students. About half were graduate students and half were undergraduate seniors. All but two were architecture majors; the remaining two were historic preservation majors.

The lack of diversity within the class was something I had anticipated in advance. About a week after pitching the course to Steve, it occurred to me that *The Landscape of Northern Slavery* couldn't be understood outside the context of plantation or Southern slavery. And, I could not count on university students in a northern small town to be familiar with the intricacies of plantation architecture. The course would have to take a broader approach to the idea of slavery, its architectural imprint on our landscape, and the results of that imprint today. I called Steve back and asked if we could enlarge the scope of the course to *The Architecture of American Slavery*. This title would offer more room to maneuver within the topic. He agreed. The course was born.

***The course would have to take a broader approach to the idea of slavery, its architectural imprint on our landscape, and the results of that imprint today.***

From its start, I wanted to take a long view of the subject and to define both "architecture" and "slavery" very broadly. Having begun with the idea of northern slavery, I never intended to limit the course to Southern plantations. While the lens of Southern plantations might be useful in examining the universality of slave architecture, it lacked sufficient richness to last thirteen weeks. There wasn't enough scholarship and field trips would be impossible. I feared that the course would be a monotonous death march of "if it's March 3, it must be [fill in the blank] plantation." A long view was absolutely necessary.

More importantly, the long view created the opportunity to draw connections between the past and the present. As an architectural historian, I consider the past architecture that surrounds us as a vibrant part of our lives. But, most students don't view it that way. They need to be taught to recognize the connections between past and present, as well as how contemporary architecture riffs upon (or rebels against) older buildings. If I limited the topic to plantations only, all of which were remote to our location, that's all students would see. They would never learn how these particular choices in shaping space reverberate around us today. In order to teach them this, I defined "the architecture of slavery" to include not just plantation houses and slave quarters but every space and landscape in which economic apparatus of slavery took form, including sugar houses, cotton mills, universities, missions, and public housing.

The breadth of this definition allowed me to engage with several readings I wanted to cover. A key part of slavery's architectural legacy revolves around the "40 acres and a mule" question of reparations. I wanted to talk about

the environmental component of that issue through the lens of contemporary thinkers, presently represented by Ta-Nehisi Coates and his article, "The Case for Reparations."<sup>3</sup> What should be done now about slavery is an important, residual question. I also wanted to engage with a project entitled *Traces of the Trade: A Story from*

readings to reference during our conversations. Architectural history classes run better with images, as most architects learn more effectively through visual media. In one of those "that's a great idea" moments born slightly out of laziness, I decided to take a "running list" approach to compiling the images. For each class, I would

add images from new readings to our unit PowerPoint and then flip through them, forward and backward, as they were relevant to the discussion. I had never tried this method before and found it quite useful in guiding visual learners. It also allowed us to refresh or alter our thinking on ideas discussed in previous class meetings. More importantly, seeing the sites brought a sense of realism to the issues. Over the course of the semester, we looked at many different types of images, from plantation landscapes to economic charts to African slave castles to redlining maps. Seeing the spaces where slaves were held, images of how they were restrained, and maps of how they viewed their world helped us talk about very difficult issues (Figure 3).



FIGURE 2. TRACES OF THE TRADE: A STORY FROM THE DEEP NORTH (COURTESY OF KATRINA BROWNE)

*the Deep North*, by Katrina Browne, a descendent of the DeWolfe family (Figure 2).<sup>4</sup> Her film raised significant questions about the extent to which white people today are responsible for actions taken by their ancestors; Bristol was featured prominently in it. Browne's work tackled the question of white guilt head on. I felt students should hear her thoughts on the matter.

I divided the course into five relatively short units: Mission, Plantation, North, Ghetto, and Legacy. Each unit had a set of assigned readings, each ended with an essay-based quiz, and each was composed of sub-topics. The Mission unit consisted of grouped readings on the topics of "White Conquest," "Mission Architecture," and "Mission Life." For "White Conquest," we examined the history of white arrival in the (future) United States from a geographic perspective. The "Mission Architecture" readings examined the actual buildings, while the "Mission Life" readings talked about how missions operated, allowing us to better understand the lived experiences of Mission-era slaves. A key goal of this unit was to broaden the students' understanding of American slavery. This choice proved useful, as many were unaware that Native Americans had also been enslaved in the past.

Because it was a seminar course, I did not lecture, but I did bring images of buildings or sites mentioned in the

The Plantation unit was the largest. Its sub-topics included "Abduction," "Plantation Architecture," "Cotton," "Sugar," "Landscape," and "Escape." Looking back, this unit did the most to press the limits of our definition of the architecture of slavery. The unit began by looking at the spaces through which African slaves travelled, including slave castles, barracons, and slave "factories," or towns established along African rivers to hold slaves for sale (Figure 4). In an effort to get a sense of the experience of moving through space as a slave, we looked at items used for confinement, such as slave yokes. We were deeply enriched by the scholarship of Louis Nelson, who is studying these ephemeral African spaces.<sup>5</sup>

The sub-topics on cotton and sugar were intended to help students understand the impact of economics on the slave landscape. These readings were augmented by images of the structures needed for cotton and sugar production, in which slaves spent a great deal of their time. We also studied how cotton was grown and picked, and how sugar was rendered from cane. Statistics and charts of slave population growth due to rises in the cotton and sugar markets revealed the influence that cash crops had on the slave experience. These sub-topics also helped us understand the plantation landscape as a totality, giving us insight into why escape was so difficult and how the experience differed for whites and blacks. Students encountered many ideas in this unit, but one of the most revelatory was that the Underground Railroad reached barely .01% of the entire slave population. One brave student ventured to describe it as "a story whites tell to make themselves feel better."<sup>6</sup>

While the Plantation unit gave us a good sense of the architecture of slavery's past, the unit on the North brought the present into focus. This unit connected us with our local landscape and its DeWolfe past. It had three sub-topics, "Colonial Northern Slavery," "Cotton Production," and "Academia and the Intelligentsia." We examined the remains of Rhode Island's plantations, which were located in the western, more rural part of the state, and considered them next to the DeWolfe family's Bristol properties. In addition to the DeWolfe warehouse, their bank, church, and many houses survive. "Cotton Production" enabled us to consider the other side of the slave economy by looking at mill villages, a quintessential New England urban landscape. Through this lens, we questioned the image of a "clean-hands" North. Subsequent discussions focused on the role slavery played in constructing New England's academic institutions, specifically our local Brown University. As students grappled with the differences between Southern and Northern slavery, they wondered which might have been a harder experience. Surprisingly, their views of Southern slavery softened somewhat in consideration of the hardships Northern slaves faced.

These first three units consistently produced interesting questions and observations, many with relevance to issues of today. For the Mission unit: was it possible to have "good" and/or morally justifiable slavery? Plantation unit: Blacks and whites defined landscape so differently that whites literally couldn't see spaces that blacks could. Is this why blacks and whites find it difficult to communicate today? North unit: Northern landscapes, even those of abolition, operated as auxiliary slave space. To what extent do we read this relationship in the buildings and urban plan?

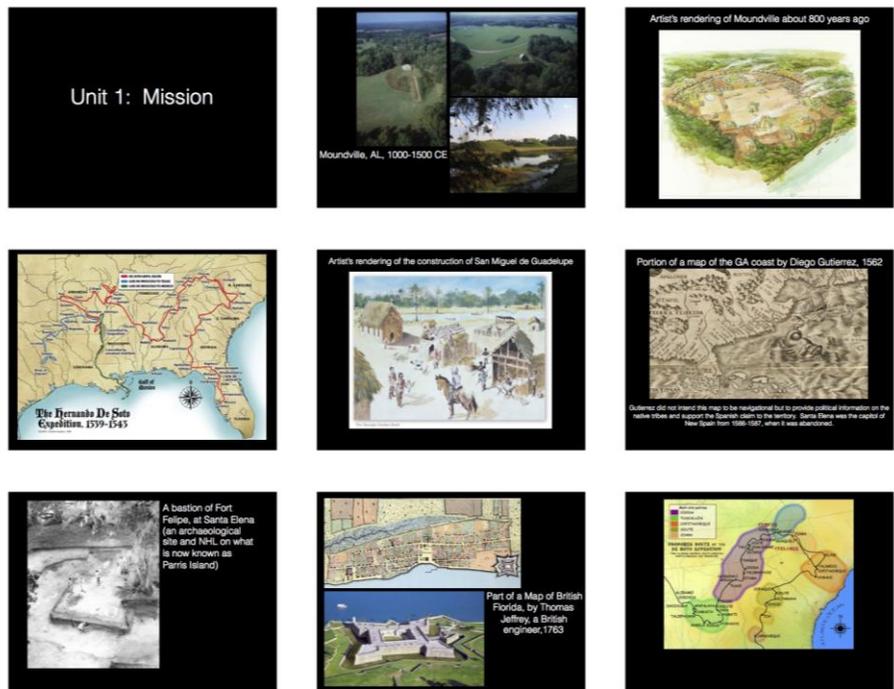


FIGURE 3. MISSION UNIT (IMAGES: CATHERINE ZIPP)

By unit 4: The Ghetto, we were headed full steam towards the present. I was deliberate in choosing the term "ghetto" for this unit because I wanted to raise the ideas of separation, boundary, and power, which are key to its definition, in the context of slavery. I also wanted to consider whether the term applied to other African-American communities in the Jim Crow era and to begin the process of connecting the architecture of slavery with present-day issues that had roots in slavery, like reparations. I was hoping that students would discover slavery and ghetto to be two sides of the same coin. But, it was a lot of ground to cover. In the end, I chose four sub-topics: "Migration," "Redlining," "Slum Clearance," and "Public Housing," all of which examined the ghetto in an architectural sense. A major challenge was finding a way to condense the voluminous amount of scholarship into bites useful for classroom discussions. This unit's readings, for the first time that semester, were hit or miss. Some resonated deeply. Others went by with no notice.

A case in point was an article on public housing by Joseph Heathcott entitled "In the Nature of a Clinic': The Design of Early Public Housing in St. Louis."<sup>7</sup> My initial instinct was that the article was a difficult read and that the other assigned reading, on slum clearance in Washington, DC, would generate more discussion. Of course, I had deeply underestimated my students. Heathcott talks about the design of 1930s- and 1940s-era public housing in St. Louis, dissecting it in ways that allowed for comparisons between the two. His examples were still standing, so I brought pictures of them to class for discussion. We spent a lot of time looking at those images and trying to determine why they were so

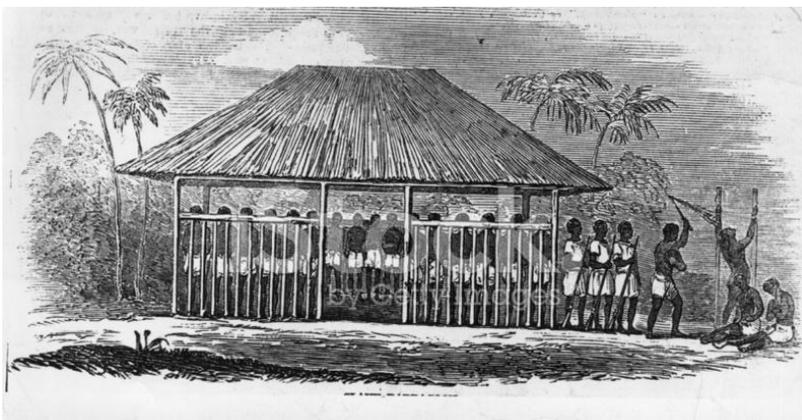


FIGURE 4. SLAVE BARRACOON (IMAGE: FREEIMAGES.COM/RISCHGITZ/GETTY IMAGES)

similar but still so different. Could you tell that one was for blacks and one for whites? In the end, we weren't so sure. Design and construction definitely mattered. The color of the residents seemed far less important.

As in previous units, images were key to how the students understood the problems of the ghetto (Figure 5). For looking at public housing, I brought in pictures of the Dan Ryan Expressway in Chicago, whose 14 lanes of traffic separate the Robert Taylor Homes, a public housing development, from a white neighborhood. These images helped us explore the questions of boundary and spatial separation, a key theme in our previous discussions of slave space. In the case of the Dan Ryan Expressway, the boundary was inherently obvious, and utterly immovable. In the case of redlining, however, "ghetto" boundaries were not initially visible. Redlined maps of Chicago, Boston, Baltimore, Oakland, and Providence helped the students see how Federal and economic policies could create invisible boundaries that became visible through human violence. They also made clear the government's complicity in creating a racist environment. At this moment, I suddenly felt the connection between my class and the Black Lives Matter movement crystalize in my own mind. What to do about it was far less clear. Unit 4 intersected with several students' studio work. In a stroke of luck (in my view), one group of students had been assigned a project in another class to design the Obama Presidential Library, on the south side of Chicago.<sup>8</sup> They had visited the site and were struck by the surrounding neighborhood—one filled with public housing units. Coming at this present-day design challenge from the perspective of the legacy of American slavery gave them considerable insight into the implications of their project for the neighborhood's future. Was this going to be a good addition to the neighborhood? Or not? Had they correctly interpreted the local context? Was their design or their process of design inadvertently perpetuating a racist environment? What about their design should change? Throughout these weeks, students offered very conflicted opinions over where they now saw their studio work heading. Their voices made clear that the issues from our history class were extremely relevant today. Getting the design right was important.

By the time unit 5 arrived, not only was the impact of slavery on architectural and urban design during the twentieth century undeniable, but it was evident that I had to find a way to bring our course material together with the Black Lives Matter movement. It was not just that the BLM movement is the Civil Rights movement of our time. The movement itself had a strong architectural component,

with key events happening in spaces deeply affected by long-standing architectural racism. It brought together all the issues we had discussed into a single, extremely relevant package. For example, Trayvon Martin was murdered while walking through a gated community of relatively recent date.<sup>9</sup> Our discussions had been dancing around the idea that gated communities were the next stage in a continuum of exclusionary spaces that began with the plantation house. We needed to know whether the racist biases built into the landscapes of slavery persisted today. Was it possible, the class wondered, that the architecture of slavery still existed? Does new construction continue these earlier patterns and, if so, how? Do we live in a landscape of white domination and, if so, how did that landscape influence the course of events that lead to Martin's murder? In short, we were heading full throttle towards the key question of how the built landscape continues to reinforce racial stereotypes and injustice.

With very little regret, I ditched a tour of the DeWolfe landscape to create space in the syllabus for an assignment on the spatial aspects of the BLM movement. I was fortunate to come across a video of the "Black Lives Matter Teach-In: On Race, Architecture, and The City," held on March 9, 2015, and sponsored by Dean Jonathan Massey

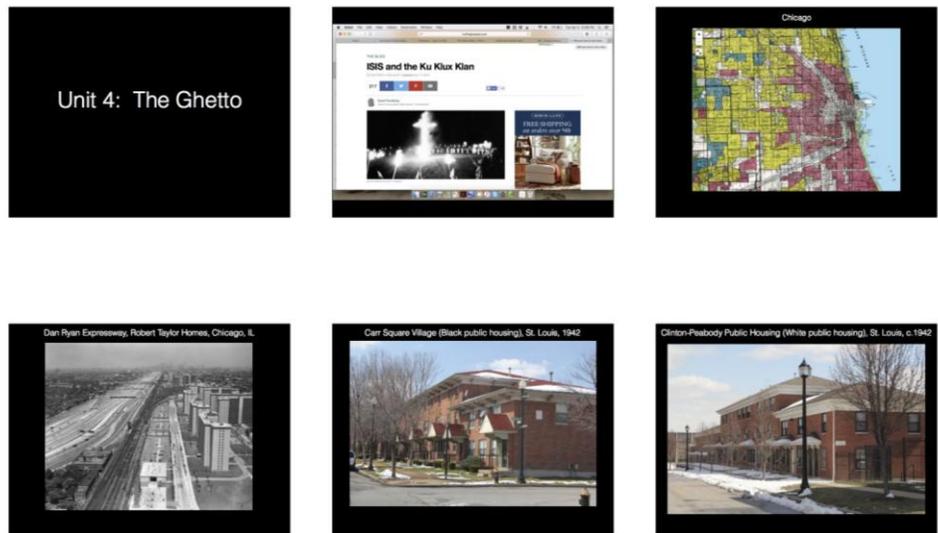


FIGURE 5. UNIT 4: THE GHETTO PRESENTATION (CATHERINE ZIFF)

and his students at the California College of the Arts, which I assigned.<sup>10</sup> Featuring a series of design projects that addressed BLM concerns, Massey's video was helpful in two key ways. First, it pointed out the homogeneity of the field of architecture, a problem often discussed in schools of architecture and well reflected in the racial make-up of my class. Second, it put the issue of BLM in a positive context by challenging architects to find solutions to social problems. Thus, it took that next step beyond identifying and acknowledging the problem to seek out remedies. The video came with a companion website, but, unfortunately, it was too late in the semester to make that an assignment.<sup>11</sup> If I do this course again (and I hope I will), readings from the website will be prominent in the syllabus. I will also include readings on the racial politics of

gated communities, which turned out to be a huge void in our understanding.

Surprisingly, we were amply prepared to discuss the BLM movement. Unwittingly, I had assigned readings that others in the BLM movement were also reading. In addition to “The Case for Reparations,” we had read excerpts from Solomon Northup’s *12 Years a Slave*, Edward Baptist’s *The Half Has Never Been Told*, Isabel Wilkerson’s *The Warmth of Other Suns*, and Beryl Satter’s *Family Properties: Race, Real Estate, and the Exploitation of Black Urban America*.<sup>12</sup> Wilkerson had recently spoken on campus, so I was particularly committed to including her work. We had also learned about Pruitt-Igoe’s destruction and discussed Hollywood’s portrayal of racial politics in *Django Unchained*.<sup>13</sup> In challenging students to make connections between the course material and other aspects of their university and personal lives, I had inadvertently laid the foundation for a robust discussion of the BLM movement.

The resulting conversation was anything but “watered down.” In fact, it was fully informed by our lengthy study of how the architecture of slavery had survived into the present day. We reflected on how consistently these biases appeared in the built environment. As student JG explained, “We watched the perceptions [of white and black people] change and we watched some of them stay constant, persisting into the current day and adding to the effects of slavery and race as a current issue.... Often overseen as part of the big picture, landscape is both physically literal and metaphorical. What was most influential in our analysis of the white and black landscape was the idea that these landscapes were so vitally separate yet existing simultaneously together.”<sup>14</sup> As we came to understand that American slavery had created different but intertwined landscapes for blacks and whites and saw how those landscapes had developed over time, the issues of racial injustice today become crystal clear. The question was not how the BLM movement intersected with architecture but rather how architecture had played a role in bringing the movement forth. It was a class-wide “aha” moment.

***Over the course of the semester, the class had encountered plenty of really hard moments, particularly where the violence of slavery became enmeshed with the spaces in which that violence occurred.***

Over the course of the semester, the class had encountered plenty of really hard moments, particularly where the violence of slavery became enmeshed with the spaces in which that violence occurred. However, there were more pauses in the conversation as students came to terms with the idea that the architecture and architects they revered had an underlying line of racism at their core. As SP put it: “As designers, we rely on previous precedents to design and understand buildings . . . It has become blatantly clear that to begin designing in the future we must take our foundation of architectural knowledge and

begin designing outside of these norms.” The buildings that are taught to most architecture students do not represent all viewpoints, as most believe. They are not a shared heritage, but rather one of white supremacist values. For some, this moment was difficult and provoked considerable reflection.

These thoughts called for different approaches to understanding architecture of the past. Are there other ways to define architecture, we wondered, other than just as buildings? And, if so, would that help ease racial tensions? As NK explained, the BLM movement, considered in the context of American slavery, “made me realize how African Americans and other minorities suffered from architecture that was imposed upon them for most of the time . . . Even though applications such as redlining are long gone, we should still realize the existence of ongoing racism and inequality in our social lives. After such a realization, our architecture can try to solve the problem by different strategies.” In short, the design process as it currently exists accommodates only white definitions of space. Blacks and other minorities not only see these spaces differently than whites, but they occupy different spaces altogether. This line of inquiry called into question not only our architectural history curriculum, but the way that the field of architecture was structured. We pondered other ways to think about and practice architecture. Then, we wondered whether architects could make a living by operating in opposition to the norm—or whether economics would ultimately rule.

My two preservationists chimed in to remind the class that what remains in the built environment is key to our understanding of its development. As AO noted: “I have begun to realize that the National Register guidelines actually actively favor privileged whites...The lack of attention to black architecture has been present since the early days of preservation—it is what allowed so-called slums to be cleared, while white neighborhoods in Savannah, Charleston, and other cities were protected as historic districts. . . . By denying African-Americans their built heritage, preservationists have denied them a sense of community—an act akin to destroying black enclaves via slum clearance or even similar to selling slave families to different owners. It has been part of the continued tradition of attempting to quell any sense of community in order to further subjugate blacks.” The lesson was that if we don’t preserve spaces of slavery, it becomes all too easy to whitewash its history, overlook its former presence, and perpetuate the status quo.

This mode of thinking was what made George Zimmerman perceive Martin as being in a neighborhood in which he didn’t belong. We felt strongly that the subsequent events of the night were deeply colored by long-held biases about space and each race’s position within it. Yet, the public seemed unaware of these biases. The lack of a physical presence of African-American sites and the lack of adequate interpretation of those sites that do exist continue to foster misunderstandings about the role architecture has played in creating the current system of racial inequality. Without spaces that testify to the African-American experience historically—like sugar houses on a sugar plantation—it is nearly impossible to bring these

biases to light. Even today, both blacks, who experience racism daily, and whites, who can't see its existence, are unaware of racial biases in our designed landscape.

These questions led the class to consider whether the erasure of African-American sites was actually a product of white guilt. As CC pointed out, it is hard for historic sites to present the history of slavery in general, particularly those that depend upon a positive visitor experience to generate revenue: "This class has caused me to wonder if we are preserving the right parts of plantations. Arguably, some of the most important parts are the actual dwellings of the slaves. Unfortunately, when we visit places, such as Thomas Jefferson's home, those are not a focus.<sup>15</sup> They have not even been preserved. . . . Slavery is a dark topic that people do not want to talk about. As a result, museums are challenged with how to teach about it and still produce that positive visitor experience that they strive for." But, what about the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC, we countered. People flock to that museum despite the challenging material it covered. Does the difference lie in the fact that that history is not our own? Do we have more trouble facing our own dark history than the dark history of others?

And, if we do, is it because of white guilt? For this question, the fact that the class was nearly entirely white proved an advantage. It was a topic that affected everyone

awareness of how privileged we were—and how much we had to feel guilty for. AO commented, "In the case of Pruitt-Igoe, demolition seems to be a manifestation of white guilt. If the buildings were destroyed, white people could ignore the fact that they relegated poor blacks to substandard housing. It is similar to the choice plantation owners made to demolish slave quarters. In both cases, the actions denied the black community of their history." Thus, if whites had constructed a landscape that reinforced racial stereotypes, exactly those the BLM movement was contesting, clearly the erasure of that landscape likewise served a white agenda.

Despite all these questions, the course did not end on a down note. For the final quiz, I asked students to suggest alternatives and reflect on what was in their power, as future architects, to change (Figure 6). Three answers were encouraging.

*Before taking the course I thought that architecture was a profession of equality, today, and throughout history. After taking the course, I now see that we, as the new generation, have a chance to possibly create an architecture and built environment that puts all races on a level ground and promotes growth to every type of person, rich or poor...One of the... most eye opening things was from the Black Lives Matter [video] when it said*

*that only 2% of architects are black. I never knew that architecture was so predominantly "white" and I guess the way that it's taught is to blame. But with all of the cultures all over the world it is surprising to me that the majority of "star-architects" are white men. There has to be more accomplished architects other than whites with all of the unique cultures all over the world.—IW*

*I had never considered slavery to be something that could shape the built environment so profoundly. Not only did it influence the architecture and landscape of the past, but it still continues to do so today. [Architecture] has the ability to oppress an entire race of people—from the Slave Castles of West Africa to the urban ghettos in Chicago. The built landscape has the power to affect people in such a dramatic way and as a designer, that was an important lesson for me to learn.—BW*

*This class has made me realize how huge of an impact policy can be on the success of an architectural solution. I don't believe architecture*



FIGURE 6. RWU STUDENTS AT WORK (IMAGE: CATHERINE ZIPF)

equally in the class. And, the fact that there were no black classmates to worry about offending was helpful. It also avoided singling non-white students out as having to "represent their race." Many weeks before, I had volunteered that my ancestors had owned slaves, which helped remove any fear of discussing the roots of our shared white legacy. In fact, as the course progressed, our initial spirit of "I'm not racist" evolved into a far greater

can be the only solution to a social problem, but as an architect I can strive to best understand the limitations or opportunities that policies put forth in order to work with them or seek to change them.... This class has taught me to be humble about what I build, what I destroy, and what I can learn from other people.—AF

Well said.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup><http://www.city-data.com/city/Bristol-Rhode-Island.html>.

<sup>2</sup> These numbers and the following were collected from <http://www.collegefactual.com/colleges/roger-williams-university/student-life/diversity/#> and confirmed by the RWU Intercultural Center.

<sup>3</sup> Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations," *The Atlantic*, June, 2014, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>.

<sup>4</sup> For more on Browne's project, see <http://www.tracesofthetrade.org>.

<sup>5</sup> Louis P. Nelson, "Architectures of West African Enslavement" *Buildings & Landscapes: Journal of the Vernacular Architecture Forum*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Spring 2014), pp. 88-125.

<sup>6</sup> After our semester ended, *The New Yorker* published an article exploring this idea; see Kathryn Schulz, "The Perilous Lure of the Underground Railroad," *The New Yorker*, August 22, 2016, [http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/08/22/the-perilous-lure-of-the-underground-railroad?mbid=nl\\_160815\\_Daily&CNDID=25430198&spMailID=9357916&spUserID=MTMzMTgyNjkwMTgyS0&spJobID=981226561&spReportId=OTgxMjI2NTYxS0](http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/08/22/the-perilous-lure-of-the-underground-railroad?mbid=nl_160815_Daily&CNDID=25430198&spMailID=9357916&spUserID=MTMzMTgyNjkwMTgyS0&spJobID=981226561&spReportId=OTgxMjI2NTYxS0).

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Heathcott, "In the Nature of a Clinic': The Design of Early Public Housing in St. Louis," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 70, 1 (March 2011).

<sup>8</sup> On the potential impact of the Obama Library on Chicago's south side, see <http://www.oplsouthside.org>.

<sup>9</sup> Among the many articles to address this issue are MitchMcEwen, "What Does Trayvon's Shooting Mean for Architects and Urbanists," *The Huffington Post*, March 30, 2012 ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mitch-mcewen/what-does-sanford-florida\\_b\\_1392677.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mitch-mcewen/what-does-sanford-florida_b_1392677.html)) and Dianne Harris, "Race, Space, and Trayvon Martin," *SAH Blog*, July 25, 2013 (<http://www.sah.org/publications-and-research/sah-blog/sah-blog/2013/07/25/dianne-harris-race-space-and-trayvon-martin>).

<sup>10</sup> The video of the event can be viewed at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l45\\_xHOQ9CQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l45_xHOQ9CQ).

<sup>11</sup> Massey's companion website is at <http://we-aggregate.org/piece/black-lives-matter>.

<sup>12</sup> Solomon Northup, *12 Years a Slave*, (London : Hesperus Press Limited, 2013); Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014); Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011); Beryl Satter, *Family Properties: Race, Real Estate, and the Exploitation of Black Urban America*, (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> On Pruitt-Igoe, see <http://www.pruitt-igoe.com/the-pruitt-igoe-myth/>. On *Django Unchained*, see <http://www.unchainedmovie.com>.

<sup>4</sup> I refer to students by their initials in order to protect their privacy and identity.

<sup>5</sup> CC uses Monticello as an example of the lack of preservation of slave history, but, in fact, relative to other plantations, Monticello is way ahead of the curve in interpreting and researching its slave history.



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# RADICAL TEACHER

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

## Refusing to be Complicit in our Prison Nation: Teachers Rethinking Mandated Reporting

by Erica Meiners and Charity Tolliver



NYC ACTION IN SOLIDARITY WITH FERGUSON, MO, 2014 (IMAGE: THE ALL-NITE IMAGES)

**P**icture this: It is February, snowy outside, and a chilly 25 degrees Fahrenheit. Ariel shows up to her 2nd grade class dressed in a T-shirt, a thin jacket, a skirt, no socks, and some wildly colored rain boots.

*Context #1: This is a tuition-based Waldorf or Montessori school and creativity is prized. Almost all the students are from affluent homes and live in relatively well-appointed and homogeneous neighborhoods and households. The parents who attend each school meeting overwhelmingly support attachment parenting, an approach to child-rearing that centers a child's creativity and autonomy and includes practices such as co-sleeping that support the bond between child and parent.*

*Context #2: This public school is described by the district as "at risk" and is in a neighborhood that experiences systemic disinvestment: few afterschool programs for young people, dwindling social services, high unemployment, and unmaintained parks and other public spaces. This community does possess other forms of public investment: policing and surveillance. The school staff has a high turnover, and many of the new teachers don't live in the neighborhood.*

Race and class, built into these descriptions of context and geography, make the galaxy of difference to how schools engage with Ariel and her rain boots. When affluent white children are underdressed for the weather, an initial assumption is often to attribute that difference to creativity, or freedom of expression. *That child is an innovator! She marches to her own drum!* Or, when a child reports sleeping in a family bed, it is attachment parenting, a legitimate and defensible way for a parent to raise their child. Yet, when poor and/or non-white parents engage in these practices, they are neglecting their child. *No socks in the cold weather?! That child is being abused.* Sharing a bed is *co-sleeping* and is a potentially criminalizable activity in many states.

Many of us might not think twice about reporting Ariel to child social services. *We care!* How can it be a bad thing to express concern about a child's well being? However, this small act of reporting can trigger a landslide. Child Protective Services has neither protected children, nor addressed the systemic factors that make children more vulnerable. Instead, as scholar and activist Dorothy Roberts chronicles in her blistering, *Shattered Bonds: The Color of Child Welfare* (2002), the nation's child welfare systems dismantle Black families, demonize Black mothers, and place Black children in the "pipeline" for prison.

Adults harm children, including their own. Children harm each other. While the everyday crushing violence of poverty and the toll it exacts on young people rarely makes headlines, the public, the media, and policymakers gravitate towards the few cases that involve extreme abuse and sometimes even death. The lives, and preventable deaths, of a small number of young people are unquestionably important. We must work to end

interpersonal violence, including how adults harm the children in their lives. Any death is too many, and we believe our communities are capable of building antiviolence movements that can eliminate child abuse. However, this violence should not be used to legitimate and expand a carceral state that fails to either prevent or end violence against children. And, as this essay illustrates, these systems fall woefully short in helping educators negotiate the overwhelming majority of situations that we face, such as Ariel in her rain boots, that rely on judgment or discretion.

Ensuring that *Black Lives Matter* in education requires seismic shifts including shrinking the footprint of policing in hallways and communities, excavating the ongoing practices and policies that reproduce heterogendered white supremacy in schools, and much more. However, what is too often erased in these movements is the key way the profession of teaching facilitates forms of racialized and heterogendered surveillance and criminalization. Teachers are mandated reporters who are required by law to report young people that they have reason to believe experience neglect and abuse. While on paper this charge looks neutral, as caregivers, mothers, educators and scholars we write this essay to examine the impacts of mandated reporting. To teach to ensure that all Black Lives Matter requires a refusal to be complicit in the mechanisms which contribute to the destruction of too many families and communities.

## Teacher/Mandated Reporter/Cop

Many teachers know that they are legally obligated to report. *Mandated Reporter* laws require people who have interactions with children (or other vulnerable or protected populations) to report reasonable suspicions of neglect or abuse. *By law I must report if I suspect a child is being harmed!* As mandated reporters, educational personnel report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect at essentially *the same rate* as law enforcement.

Three-fifths (62.7 percent) of all reports of alleged child abuse or neglect were made by professionals. The term "professional" means that the person who was the source of the report had contact with the alleged child maltreatment victim as part of their job. The most common professional report sources were legal and law enforcement personnel (18.1 percent), education personnel (17.7 percent), social services staff (11.0 percent). (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016, p. 2)

This legal position means that teachers aren't bystanders and it places them within the "soft" extension of the carceral, or punishing, state.

The establishment of mandated reporting laws, through one lens, is fairly transparent. In 1962, C. Henry Kempe's "The Battered-Child Syndrome" was published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. One of the first studies to name child abuse as a significant and widespread social issue, Kempe's article garnered national attention and galvanized action. Mainstream media coverage of child abuse, according to historian Barbara Nelson, skyrocketed: "between 1950 and 1980 the *Times*

published 652 articles pertaining to [child] abuse” (Nelson, 1984, p. 73). Between 1963 and 1967 all states passed some form of a child abuse reporting law (Nelson, 1984, p. 72). By 1978, after the 1974 passage of federal legislation, the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), which required states to pass “provisions or procedures for an individual to report known and suspected instances of child abuse and neglect, including a State law for mandatory reporting by individuals required to report such instances” (Brown & Gallagher, 2014, p. 45), mandated reporting legislation flourished: “forty-eight states required nurses to report, forty-nine required teachers and school officials to report, forty-nine required social workers to report, and forty required law enforcement officers to report” (Brown & Gallagher, 2014, p. 42).

Across the states, teachers’ legal roles under mandated reporter laws are relatively similar. For example, the 1975 Illinois Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act states that teachers must inform authorities if they have a “reasonable cause to believe” a child is being neglected or abused. Over the last three decades these laws have continued to shift: In Illinois, starting in 1986 all teachers must sign a form stating that they understand the repercussions if they fail to comply, and as of 2013, all mandated reporters must be retrained in the law every five years. There are few prosecutions of “failure to report.” In Illinois only a handful of teachers have been charged over the last decade; however, compared to other states, the penalties are steep. “Illinois defines a failure to report as a Class A misdemeanor with a subsequent violation carrying a class 4 felony charge. A class 4 felony in Illinois carries a minimum jail sentence of one year with a maximum of three years” (Brown & Gallagher 2014, p. 63).

Mandated reporting laws are a part of a wider movement that created our nation’s child protection services, a system, legal scholar Martin Guggenheim (2005) argues, that is in part the result of a political compromise and a failure to name and to challenge white supremacy, particularly anti-Black racism. Guggenheim argues that the early 1970s were characterized by a racialized backlash to the limited gains forged through both the 1960s era civil rights movement and the Johnson Administration’s “War on Poverty.” Social movements fought to ensure that key federal social assistance programs were at least nominally open to non-white communities, and new initiatives emerged to target poverty. Yet these programs were quickly under attack precisely because they had been extended to some non-white communities, and particularly to women (Kandaswamy, 2010). While anti-poverty funding had been directly linked to child welfare in 1967 through federal programs like the Aid to Families With Dependent Children (AFDC), by the 1970s, while children still merited support, poor adults, particularly nonwhite adults, did not. Conservatives, Guggenheim writes, effectively argued that “liberal anti-poverty programs had exacerbated the problems of the poor” (Guggenheim, 2005, p. 184).

Unwilling and unable to name and oppose the anti-Black racism at the core of the backlash against government support for social welfare programs, Democratic policymakers retreated. Policing families,

specifically mothers, was possible in order to save children, but ending poverty, supporting childcare, and promoting equality of opportunity, were not. The 1974 federal legislation, Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), separated child protection from anti-poverty programs. With CAPTA, children’s wellbeing was policed, but not supported, and all the structural factors that shape child welfare, including, for example, parent’s income, were rendered invisible. Fighting child abuse merited support from the government, but families in need did not.

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Social movements that sought to raise the visibility of sexual violence also helped to shape child protective services. In the 1960s and 1970s feminists mobilized to make interpersonal violence visible to mainstream audiences, in particular physical and sexual violence. With street mobilizations and new lines of scholarly research, feminists named the state’s complicity in erasing and minimizing (cisgendered) men’s violence against the women and children in their lives. Yet, this demand was quickly absorbed by the state. While grassroots and community organizing coalesced around experiences of harm, the state responded with increased policing and additional punishing laws. In the violence against women movement, “we won the mainstream but lost the movement,” writes sociologist Beth Richie in *Arrested Justice: Black Women, Violence, and America’s Prison Nation*(2012) – a key text chronicling the shift in the anti-violence movement from organizing to criminalization. While punitive measures, such as mandated reporting laws, may purport to address the harm some children experience, criminalization is not a deterrent, a preventative tool, or a response capable of igniting cultural shifts to reduce violence.

Mandated reporting laws are not universal. In New Zealand, where mandated reporting laws currently do not exist, a team of researchers recently investigated the potential impact of implementing mandatory reporting legislation. An article summarizing the results of this large-scale study published in a 2015 issue of *Children’s Rights* did not recommend mandated reporting as it “would deter secondary students from disclosing abuse to teachers and school counselors. Further, the introduction of mandatory reporting laws might deter students from attending school if they had been obviously physically abused” (p. 491). A publication by the Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education and the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, assessing treatment and intervention programs, *Violence in Families: Assessing*

*Prevention and Treatment Programs* suggests that it is was implemented “fact free”:

*Mandatory reporting requirements were adopted without evidence of their effectiveness; no reliable study has yet demonstrated their positive or negative effects on the health and well-being of children at risk of maltreatment, their parents and caregivers, and service providers. (Chalk & King, 1998, p. 161)*

Rather than an open dialogue about the effectiveness of mandated reporting legislation, we continue to move in the opposite direction. In Tennessee the names of those convicted and *suspected* of child abuse or neglect, even if these claims are investigated and found to be unsubstantiated, are made publicly available online by the state (Locker, 2015).

While the 2015 Supreme Court decision in *Ohio v. Clark* outlined that teachers *are not* law enforcement, and therefore a child’s admission of abuse to a teacher is admissible in a court of law (National School Board Association, 2015), mandated reporter laws aim to ensure that teachers do police work: surveillance, regulation, and punishment. Mandated reporting laws might suggest that the problem of child abuse and neglect has been solved, but in reality, these laws do little to help vulnerable families including children, do not reduce or eradicate violence toward children, and fail to create needed public dialogues about the structural contexts that facilitate harm.

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## Poverty v. Neglect & Abuse: Who decides?

No one doubts that teachers report suspected cases of neglect or abuse to law enforcement out of care and concern. *I am reporting Ariel because I am worried about her and I care!* But at least 75% of all substantiated cases are for neglect, a category difficult to define (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016, p. 3). And what is the role of poverty, which is the strongest predictor of all assessments of child abuse and neglect? The federal government’s guidelines offer this official definition of child abuse and neglect:

Any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation; or an act or

failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm. (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013, p. 2)

There are no bright lines around “imminent risk” or “serious harm.” Most significantly, poverty and assessments of neglect are intertwined. Not only can poverty be misidentified as neglect, or a failure to act – *No money to pay for food? You are neglecting your hungry child* – but poverty creates the conditions for neglect – *With no money to pay for food, your child is hungry and experiencing neglect.* In 2013, approximately 20% of all US families lived at the federally recognized poverty level, defined as a family of four living below \$23,624 a year. Black children are four times as likely as white children to live in poverty (Tavernise, 2015). Parsing out what neglect is, and its relationship to poverty, is never race neutral.

Several jurisdictions in the United States have tried to address the overlap between poverty and neglect by implementing laws that acknowledge that poverty is not neglect. According to a report by the American Bar Association, “about half of the states have acknowledged that poverty does not equal neglect, by including a poverty exemption in their statutory definition of neglect. The exemptions range from outright exemption for neglect if poverty is a factor, to an exemption for environmental factors beyond the parent’s control” (Dale, 2014). Yet, conversely, some states explicitly assert that a child’s witnessing of domestic abuse is a form of neglect (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016, p. 2. Some officials in the Kansas Department of Children and Family Services don’t think parenting by gay and lesbians is good for children (Lowry, 2015). Courts and social services agencies are also willing to entertain the question: are people with disabilities unfit to parent? (Powell, 2014). What about if a parent dates someone with a criminal record? While a small percentage of substantiated cases do involve indisputable and significant harm, neglect is often a judgment call and in communities where patriarchy and homophobia are valued and naturalized, neglect can be an elastic and convenient category.

The mandate of Child Protective Services (CPS) is to ensure the wellbeing of children. CPS is not structured to eliminate poverty or systemic racial discrimination. But if there is a strong relationship between poverty and neglect, and between non-white communities and poverty, is CPS contributing to masking the problem? Across the US tax dollars support programs that purport to “save children,” but not to support communities and families. Our minimum wage is not a living wage. There is no universal healthcare. Scant resources support access to childcare. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996 catastrophically reduced the program, implementing bans for those with drug related convictions, establishing a lifetime limit of five years to access benefits, and more. While there is no money to support families or to combat poverty, in 2012, federal, state, and local sources spent over *\$28.2 billion* on child welfare activities including foster care, adoption, CPS investigations, and case management (DeVooght, Fletcher & Cooper, 2014, p. 1).

With murky boundaries surrounding abuse and neglect, billions of dollars behind systems and institutions

designed to identify and regulate failing families, and shrinking resources available to support the poor and the working poor, allegations of child neglect and abuse particularly from educators, continues, in part because of our good intentions. Teachers want to help: We want to know that the children in our classes are safe when they return to their homes.

## Smoke and Fire, or Smoke and Mirrors?

Beyond the legal requirements, many teachers might also feel morally compelled to report. *Even if CPS doesn't find something, we all know that if there is smoke there is fire.*

But is this true? The data suggest otherwise: professionals, including teachers, are more likely to suspect and to report "child abuse and neglect" in low-income families of color. While statistics vary across the nation, the overwhelming majority of reports of child abuse and neglect are found to be unsubstantiated. Or, CPS investigates and finds no evidence of neglect or abuse. In 2014 "CPS agencies received an estimated 3.6 million referrals" and there were 702,000 victims of child abuse and neglect (victim rate was 9.4 victims per 1,000 children in the population) according to the federal government's annual report, *Child Maltreatment 2014* (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016, p. 2). The majority of substantiated cases are for neglect, not physical or sexual abuse: "Three-quarters (75.0%) of victims were neglected, 17.0 percent were physically abused, and 8.3 percent were sexually abused" (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016, p. 2). Non-white children are reported as maltreated at higher rates than white children:

Black, American Indian or Alaskan Native, and multiple-race children have higher rates of reported child maltreatment than do other children. In 2013, black children had a reported maltreatment rate of 14.6 per thousand children, American Indian and Alaskan Native children had a reported maltreatment rate of 12.5, and children of multiple races had a rate of 10.6 per thousand. This compares with 8.5 for Hispanic children, 7.9 per thousand for Pacific Islander children, 8.1 per thousand for white children, and 1.7 for Asian children. (Child Trends Data Bank, 2015a, p. 4)

The picture from this research: teachers suspect and report Black, American Indian or Alaskan Native children as maltreated at significantly higher rates than white children. The majority of all allegations of abuse and neglect are unsubstantiated. When a CPS finds a problem, it is usually neglect, not abuse. (Of course, if an investigation doesn't reveal evidence this doesn't necessarily mean that child is *not* experiencing harm. Yet, this same logic must also suggest that an official finding of neglect and abuse doesn't necessarily always indicate that child *is* being abused or neglected. We can't have it only one-way).

Recognizing neglect is murky. Or, there might very well be "smoke" but the lens and judgment of professionals most likely to report child abuse and neglect are not neutral. Parenting practices are scrutinized through a deeply classed, heterogendered, and racialized lens.

Education is still predominantly a white feminized profession, and as research *continues to illustrate* that white teachers are more likely to anticipate academic success from white students than from Black students (Gershenson, Holt & Papageorge, 2016), it is not a stretch to assume that white teachers have trouble reading parenting practices across race. Deeply entrenched feelings and experiences shape all of our ideas of what constitutes "good enough" parenting, and the stakes are high.

Consider the difference: in June of 2014 Debra Harrell couldn't afford childcare and let her nine-year-old daughter play in a nearby park by herself while she was working as a shift manager in a McDonald's in North Augusta, South Carolina (Henderson, 2014). In 2008 Lenore Skenazy left her nine-year-old son in Bloomingdales in Manhattan with a Metrocard, a map, and \$20. Her son arrived home, alone, approximately 45 minutes later (Skenazy, 2008). Debra was arrested and charged with "unlawful neglect of a child." Her daughter was initially removed from her care, Debra spent seventeen days in jail, and McDonald's only reinstated her after pressure from advocacy groups (Henderson, 2014). Lenore wrote a column about letting her son take the train home alone and was lauded as a hero of the "Free Parenting" movement (Skenazy, 2008). Debra, an African-American woman, was trying to keep her minimum wage job, while Lenore, a white Yale-educated journalist, invented the "Take Our Children to the Park & Leave Them There Day" in 2010 to promote children's autonomy.

## ***Parenting practices are scrutinized through a deeply classed, heterogendered, and racialized lens.***

Perhaps Debra's child was at risk. But what about Lenore's? What inoculates Lenore from state intervention and surveillance? And, perhaps most compellingly, how will punishing Debra help her, or her child? National media attention was required to ensure that McDonald's, where she had worked successfully for the previous five years, did not fire Debra (Henderson, 2014). With a criminal record, securing employment will be even more precarious for Debra. Without legal employment, Debra's ability to provide adequate housing, food and healthcare diminishes, all both potential further evidence of, or preconditions for, neglect or abuse. And Lenore? Her case is only visible because she wrote about it. Across the United States, at any given moment, families like Lenore's with access to wealth and privilege are able to shield their parenting practices from scrutiny.

## What is so wrong with Child Protective Services?

*It is better to be safe than sorry. It can't hurt to report Ariel, even if I just feel that something is wrong.* Reporting suspected neglect or child abuse, an action many teachers construe as helping and necessary, sets in motion

a pathway for students of color, particularly African-American youth and their families, to be swallowed up by our incarceration nation.

While laws and investigation procedures differ across states, reporting frequently triggers a bureaucratic and rigid process that is immediately beyond the teacher, and the family's, control. When an investigation is opened, every action of a family can come under surveillance. *Investigation* comes from the criminal justice world, and the links are not merely surface. A CPS investigation is not a friendly conversation with family members about what is difficult. Instead of providing a potential pathway to assistance or resources, opening an investigation often subjects that child and their family to intrusive and psychologically difficult interrogations. If CPS is alerted because of Ariel's lack of warm winter clothing, an entire household comes under scrutiny. The family must defend their behavior or environment. Poverty becomes evidence of alleged criminality, abuse, or neglect. Yet, while this investigation is punitive, the family has none of the "rights" even nominally attached to the criminal legal system: the family has no Miranda protection, no right against self-incrimination.

If the investigation does reveal abuse or neglect, engagement with CPS is far from optimal. Numerous research studies, including reports produced by state and federal governments, document that children in protective services, particularly those in foster care, have some of the worst life outcomes: least likely to graduate from high school and most likely to end up incarcerated (Child Trends, 2015). Young people who spend years in care and are bumped across multiple placements, sadly not an anomaly, experience some of the worst life outcomes and are much more likely as adults to be unemployed, homeless, and in prison (Child Trends Databank, 2015b). Seventy-two per cent of youths in the Massachusetts juvenile-justice system had been involved with the state's child welfare system (Citizens for Juvenile Justice, 2015, p. 3). Far from a ticket to college success or to economic mobility, for many young people, CPS facilitates premature death.

Young people in foster care are disproportionately non-white. A long list of blue ribbon commissions and reports, spanning decades, demonstrate that African Americans are grotesquely over-represented in foster care. Nationally, in 2014, "Black children, who made up around 14 percent of all children, accounted for 24 percent of foster children in that year" (Child Trends, 2015, p. 5). These numbers are often deeper at the state level. In California, while African Americans constituted 5.7 % of the state population in 2013, African American children were 24.3 % of the state's total foster care population (Taylor 2013, p. 33). In Michigan, a 2009 report from the Center for the Study of Social Policy found that "African American children represented just slightly less than 18 percent of all children residing in Michigan in 2003, they represented more than half of all of the children in the child protective custody" (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2009, p. 2). A key factor shaping these numbers? "The belief that African American children are better off away from their families and communities was seen in explicit statements by key

policy makers and service providers. It was also reflected in choices made by DHS" (2009, p. ii).

Many non-white young people in CPS are also queer, transgender, non-gender conforming and non-heterosexual and CPS struggles to be gender and sexuality affirming. State systems designed to protect children, foster care and group homes, often require compulsory heterosexuality and are not capable of supporting people who identify as gender non-conforming or transgender. A 2014 report from the Williams Institute found that 19% of all youth (ages 12-21) in "out of home care" or child services in Los Angeles identified as LGBTQ young people of color (Wilson, Cooper, Kastansis & Nezhad, 2014, p. 6). Queer youth are twice as likely as non-queer youth to report experiencing poor treatment in care, and they are more likely to have multiple foster placements and to live in group homes (Wilson, Cooper, Kastansis & Nezhad, 2014). An earlier study, in New York City in 2001, found that state care was disastrous for LGBT young people.

*[A] staggering 78 percent of LGBT youth were removed from or ran away from foster care placements because such placements were unwelcoming or even hostile toward their sexual orientation or gender identity. One hundred percent of LGBT youth in ACS group homes reported that they were verbally harassed while at a group home and 70 percent reported that they were victims of physical violence due to their sexual identity. (Feinstein, Greenblatt, Hass, Kohn & Rana, 2001, p. 16)*

That CPS both disproportionately regulates non-white and/or queer young people, and the experiences of these young people in CPS are often harmful, mirrors their wider treatment by the criminal justice system, and might be familiar to readers. The over-representation of youth of color and/or queer youth is endemic across all facets of our criminal legal system. For example: despite research that clearly suggests that white people use drugs at the same or higher rates compared to non-white people, white people are often the least likely to be stopped and searched by police, charged when found with drugs, and convicted. If charged and convicted, white people typically receive more lenient charges—possession, not possession with intent to sell— and serve less time in prison. What does that look like on the ground? In Chicago, according to a 2011 investigation by reporters for *The Chicago Reader*, "The ratio of black to white arrests for marijuana possession is 15 to 1" and "the ratio among those who plead or are found guilty is 40 to 1" (Dumke and Joravsky, 2011). Police are not stopping white people and searching them for marijuana. But, if marijuana is found, white people are less likely to be arrested and convicted. If convicted, they are likely to receive more lenient sentences. The state also polices LGBTQ communities, particularly those non-white, who are over-represented in juvenile justice systems (Mogul, Ritchie & Whitlock, 2011; Irvine, 2010). The predominance of transwomen stopped in public places by police and accused of solicitation while engaged in routine activities, "walking while trans," is

confirmed in *Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey* (2011) where “29% of respondents reported police harassment or disrespect” (Grant, Mottet & Tanis, 2011, p. 3). Non-heterosexual girls experienced 50 percent more police stops and had twice the risk of arrest and convictions compared to heterosexual girls who engaged in the same behavior (Himmelstein & Bruckner, 2011).

CPS is a part of the wider criminal justice system, a key anchor in our carceral state. Far from a neutral system, CPS disproportionately regulates poor families of color, and the life outcomes of the young people within CPS are dismal. Linking CPS to our criminal justice system helps us recognize these forms of care as coercive and punitive and illustrates places for resistance.

## What to do?

Mandated reporting laws function to move a wide range of workers in helping professions— social workers, youth advocates, teachers—into playing roles pivotal to maintaining our carceral state, or our wider racialized matrix of prisons, policing and punishment.

Yes, children are harmed, and most often by people who profess to love them. But the systems developed to help function to fail children, their families, and our communities. How to support children, particularly those that experience harm, and not reproduce or reinforce an unjust system?

We need bold critique, imaginative responses, and, for those of us who are working in schools, a willingness to be uncomfortable. This is a messy moment and teachers should not pretend otherwise. To teach as if all *Black Lives Matter* requires rethinking how the profession has naturalized mandated reporting laws along with other facets of policing and criminalization. Optimistically, as mandated reporting laws are relatively new inventions and are not universal, it is easy to imagine ourselves otherwise.

Below we offer suggestions based on the ways many different kinds of teachers and other youth advocates (including ourselves) are building the capacity to challenge mandated reporting laws and help children, and their communities, to flourish. This is not a list of must-dos, nor is it complete, or intended to apply to every context. While much less likely, Ariel might arrive in winter with cigarette burns on her legs, not rain boots, and we have not built systems capable of intervening in this context, yet. We offer these starting ideas as generative possibilities that can build the world we know we need, rather than a prescription for a specific situation. And teachers are already practicing, generating, and sharing, other interventions.

- *Know your working conditions and your rights!* What are your state’s mandated reporting laws and what are the penalties for not reporting?

<https://www.cqa.ct.gov/2012/rpt/2012-R-0058.htm>

- *Organize!* Work with others and groups to address the systemic and institutional issues that place families in precarious conditions. Campaigns like the *Fight for 15!* (<http://fightfor15.org/>) are mobilizing to raise the nation’s minimum wage to \$15 an hour.
- *Get educated!* Communities and groups across the United States are directly reducing our reliance on policing and building transformative justice responses to harm. See, for example, the innovative work of organizations such as Critical Resistance (<http://criticalresistance.org/>) and the Audre Lorde Project/Safe Outside the System (<http://alp.org/community/sos>). Learn about how parents are impacted by the child welfare system by reading the magazine for parents involved in CPS, *RISE Magazine* (<http://www.risemagazine.org/rise-magazine/>) and read works on the history of CPS and its impact on poor and non-white families, particularly mothers, by activists and scholars such as Martin Guggenheim and Dorothy Roberts.
- *Challenge white supremacy!* Follow article #5 from the 1968 Position Statement from the National Association of Black Social Workers, the first position statement from this organization: “We direct white social workers to involve themselves to solving the problem of white racism—America’s number one mental health problem.”
- *Support young people!* If a young person comes to class unkempt, unclean, or tired, there are ways to intervene that make a difference in a young person’s self-esteem and their ability to function. Provide the young person extra time: more time in the bathroom, quiet time in class, and extra time for homework before or after class.
- *Offer resources!* Have food snacks or extra clothes available for young people that need them. Many local grocers and thrift stores (including Whole Foods, Aldis, and Costco) often will provide some free food and clothing if teachers or school social workers write a letter or visit the store and ask. Extra clothes, coats, gloves and nonperishable food can mean the difference between supporting a child and disruption of their entire world.
- *Collectivize!* Find colleagues with similar commitments to justice and brainstorm five more things you can do to support young people and their families in your school (and communities).
- *Check your assumptions!* Talk to the child to find out what is going on. Think about what neglect is (and it is subjective). Remember that many parents are also currently experiencing poverty and trauma. Remember that young people are more likely to experience harm inside of child welfare services.

- *Be up front about your legal constraints!* Inform a child, especially a teenager, about the legal constraints of your position in case they disclose something that might require reporting.
- *No other option?* If there is no other option but to report, meet with the parent. Advise the parent or guardian to report themselves and let them know exactly what you will report. It is better for them to be ahead of it than to be surprised.

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# RADICAL TEACHER

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

## Examining Race & Racism in the University: A Class Project

by Lora E. Vess



PROTEST AGAINST POLICE BRUTALITY IN BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA, 2014 (IMAGE: ANNETTE BERNHARDT)

**B**y the end of 2014, most Americans were familiar with the Ferguson, Missouri shooting of unarmed black teen, Michael Brown, and the Grand Jury acquittal of police officer, Darren Wilson. The shooting and subsequent deaths (Eric Garner, Walter Scott, Freddie Gray and others) raised black consciousness through “Black Lives Matter” protests and a public discourse on race, privilege, and discrimination that dominated the headlines for months and seemed to finally bring sustained attention to institutional racism, at least as manifest within law enforcement. To this extent, concerned citizens of all races began having long overdue conversations on race relations and racial disconnect in U.S. society. As a sociologist, while I regularly teach on these issues, I was inspired by the movement’s energy to find new ways to engage directly with race and privilege at my university. I did this by developing a student research project for a 400-level Race and Ethnicity class in which students conducted face-to-face in-depth interviews with members of the university community. By documenting experiences, our objective was to contribute to a better understanding of racial identity and racialized experiences on the university campus. On a pedagogical level, I had two goals: 1) for students to become active, experiential learners on the subject of race in their own lives and on campus, and 2) for students to learn and apply basic qualitative research skills.

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I teach at a small public liberal arts university where 16.4% of the student population identifies as Alaska Native/American Indian, 61.5% as white, 1.9% as Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 3.6% as Asian, 1.5% as Black, with 15.1% not reporting (Collins 2015:16-18). This project was situated within campus conversations about microaggressions, power, decolonizing the university and the broader social problem of racism made increasingly visible by groups like Black Lives Matter. Using our group project as a framework, I describe the integration of a critical race analysis into the curriculum. I discuss some of the strengths and limitations of our project, offering considerations and suggestions for teaching similar projects, especially at small universities. I include student quotations gathered through final reflection papers to give voice to their experiences as well as a self-reflection on my experiences as part of this project, particularly as a white woman.

The University of Alaska Southeast’s main campus is located in Juneau, Alaska’s state capital. Juneau is a small city, with 32,000 year-round residents nestled in the temperate rainforest of the Inside Passage. Limited social movement activism, geographical isolation, and a small population of Black residents and students offer a distinct context for examining the reach of BLM. In my community, our local newspaper provides very little coverage of the

movement, or of racism more broadly.<sup>1</sup> There is a pronounced level of anti-Native racism and a legacy of historical trauma among Alaska Native populations. Similar to Jim Crow in Southern states, Alaska Natives suffered from legalized systems of segregation and discrimination. Officially, the city was named for miner and prospector Joseph Juneau, but more accurately it should be understood as Tlingit Territory, land inhabited for thousands of years by Tlingit Indians prior to the 1880s gold rush. Racially, Juneau is slightly more racially diverse than the United States as a whole (which is 77.7% white compared with 70.3% in Juneau), with 11.7% of Juneau’s population identifying as Alaska Native/American Indian, 1.5% as Black, 6.1% as Asian, 6.2% as Hispanic or Latino, and 9.4% as two or more races (2013 Census). Living off of any road system, everyone arrives by boat, plane, or birth. There is a strong arts and cultural scene, and the downtown built environment exudes western charm while the natural mountainous and marine environments are major draws for visitors and the reason many locals stay. Alaska state politics are conservative and, while political demonstrations at the Capitol sometimes occur during the legislative session, there is no sustained anti-racism campaign by grassroots social movement organizations in Juneau. The few events that are held tend to follow a model of a community-dialogue approach, which collaborates with police departments, rather than protesting them.

## Preparing for the Project

The Race and Ethnicity course is a 400-level, interactive seminar style course emphasizing critical thinking and experiential learning. Introduction to Sociology is a pre-requisite for the course. Similar courses incorporate activities designed to introduce students to the concept of race as a social construction (Obach 1999; Khanna and Harris 2009), as a mechanism for overcoming student resistance to learning about inequality (Pence and Fields 1999; Cherry et al. 2014), or to teach critical race theory in largely white classrooms and white institutions (Chaisson 2004). Still others emphasize the importance of interrogating one’s own position of power as white (Thomas 2007) and privileged (Messner 2011). Indigenous scholars (Brayboy 2005; Barnhardt and Kawagley 2005; Roberston 2015) problematize Westernized ways of knowing that perpetuate the ideology of colorblind objectivity and fail to attend to the endemic racism of colonization.

In our course, confronting white denial or white privilege as a potential barrier encountered in many race-critical courses was minimized by students’ racial diversity, the small class size, and the self-selection of white students into the course (one of whom is from a mixed-race family). Six students (all women) completed the Race and Ethnicity course, identifying as Asian, white, Filipina, Alaska Native, and Hispanic. All but one student had previously taken sociology classes with me where they learn that racial categories are historically and socially defined. Our approach was intersectional, yet the question guiding many of our readings and discussions was: how

does *race* still matter in the United States? To this end, we deconstructed the concept of whiteness and white privilege and explored the dynamics and weaknesses of a “color-blind” and “post-racial” approach to society. Readings from *Rethinking the Color Line: Readings in Race and Ethnicity* (Gallagher 2012), Peggy McIntosh’s classic “White Privilege, Male Privilege” (1995), and Bonilla-Silva’s *Racism Without Racists: Colorblind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America* (2014) provided historical and theoretical frameworks for studying race and ethnic relations. We spent four weeks with Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (2012), which was fundamental for understanding institutional racism, structural violence, and the basis for Black Lives Matter grievances and protests. Supplemental readings, including those from the Ferguson and Black Lives Matter syllabi circulating on the Web<sup>2</sup> and from social and print media, provided contemporary case studies and examples.

To transition students from a safe classroom environment to uncomfortable or potentially confrontational encounters of investigation, I incorporated two specific assignments to help them prepare for their final project. The first assignment required students to interview individuals on questions related to racial identity and racial construction. Interviewees are asked to identify the current number and categories of races globally, and to explain the basis of their distinctions. Responses range from ‘one’ to ‘infinite’ with significant muddling of ethnicity, religion, race, and nationality. With comments from interviewees like “race shouldn’t matter” or “I don’t see a need for distinctions,” students learn just how uncomfortable and confused people are talking about race and how easily they may slip into “all” lives matter rhetoric. It is an eye-opening experience that provides students with useful interviewing practice and insight into the variability of racial constructions. As one student said, “finding out that a lot of people don’t even understand the concept [of race] was pretty surprising.”

In the second exercise, students led a discussion of Robin DiAngelo’s (2011) article “White Fragility,” which she describes as “a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves” including “the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation” (2011:54). Approximately fifteen faculty, staff, and administrators attended the forum. The small size felt manageable and reduced student anxiety. Students brought questions and passages to stimulate discussion of the reading, and attendees were encouraged to do the same. During the first week of the term, students developed a list of ground rules for facilitating safe and inclusive discussions. Nevertheless, we were unprepared for the actual display of white fragility that occurred by an older, white, male university professor when he refused to acknowledge racism or privilege because he had not seen it. Reflecting DiAngelo’s description of whites’ entitlement to racial comfort, he acknowledged that some of his students had reported experience with racism to him, but he denied the legitimacy of their accounts. Instead, he

cautioned that by talking about “color,” we created stereotypes, rather than dismantled them. In our debriefing session, students were astonished that a university professor would interrupt them, talk over them, and freely demonstrate such problematic racial attitudes and white arrogance. In fact, one student suspected he had been a “plant” until she realized that I was also flustered. From my perspective what was most remarkable was not the display of white fragility and denial, but the well-articulated student challenge to his “defensiveness and righteous indignation” through his embodiment of the very characteristics of privilege that DiAngelo described.

***In our debriefing session, students were astonished that a university professor would interrupt them, talk over them, and freely demonstrate such problematic racial attitudes and white arrogance.***

## Conducting Qualitative Student Research in a Classroom Setting

Students in the social science and liberal arts programs at the University of Southeast Alaska have limited instruction in qualitative research, given the small size and quantitative methodological strengths of our faculty. As the only on-site sociologist, and one of only a few qualitative researchers, my goal is to increase student familiarity and experience in a range of qualitative methodological traditions. To this end, my courses incorporate projects involving in-depth interviewing and participant observation, skills that are useful in a variety of professions and help students learn to notice and listen for different experiences. Generally these are individual projects, rather than collective efforts. Thus, the students and I entered into this group-based project as novices together.

The first step in the project required students to complete human subjects training, with certificates indicating they passed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative program. Our research process deviated from a standard format in that we did not conduct a literature review; instead we relied on our classroom readings and lectures to become familiar with relevant material. We were motivated by a desire to better understand racial dynamics and interactions, rather than to add to the sociological literature per se. While I would not endorse skipping this step for most other course projects, it was an important time saver. Students preferred a community-based project that would allow them to investigate police interactions, incarceration, and housing discrimination, but the scope was too large and I advocated a campus-based project instead. Next, students developed a list of possible interview questions, partly based off of their first assignment. We attempted to narrow this list (students initially submitted over 50 questions) during class time, by prioritizing the most salient questions and rewriting those with ambiguous intent. Nevertheless,

we ran out of time and I spent a long weekend consolidating the questions, taking significant care not to omit questions or change the nature of the students' ideas. I also took responsibility for writing and submitting our institutional review board application. Students were required to read and provide feedback to the IRB application, but very few changes were recommended. This limited student role was not ideal, but necessary, if I did not want to divert too much student time (inside or outside the classroom) away from the substantive course material. Finally, having developed a clear, if not lengthy, interview guide, we dedicated a class period to practice interviews with subsequent revision based on student input. It was important that students felt invested in the project with a degree of ownership over the research design. At times I may have been autocratic in decision-making, but in general this was to ensure strong ethical standards, coordination, and efficiency. When I made decisions without students, I did my best to explain my decisions and obtain their buy-in.

Considerable classroom time was dedicated to the ethical dimensions of interviewing members of such a small campus community and the importance of protecting identities. Interviewees understood participation was voluntary and provided informed consent, yet the class agreed that potential risks to faculty, staff, and students who shared experiences and observations of racism were high and took numerous steps to prevent identification. We were adamant that no identifying characteristics would be revealed during our final presentation. Names were never shared in the classroom setting. We used pseudonyms (selected by the interviewee), neutral pronouns such as "they" rather than "he" or "she" in our class discussions and presentation, and never linked identifiable information such as position and race in public discussion. Only individual student interviewers and I had access to interview notes and consent forms. Our demographic data collection was limited to racial identification, age range, department (not major, since we were interviewing both students and staff), and gender identity. Regardless of our efforts, it was clear that some interviewees remained apprehensive about disclosing too much, as indicated by comments like, "I can't say that" or "That will expose my identity." Students did not audio-record the interviews, a possible validity concern, but this decision strengthened identity protection and saved time.

The interviews were used to expand student methodological capabilities and promote active learning. In-depth interviews give voice to experiences and are especially useful for small populations. The informal interviews and the "White Fragility" forum provided students with key basic interviewing skills and insight into challenges of race-centric discussions. Students learned recruitment strategies, ethical guidelines, probing techniques, and questionnaire construction, and gained formal research presentation experience. Applying course concepts and student research interests, we developed four general categories of inquiry: 1) understandings of race, 2) racialized experiences on campus, 3) race-related observations on campus, and 4) recommendations for improving race relations and diversity on campus.

Open-ended questions helped us avoid making presumptions about interviewee experiences and also avoid construction of multiple questionnaire designs that focused on one race over another (i.e. questions about white privilege). We minimized sociological terminology (colorblindness, invisibility, microaggressions) in our interviews, instead using words we felt had commonly understood definitions (stereotyping, diversity, racism), even if sociologists may define those terms in particular ways distinct from lay use. This allowed students to see first-hand that although most everyone presumes to know what "race" is, most cannot comfortably or confidently define it. The prevalence of this disjuncture was actually one of the major findings of the study. However, by leaving interpretation of key terms open, we may have threatened validity since some interviewees did not answer questions as we intended (e.g., believing "reverse racism" is a problem).

In their reflection papers, students described a combination of interviewing anxiety and excitement, with nervousness diminishing after each completed interview. Students were required to conduct a minimum of five interviews, with one student conducting twelve because, "after interviewing five people I realized I was starting to see patterns...and I wanted to know more." Given deeply entrenched conceptions of race, we did not attempt to "correct" interviewees' misconceptions of racial construction. Students learned to play the role of the neutral interviewer and minimize bias, both in regards to respondents seeking approval and by not interjecting. This was challenging for students, with several stating that it was difficult "to not jump in and point out racist dialogue, racially coded language, and blatantly racist comments." In one student's words,

*It was hard to sit there in situations when you had participants choking up telling stories and you just had to sit there showing little emotion, or you had participants who were pissed off about a race receiving benefits and then it was difficult to tell them not to shove it.*

## Discussion of Research Experience

On key experiential learning measures—connecting sociological concepts to reality, validating student experiences, and educating others—the project was a success. As one student described,

*The highlight of this project was conducting the actual interviews and actually seeing people think about their experiences with race on campus. Several of the people I interviewed had to stop and think about it for a while and I felt like because they were doing that, our class was actually making an impact on getting a dialogue started on about this issue. Hearing their answers reinforced sociological concepts...*

As others (Wright 2000; Pedersen 2011; Strangfeld 2013) have noted, active student-led learning creates a

link between knowledge and practice. On the personal level,

*Listening to other people's stories made me feel better about my own. I'm sure it was a relief for some of our interviewees to get those stories off their chests and I'm glad we gave them the chance to.*

Several students referenced the emotional aspects of the project with one student observing, "The conflict and/or personal experiences heated the conversations, which is needed before progress can be addressed."

By conducting research within an institution familiar to students, the interviews had the combined effect of personalizing experiences of privilege in a known setting and exposing institutionalized structures of privilege and denial, which are frequently hidden from view as students go about their daily lives on campus. As students learned, few people talk about race or racial identity, but given the opportunity, both the interviewee and interviewer often experienced transformative moments. For example,

*I found it most interesting that people I consider friends had this moment of realizing that all the jokes people make toward them about their race and/or ethnicity really aren't funny. I had a friend tell me that in actuality it "pisses me off." I've never seen that side of him and honestly I was happy to.*

Another student stated:

*I thought it was revealing that white interviewees picked up on examples of racism/racially coded language among friends and others, but not in themselves. In one case, a white interviewee denounced seeing examples of racism/discrimination on campus, yet laughed and told a racist joke about Alaska Natives and asked that I keep it off record.*

Gaining insight into university organization and functioning lifted a veil of colorblindness and supposed racial equity. Black scholars have advanced concerns that recruitment failures and challenges to promotion have kept faculty of color underrepresented in higher education. Our findings clearly indicated student concern about the lack of racial diversity among faculty. As one student stated,

*I had one interviewee, who was a person of color, that (sic) said when it comes to faculty meetings conducted specifically for addressing diversity issues, there were still people who showed up questioning the need for diversity, when it is blatantly obvious that there is a lack of it within faculty and staff members.<sup>3</sup>*

Another student observed,

*One of the people I was interviewing said something along the lines of, "to white people nothing is about race; to people of color, everything is about race," and I think that especially after seeing all the data, this is somewhat true on our campus. People belonging to minority groups do have the burden of being a "person of color," whether it's being a target of micro-aggressions or being singled-out on campus.*

### ***Integration of Black Lives Matters struggles into the class provided a model of activism and inclusivity to refer to, fostering understandings of the power of transformative dialogue and action.***

Black Lives Matter has helped revive student anti-racism activism on university campuses. While it was not my goal to "create" activists per se, I did want students to feel empowered as they articulated forms of racial marginalization on campus. Through the research experience, students were able to connect race scholarship with social justice. Integration of Black Lives Matters struggles into the class provided a model of activism and inclusivity to refer to, fostering understandings of the power of transformative dialogue and action. One of our main objectives was to contribute to the campus dialogue on race, particularly through our end of the term presentation attended by fellow students, faculty, staff, and several administrators. Students presented the key findings of their project, using PowerPoint slides for quantitative data, while reading selected quotes from interviews. Even though students felt apprehensive about the presentation and were a bit self-critical, the opportunity to share these findings was meaningful to both the students and the campus community. This project provides a baseline of data from which to act, including interviewee recommendations ranging from the general "more transparency" and "curricular changes" to the specific, "hold trainings during new student orientation" and "identify who to report a racially-discriminatory incident to" (the majority of our respondents had no idea whom to report to). Our analysis also revealed contradictory perceptions regarding the on-campus Native community, with some interviewees stressing that the university needs to do more with recruitment and retention, and several mixed raced respondents expressing feelings of exclusion from the Native community.

### **Post-Project Reflection**

During my on-campus job interview, a (future) colleague drove me through our snowy campus, situated on Auke Lake, or Áak'w in Tlingit, with a view of Mendenhall Glacier and said, "Welcome to our summer camp." While she was referring to the wooden structures, the size of the university, and the physical beauty, that introduction also implied a sense of intimacy. At the

University of Southeast Alaska (UAS), students call you by your first name and, as in other small towns, they are your servers in restaurants and your companions on the bus. The social distancing that occurs in other settings isn't possible at UAS and in Juneau. Nevertheless, my whiteness and status as a professor affords me a privilege of legitimacy and power I can draw on when I wish to. I laughed with my students at DiAngelo's description of the discomfort white people experience when people of color join together, even briefly, to the exclusion of whites in an anti-racism exercise. Upon later reflection, I wondered, "was I playing the role of the liberal progressive?" or, as Messner (2011) reflects, reinforcing my own privilege by appearing "so open-minded?" I am aware, as Thomas (2007) describes, that "being cool is not enough" and that so long as there is "the ever-present reality of racial oppression," the relationship between the white teacher and non-white students will be problematic (p. 154). Cognizant of the normativity and invisibility of whiteness and the status my race affords me, I wanted to "name it" and on the first day I introduced myself to the students as a white person. I wondered about their responses; a sort of "d'uh" or "white professors don't do that," but this was an easy and even privileged action for me. I did not fear any challenges to my intellectual authority and legitimacy on that first day nor did I experience them at any point throughout the term (see Harlow 2003). Nevertheless, I am not a race scholar; race and ethnic relations was not one of my graduate areas of study, and while my position as the lone on-campus sociologist requires that I teach a range of new courses, teaching this particular class demands a greater sense of accountability and attention to systems of dominance and oppression that benefit me.

***Upon later reflection, I wondered, "was I playing the role of the liberal progressive?" or, as Messner (2011) reflects, reinforcing my own privilege by appearing "so open-minded?"***

I am also a feminist and come from a lower socio-economic status. At times I struggle with the imposter syndrome and engage in emotion work in ways that I doubt most of my male peers do. Yet, I have tried to be conscious of my privilege as a white, heterosexual, (yet untenured) university professor. In this class, I did not pretend to be "objective" about social inequalities and I imagine that it worked to my advantage to be female in a class of all women. Nevertheless, my race dominates among faculty, including all of us in social science. My race shapes my pedagogy, reinforcing the dominant white culture in ways I don't always see or acknowledge (see Hytten and Adkins 2001). This project received nothing but positive feedback from colleagues. I do not know how this response may have differed had I been a woman of color. When interviewees were asked, "Who do you think is doing the most to address these issues?" the general response was that it is a small group of people on campus. For years, the few Native professors and staff have critiqued

the western colonial model of the university and structural institutionalized limitations to racial diversity and retention. Those of us who wish to serve as allies need to continue doing "self work" and move beyond acknowledging our privileges to taking responsibility for institutional change. Even though our project was university-centered, we could have more strongly linked the structural racism at our institution with systematic problems found in higher education, particularly those noted by Black Lives Matter activists within academia, including educational attainment levels, curriculum changes, and cost constraints of higher education.

Reflecting upon implementation of the project, the students and I shared many of the same practical concerns. Not surprisingly, time limitations and time management are among the primary challenges for a project like this. Realistically, unless the project is conducted in a methods course, instructors must be prepared to take on a substantial part of the work. Thus, there was a trade-off between keeping the project on track and on schedule, and making sure the student research experience was solid. From the beginning of the term I told students I wanted this to be a collaborative project. Success on this front is uncertain; students reported that while the workload was evenly distributed, this was less of a "group project, but . . . a collaboration of several individual projects," with at least one student valuing this approach because it made "us hold our own weight as students and [held] us accountable." Students felt guidance was strong, but expressed preference for more time for interviews, discussion of data, and presentation preparation. Unfortunately, the student role in data analysis and compilation was limited. In hindsight, I should have assigned readings (e.g. Healey-Etten and Sharp 2010) to guide our class discussions on conducting interviews and developing the interview guide. I also underestimated student nervousness in speaking to an audience. While I felt students were prepared for the formal presentation, I now recognize I should have scheduled more practice time. A final consideration is the importance of trust and respect in the classroom; on the whole, this project would not have succeeded without a strong level of trust and accountability among students and between the students and me.

## Conclusion: How Does Race Still Matter?

By the end of the term, students in the Race and Ethnicity class had not only learned that race still matters, but through their class project they had learned *how* it still matters to members of their campus community. This was especially relevant for understanding Native Alaskan identity and racism towards Alaska Natives on campus. Many Alaska Native interviewees expressed Native pride, with one interviewee stating, "I'm privileged to be indigenous to this place." On the flipside, another Native interviewee stated, "It [lack of racial diversity on campus] affects me because it has often made me feel like a lone voice shrieking in the wilderness. It has frustrated me, alienated me, angered me," with another reporting, "I have been the object of micro-aggressions many times." Non-

Native interviewees were found to be both supportive and resentful towards Native Alaskans on campus. A white interviewee describing stigma stated, "academically, professors see me differently because I am white. If I was Native, they wouldn't think I was as motivated," but more interviewees reported experiences or observations of "reverse racism" and at least one person thought only certain groups were allowed to practice their traditions on campus and found this "unfair."

While this project was inspired by Black Lives Matter, the small proportion of African Americans on campus meant that our findings were not directly related to the primary grievances expressed by the movement such as state sanctioned violence against black bodies, black liberation, and investment in black communities. However, several self-identified mixed race and black men reported their unease with a new police substation on campus. One respondent stated, "I think that to get a campus cop now is really damn disrespectful . . . I know when me and my roommate were getting signatures to try to do something about the cop, only people who would sign it was brown kids. Other people were like, this is a good idea; it makes me feel safe." Rarely is an officer on campus, yet this comment suggests that the movement may be influencing students who feel targeted by policing to call these things out. Some respondents remarked on the intertwined sexism and homophobia they had experienced or observed, unintentionally reflecting the queer feminism at the heart of the movement. One student's comments highlighted the importance of black love at the center of Alicia Garza's Facebook post credited with coining "Black Lives Matter"; "It [blackness] gets pushed under the rug. Like you should be embarrassed or should hide it, pretend to be a higher race, or whatever . . . My culture has been erased and forgotten."

All of the students indicated interest in presenting the findings again, with several wanting to expand the scope of the project to include gender and sexual orientation. Now proficient in recognizing colorblind ideology, racially-coded language, and microaggressions, students reported a willingness to step in and not steer clear of uncomfortable conversations with friends, family, and classmates as they admitted they might have done in the past. Descriptions of marginalization by some interviewees of color affirmed the lessons of Black Lives Matter as discussed in class. Beyond the personal level, students felt this project contributed to an important dialogue on campus, serving as a stepping-stone for changes. As one student expressed, "What we have done or at least started here on campus was very important and meaningful. I hope that other students feel the same way."

This project is not unique in fostering student understanding of course content; however, by examining their own university, students moved beyond abstract learning to develop a complex and structural understanding of racial identity, privilege, and discrimination. As my students reported, when asked how often the topic of race comes up in conversation, some interviewees reported talking about it more than they had in the past, with specific references to Ferguson and Trayvon Martin. However, even as mass media increases coverage of police

shootings of black men (McLaughlin 2015), and conversations about racial inequality and injustices continue at the national level, post-racial discourse dominates. As educators, we always have the responsibility to teach and engage our students with difficult topics. The current national dialogue on racial inequality provides an opportunity to introduce and incorporate topical and powerful examples into our courses and units on race and ethnicity. It is hoped that this article provides some ideas and considerations for building student qualitative research skills as they learn to engage with and analyze their racialized and sometimes privileged social worlds.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Using "Black Lives Matter" as a search term yielded one result (an article on a local non-violence rally) in the local newspaper for 2014. Using search terms: #BlackLivesMatter, black lives, Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Michael Brown, police violence, anti-racism did not alter the results. Changing the search keyword to "racism" yielded more results but none specific to the Black Lives Matter movement.

<sup>2</sup>Some of the syllabi I used have been updated, but I refer to the reader to:  
<http://www.blacklivesmattersyllabus.com>;  
<https://sociologistsforjustice.org/ferguson-syllabus/>;  
<http://www.tolerance.org/racism-and-police-violence>;  
[http://www.academia.edu/12277372/BlackLivesMatter\\_Syllabus](http://www.academia.edu/12277372/BlackLivesMatter_Syllabus).

<sup>3</sup>There were only two Alaska Native professors on the Juneau campus during this project (there are now three). There are no African American faculty.



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# RADICAL TEACHER

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

Poetry

**If the Tiger Sleeps**

**All I Desire**

by Peter Neil Carroll



PETER NEIL CARROLL  
PHOTO COURTESY OF WINNING WRITERS

## If the Tiger Sleeps

My first students came on buses and subways, Chicago's maw spilling out second-generation ethnics, first in their families in college: Greeks, Italians, Ukrainians, Jews from the north side, south side Czechs and Blacks, an Assyrian who often drove me home in a beaten Triumph. Months after the big riots of the Sixties, the kids were hip, energetic, troublesome, some serving time in jail on weekends. One beardless boy pursued by the FBI for draft protest got nailed at graveside prayers when his mother died. One young lady said her father hated short skirts and asked my opinion of her thighs. A recent bride failed to deliver a paper because the groom had a nervous breakdown, begged to pass the course, and still owes me ten pages on Jonathan Edwards. We were in this mess together—Vietnam, civil rights, women's liberation—an era of stress. I was the rookie with a PhD.

*Groovy*, said the Assyrian when I spoke of *enthusiasm*—the god within, separating self-claimed Puritan saints

from sinners who abounded. He knew a thing or two about speed, pot, acid, ecstasy that accompanies spiritual birth. Once I began class with questions no one answered. Sensing torpor I assumed they hadn't prepared, scolded them, stalked from the room. But the Assyrian insisted it was my fault. You're the ringmaster. If the tiger sleeps it's your job to wake him up.

In every classroom, I see his face imploring me to teach. I see too the graduating senior cramped in her one-arm desk writing the final exam, pinned to her blouse a red-white-&-blue RFK button as her candidate lay dying in Los Angeles. We lived for hope. I taught my heart out for that class, everyone passed, even me. I hope that bride finishes her paper on Edwards soon. I might not last much longer. I just found the Assyrian's obituary, surprised me how old he'd become.

## All I Desire

My students come with their problems:  
Dyslexic, epileptic, the gaunt mother  
without hair, the swimmer who crashed  
her skull at the bottom of the pool, can't  
remember when the papers are due.

I've heard them all: every apology,  
alibi, excuse, stranger-than-life story,  
every reason not to be present, pleas  
for exemption, extension, amnesty.

All I desire is truth. Their lives are hard  
enough. I love them in their frailties, efforts  
to be whole, normal as the homecoming queen  
with a D average who crossed her tan legs  
and asked, "Professor, how can I get an A?"

I will do anything to ensure their spirits stay  
unbroken. Sometimes they return, ecstatic,  
grateful, humble. Sometimes a student's obituary  
reminds me that grades are not important.



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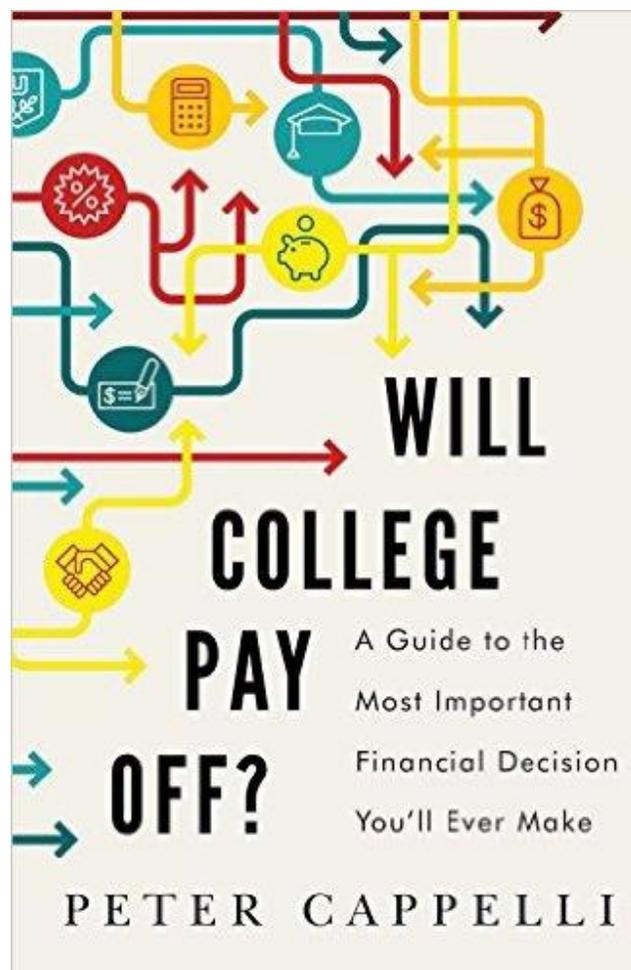
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# RADICAL TEACHER

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

Review:  
Will College Pay Off?: A Guide to the Most Important  
Financial Decision You'll Ever Make  
by Peter Cappelli

Reviewed by Nicole Hala



## **Will College Pay Off?: A Guide to the Most Important Financial Decision You'll Ever Make (PublicAffairs, 2015) by Peter Cappelli**

**Reviewed by Nicole Hala**

It seems almost un-American to question the value of a college degree. Liberals and conservatives alike tout postsecondary education as a cure for poverty, a weapon against inequality, and the primary means of upward mobility in society today. For decades, we have been hearing about the “wage gap” between college and high school graduates, the sizeable income “premium” that accrues to those with college degrees. Since the start of the Great Recession, we have seen an “employment gap,” with less educated workers suffering higher rates of unemployment, for longer periods. According to the latest headlines, the divergence is greater among Millennials than previous generations, suggesting that the college payoff is only getting bigger.

Propelled by hope of rising or by fear of falling, more than 70 percent of U.S. high school graduates go on to college (6). The United States leads the world in college enrollment, which totals 21 million, a number that has risen by 50 percent since the mid-1990s (176). While enrollments have surged, public funding for higher education has not kept pace, pushing a greater share of the costs onto students and their families, who pay six times as much as their peers in other developed countries (115). Over the past 30 years, the real cost of tuition and fees has increased more than virtually all other prices: 250 percent at private colleges and a stunning 330 percent at underfunded public institutions (118-9), which enroll about 80 percent of students (55). Over the same period, incomes have stagnated. The enrollment surge since the mid-1990s is disproportionately from families who are not wealthy, whose real incomes have been falling, and whose savings are meager (176). Yet new financing options have enabled cash-strapped families to borrow against their homes and retirement savings in order to send their kids to college. How could they refuse, when the payoff seems like such a sure thing?

Concerned by the irrational exuberance about the college payoff, Wharton management professor Peter Cappelli urges families to exercise due diligence before making an investment that can lead to financial ruin. An expert in employment trends, the workforce, and education, Cappelli has spent years studying the school-to-work transition. His latest book, *Will College Pay Off?: A Guide to the Most Important Financial Decision You'll Ever Make* (2015), sheds light on the factors that determine whether a particular program will pay off, separating college myths from college realities. While much of the national discussion fixates on rewards, this clear, comprehensible guide is dedicated to helping students and

families understand and manage the considerable risks of the college investment.

The wage gap or “college premium”—i.e., the additional average income a college graduate earns relative to a high school graduate—is often presented as conclusive evidence of the college payoff. Cappelli, however, calls attention to the tremendous variation in graduates’ earnings across schools and across fields. Using the average earnings of all graduates to decide whether to go to college, he says, “would be like using the average temperature of the earth . . . to decide whether to wear a coat today” (103).

***Since the Great Recession, new college graduates have struggled to find gainful employment on secure career paths. “Skills mismatch” is the common explanation, which assigns blame to students and colleges, implying that employment security is simply a matter of getting the right degree.***

The most interesting point about the wage gap, according to Cappelli, is how much it has changed over time. The college premium, which today is likened to an economic law, was virtually nonexistent in the early 1960s and again in the late 1970s, when high school dropouts, high school grads and college grads had similar weekly earnings (90). That changed after the 1981 recession, which started the collapse of real wages for everyone with less than a four-year degree. Pay continued to fall through the early 1990s, thanks to deunionization, especially in the manufacturing sector, and low-wage competition from China. Wages for college graduates recovered, but they did not exactly take off. Cappelli points out that the improved college premium is mainly the result of the *decline in earnings* for non-grads: “Suddenly it paid to have a college degree because the wages if you didn’t have one were awful” (90). (Yet, even today, this is not a universal rule; in China and Italy, for example, there is no college premium, as college grads have a harder time finding jobs than do high school grads (95).)

Since the Great Recession, new college graduates have struggled to find gainful employment on secure career paths. “Skills mismatch” is the common explanation, which assigns blame to students and colleges, implying that employment security is simply a matter of getting the right degree. In response, colleges—particularly, for-profit colleges—have shifted toward programs promising skills training that leads to jobs at graduation. Disputing claims of skills shortage, Cappelli argues that such narrow vocational degrees are risky investments in an increasingly unpredictable job market, especially when they involve loans, as for-profit degrees nearly always do. Locking students into occupations years before they graduate, these narrowly focused degrees make it difficult to do anything else should graduates fail to

find jobs in their fields. Graduates of for-profit schools—where the graduation rate is only 22 percent—are further burdened by outsized debt; for-profits enroll ten percent of all students but account for 40 percent of defaults (Larson 2016). Cappelli's point is not that there is a big financial payoff to a liberal arts degree, but that "there is no guarantee of a payoff from very practical, work-based degrees either, yet that is all those degrees promise." Liberal arts offer something else, he says: "to enrich your life and provide lessons that extend beyond any individual job" (27).

So will college pay off? "Not necessarily," Cappelli concludes. "It depends on who you are and where you go." The return from many programs—as much as one in four, he estimates—is actually *negative*. Yet, even here, Cappelli refrains from any kind of structural analysis, instead adding that "Much of the problem may have to do with the attributes of the students attending those schools" (179-180). Structural inequities (e.g., class and race) are conceptualized strictly as individual attributes. The "limits of schooling" are similarly emphasized with respect to the mythic college premium, which may have less to do with what happens in college than with preexisting advantages that got college graduates admitted in the first place, according to Cappelli: "Some of those advantages have to do with abilities, some with family background and resources that would have allowed them to do better in life even if they did not go to college" (179). In fact, the United States ranks nearly last among industrial countries in upward mobility, as measured by the percentage of college students whose parents did not attend college, a staggering statistic the book mentions in passing (61).

***For most members of disadvantaged communities, however, investing in college will not pay off and may leave them worse off—deeply in debt, with no degree to show for it.***

The book cites numerous similar studies, all the latest data, international and longitudinal, conjuring up—for readers attuned to issues of educational equity, at least—a system of higher education that is highly stratified and tends to reinforce rather than reduce inequality. For Cappelli's intended readers, however, the data is meant to serve a more narrow, specific purpose: to guide investment. As a response to the college funding crisis, financial literacy education can empower individual consumers, but may also serve to justify further austerity and the ongoing neoliberalization of higher education (Arthur 2012).

"College graduates" are more diverse than ever, and so is the "college experience," rendering "average" outcomes largely meaningless. Long focused on the differences *between* college grads and non-grads, researchers have turned their attention to differences *within* the college-educated group, finding significant and systematic variation in outcomes—by class background,

family income, race/ethnicity, etc. (Hershbein 2016; Emmons & Noeth 2015; Mettler 2014; Glass & Nygreen 2011). Specifying the critical trends shaping the college payoff, Cappelli helps explain why. Stagnating incomes, public funding cutbacks, escalating college costs, rising levels of student loan debt, declining graduation rates, lengthening time-to-degree, shifts in the structure of financial aid (favoring merit over need and loans over grants) and other related trends have had disproportionately negative effects on low-income, minority, and first-generation college students.

Thus, the groups that most need a payoff from college can expect the least benefit—on average, that is. Yes, some disadvantaged students can beat the odds, and guidebooks like this can help them do so. For most members of disadvantaged communities, however, investing in college will *not* pay off and may leave them worse off—deeply in debt, with no degree to show for it. For decades, we have relied on education to solve the problems of poverty, economic inequality, and racial injustice, an indirect approach meant to work by equalizing opportunity. But education, as the apparent need for Cappelli's guidebook makes clear, is not equalizing opportunity. To improve the lives of disadvantaged individuals and communities requires investing in programs and policies that confront structural inequities head-on.

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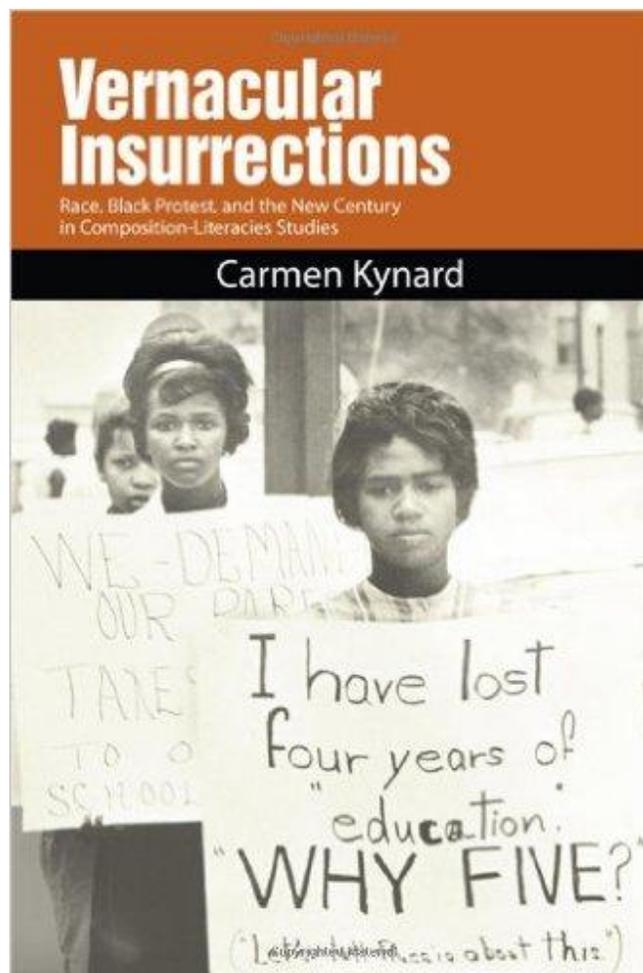
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# RADICAL TEACHER

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

Review:  
Vernacular Insurrections: Race, Black Protest, and the  
New Century in Composition-Literacies Studies  
by Carmen Kynard

Reviewed by Ted Hall



**Vernacular Insurrections: Race, Black Protest, and the New Century in Composition-Literacies Studies (State University of New York Press, 2013) by Carmen Kynard**

**Reviewed by Ted Hall**

*Vernacular Insurrections: Race, Black Protest, and the New Century in Composition-Literacies Studies* is a masterful study of race, literacy, rhetoric, and composition that deserves the widest readership. Building on four decades of scholarship that reexamines the student-led, Black Protest phase of the 1960s movements, *Vernacular Insurrections* underscores the critical role of Black student organizations and the Black Arts Movement in the development of African American literacies, rhetorics, and resistance.

***A century ago, W.E.B. Du Bois redefined the social sciences as a discipline. Du Bois's scholarship challenged the idea that Black people are a problem people. Instead, his analysis positioned Black people as facing systemic problems as a result of America's color line.***

*Vernacular Insurrections* has benefited from a growing body of scholarship on African American literacies and rhetorics. In many aspects, previous and existing scholarship on African American rhetorics has neglected to situate composition and literacies studies historically within larger geopolitical protests movements. Many contemporary literacy and composition scholars have been preoccupied with establishing the linguistic legitimacy of African American Vernacular English (AAVE), while providing scant attention to the identity politics surrounding its emergence as a field. However, *Vernacular Insurrections* provides a sociopolitical and historical context for scholars to understand the formation of composition and rhetorics for African Americans within the larger struggle of resistance and Black liberation.

Dr. Kynard begins *Vernacular Insurrections* with an important critique of American universities and K-12 schools, which "through their scholarship and instructional designs, have often upheld a racial status quo alongside a rhetoric of dismantling it. These [are] not the workings of contradictory and confused individuals merely locked within their space and time. My grandmother understood such contradictions . . . as 'runnin' with the rabbits and 'huntin' with the dogs,'" Kynard writes. Dr. Kynard invokes her grandmother's epistemological framework throughout the text to "achieve an alternative awareness, ideological approach, and set of cultural practices" (19). Her

grandmother's quote signifies an important distinction of *Vernacular Insurrections* within literacy and composition studies.

*Vernacular Insurrections* is critical of interventionist-based pedagogical models that position urban students as in need of "prescriptive, skills-based instruction" (4) for the singular purpose of acquiring literacy for integration. Composition and literacy studies have a long history of using deficit models that render invisible the Black and Latina rhetorics and literacies. *Vernacular Insurrections*, instead, offers a historical analysis that makes explicit the importance of pedagogical strategies and theoretical constructs that imagine urban students as living heirs to dynamically linked rhetorics and literacies. Therefore, composition and literacy studies are faced with the disciplinary imperative to become an inclusive "design" space for textual production that acknowledges the epistemic identities that urban students bring to classrooms to address the color line. Thus, *Vernacular Insurrections* highlights the racial politics and subjective ideologies framing composition and literacy studies, and offers a critical lens to reinterpret these politics through a Black Freedom Movement lens.

A century ago, W.E.B. Du Bois redefined the social sciences as a discipline. Du Bois's scholarship challenged the idea that Black people are a problem people. Instead, his analysis positioned Black people as facing systemic problems as a result of America's color line. Similarly, the early Chicano Studies and Indigenous and Black programs at universities like Cornell and San Francisco State were created in response to the whitewashing of race within universities and the traditional disciplines. These programs served as intellectual counter-cultural spaces for knowledge production based on the epistemic identities of the participants in grassroots movements that produced them. In fact, many progressive public intellectuals of color outside of the academy viewed university-based trained scholars as co-conspirators in knowledge production that advanced the racial domination of Brown and Black people globally.

More recently, Robin Kelley and others have referred to the Black Radical Imagination as a part of the intellectual legacy that emerged from the 1960s critical ethnic studies programs. Similar to that of Du Bois, scholarship by philosophers Sylvia Wynter and Lewis Gordon makes explicit the decadence of the western canon and its disciplinary obsolescence within higher education. Similarly, Fanon's scholarship "ruptured the present

knowledge system that all academic disciplines serve to maintain, by calling into question our present culture's purely biological definition of what it is to be, and therefore of what it is like to be, human" (Wynter 2001: 31). This radical rupture that the Black Radical Imagination caused creates the space; *Vernacular Insurrections* enters that space, which moves the disciplines out of their present Western/European/Masculinized conception of composition and rhetoric, beyond the Self and Other dialectic, toward an epistemic decolonized conception that needs no Other to understand Self.

***Vernacular Insurrections invites the voices of Black and Latino youth through interludes before each chapter. From a methodological perspective, the interludes are critical to the book's success.***

Dr. Kynard, in challenging disciplinary knowledge, critically interrogates the White male-centric master narratives within literacy and composition studies that position European/Western knowledge production as universal and ethnic-based knowledge production as particularity. The book makes clear the intersections of race, gender, and social class in the texts students create, and the ways that composition teachers analyze those texts. It's all about the way power is asymmetrically distributed in classrooms based upon a narrow set of established normative canons and rhetorics. Scholars and practitioners, then, in the fields of literacy, composition, and rhetorics decide on seminal texts "marked as progressive," which often are read uncritically in graduate schools. Hence, "huntin with the rabbits and runnin with the dogs."

*Vernacular Insurrections* invites the voices of Black and Latino youth through interludes before each chapter. From a methodological perspective, the interludes are critical to the book's success. First, the student interludes are qualitatively rich data that provide insights into their gendered and racial rhetorics as they relate to popular culture. Second, the interludes position students as writers connected to various African Diaspora speech communities beyond the local. Finally, perhaps most importantly, unlike many Marxist composition and literacy scholars, who link revolutionary change to the middle class, Black and Latino students are positioned as the most critical agents in articulating a rhetoric of revolution and transforming their conditions inside the classroom.

*Vernacular Insurrections* makes important contributions toward feminist scholarship in that Dr. Kynard utilizes theory and builds theory from a critical feminist standpoint. Critical feminist perspectives continue to face forms of resistance within the disciplines, with the exception of gender studies. Perhaps an equally important

radical goal of *Vernacular Insurrections* is to reconstitute the ideology, and practices, of composition-rhetoric as a discipline, not to erase the history dogmatically, or at all. Instead, *Vernacular Insurrections* enables a broader set of epistemic knowledge to emerge within the discipline. It demonstrates that no serious discussion around the achievement gap can happen without decolonizing the literacy and composition classroom. Furthermore, Dr. Kynard's work advocates for language rights for all. *Vernacular Insurrections* will no doubt find an audience beyond the margins of composition, literacy, and rhetoric. Dr. Kynard's work will find other interlocutors in critical ethnic studies, critical feminist studies, and critical language studies. *Vernacular Insurrections* will be right at home and connected to a larger sociopolitical movement, which views scholarship as connected to the empowerment of local communities. Additionally, *Vernacular Insurrections*, perhaps, will be canonized among language rights activists and third world feminist scholars who view as essential role that language and culture play in identity formation. The Black Arts Movement represented Black cultural productions in the best of the Black Vernacular tradition.



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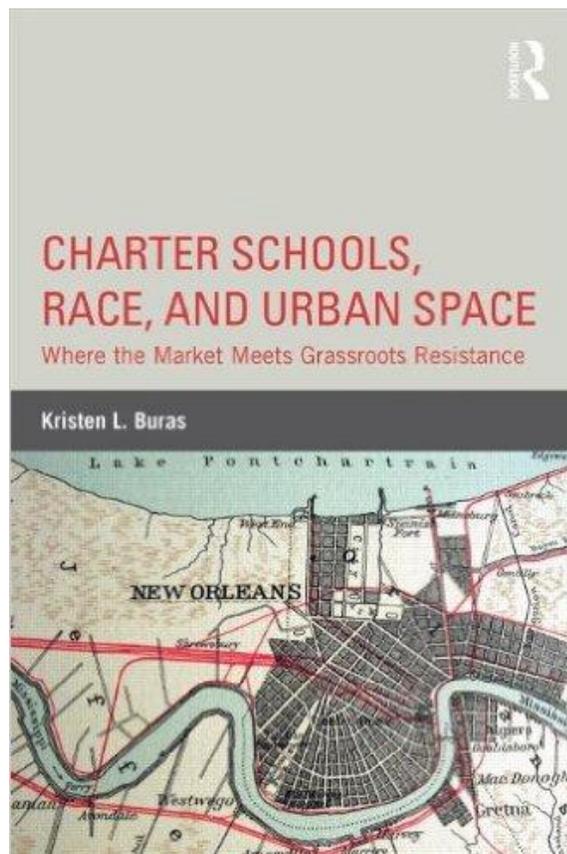
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# RADICAL TEACHER

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

Review:  
Charter Schools, Race, and Urban Space: Where the  
Market Meets Grassroots Resistance  
by Kristen Buras

Reviewed by Nicole Polier



## **Charter Schools, Race, and Urban Space: Where the Market Meets Grassroots Resistance (Routledge, 2015) by Kristen Buras**

### **Reviewed by Nicole Polier**

If you believe Governor Chris Christie, New Jersey public schools are “broken and failing,” and charters are “salvation for families, especially in failing urban districts.” Lest there be any doubt whose side he’s on, Christie threatened to veto any bills by legislators that “try to stick it to charter schools.”

One can’t help but notice how often the term “failing” is used to describe poor urban public schools and how “choice” has become shorthand for the salutary effects of charter reform. Never mind how schools get “broken” in the first place and how their “failure” has time and again, as if inevitably, led to privatization, figured as “choice.” State takeovers of public schools are occurring most rapidly in poor and minority school districts in response to financial crisis: Jersey City in 1989, Paterson 1991, Newark 1995, Detroit 1999, Philadelphia 2001, Little Rock 2015, and the Louisiana Recovery School District in 2003, 93% black and Latino, before the storm. Cities like New York, by contrast, have undergone charter reform at a more gradual pace.

Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans at the end of August, 2005, and was the costliest natural disaster in U.S. history and among the deadliest, trashing the infrastructure and forcing populations to flee, some never to return. There was nothing natural about the mismanagement of the disaster at local, state, and federal levels. The response to destruction of New Orleans public schools, flooded and closed down after the storm, was rapid and well organized by contrast. Within a few months, the state of Louisiana nullified the collective bargaining agreement of the New Orleans teachers’ union and handed over most schools to the Recovery School District (RSD), an entity created in 2003 to intervene in the governance of schools the state then considered to be failing. Legislatively, Act 35, passed in November 2005, was a mechanism for transferring failing schools into the RSD on a wholesale basis. Meanwhile, city teachers were placed on “Disaster Leave without Pay,” as the state superintendent hastily solicited federal aid from the Department of Education to open charters by January of 2006.

It was a perfect storm that created the conditions for a new relationship between state and capital in the implementation of privately run public schools, known as charters or “school choice.” Today, something like 70% of New Orleans schools are in the RSD and run by numerous charter companies like KIPP, New Beginnings, and Choice Foundation, to name a few. The state of Louisiana describes these as “independent public schools that are free to be more innovative and are held accountable for improved student achievement.”

Kristen Buras, in *Charter Schools, Race, and Urban Space: Where the Market Meets Grassroots Resistance*, sets out to turn the ideology of school choice on its head with an assessment of market-based reform from the bottom up. Based on interviews with teachers, students, and local activists and situated in the racial history of this region of the south, Buras argues charters have run roughshod over historically black poor and working-class communities in a redistribution of state power from public to private hands.

New Orleans, with its high population of black students, is a site of contention for black education nationwide. Buras locates this site within the racial composition and geography of New Orleans and argues that a process of accumulation through dispossession, a concept coined by David Harvey (2006), has benefitted white business elites at the expense of black students, families, and neighborhoods. By late 2005 there began a piling on of private interests and institutions committed to remaking the schools, from Teach for Americas (TFA) to the Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives at Tulane University. After Katrina, the social relations of race and class were reshaped within a state and federal framework as Baton Rouge became headquarters for officials to re-engineer the city and its schools.

***New Orleans, with its high population of black students, is a site of contention for black education nationwide.***

Movers to remake schools in the lower Ninth Ward assumed a wealthier and whiter city after the wreckage of Katrina. The geography of race and class in the Ninth Ward seems especially intense as a site of struggle: over the last decade the Bywater of the Upper Ninth has seen an emigration of hipsters and rapidly rising real estate prices with the feel of Williamsburg or Crown Heights in Brooklyn. In one chapter, Buras looks at successful local efforts to reopen Kings Elementary School in the lower Ninth after it was renovated in 2007. In another, she considers “counterstories on the Master’s plan for Reconstruction”—e.g., the permanent closure of Douglass High School in the Bywater. Here she describes a local program started in 1998 called “Students at the Center” (SAC) that created a curriculum based on local history and social justice, resulting in the publication of a collection of student essays. SAC is an example of what Buras calls “a culture of caring” lost after Katrina. The building was surrendered to KIPP Renaissance High School, which reopened with an air-conditioned auditorium, an emphasis on college prep, and a “no excuses” code of discipline.

*The historic space that was Douglass became KIPP Renaissance High School in 2010-2011. . . Douglass students would not be welcome to attend. Whose renaissance was this? Master planners and those consulted by the Bring New Orleans Back Commission, which called for the city to develop the nation’s first charter school*

*district, included the founder of KIPP; founder of Teach for America; founder of New Schools for New Orleans; and the Broad Foundation, Gates Foundation, and NewSchools Venture Fund. . . Community-led education initiatives could have provided the basis for state investment of resources at Douglass, but instead the interests and visions of edu-businesses such as KIPP came first. (114-115)*

New Orleans business leader and booster for charter reform Leslie Jacobs put it this way: "We decided to take failing schools away from the school district . . . And in doing that, local policies go away . . . So out comes the building, the students, the money and a fresh start." (35) Presto. It was a "fresh start" for foundations like Gates, Broad, and Fisher, investors like WalMart and Bloomberg. This confluence of forces is pictured in a remarkable diagram of arrows in all directions, pointing directly and indirectly to New Schools for New Orleans (NSNO), a charter school incubator. Foundations dumped \$17.5 million into charters, outdone by the USDOE at \$28 million, along with a flood of lesser contributions that have flowed to organizations and local groups connected in one way or another to charters.

***If you want to destroy a government program, defund it first so it can't work and the people won't want it, and then privatize it, as Noam Chomsky has observed, and the history of public education in this country is a prime example. The next task, according to Chomsky, is to shift the focus of public attention from a sense of civic engagement to a sense that schooling is someone else's burden.***

The sixth and final chapter, co-written with a local collective, takes to task a report by NSNO on education reform that touts New Orleans as a guide for cities. This discussion might well have begun the book; the authors sketch the history of desegregation and white flight from 1950 through 2000 and, along with it, the defunding of city schools that formed the historical prologue to charter reform. This policy ecology, as Buras calls it, is a reminder of Marx's observation that capitalism is a creative and destructive process. The deadly force of Katrina had the effect of an accelerant for state and private sources.

The discussion of dispossession is most interesting when the author looks from the top down at the feeding frenzy of interest groups that closed in after Katrina. But conceptually, the discussion is out of focus. Terms like "urban space economy" are invoked but never fleshed out, and Harvey's notion of accumulation by dispossession is not put to much use. Is it the case, as Buras contends, that the closing of New Orleans schools was racially motivated, or was closure a process whose effects have heightened

existing inequalities along lines of race and class? (Incidentally, there is no discussion of how dispossession has disproportionately affected women in the working class.) One thinks of the fortune saved on teacher salaries and benefits, bargain-rate TFA recruits flowing in from out of town, the creation of flexible, just-on-time production (to coin a phrase from Harvey, 1989) made possible by the destruction of organized labor. In reference to the rehiring of teachers fired in the fall of 2005, one teacher said to Buras: "Evidently, there's an unwritten memo that says 'anyone making over \$50,000, don't hire them'." (141)

Buras contrasts the "culture of the education market" with the "culture of the community," its opposite number. But beneath the discussion of racial politics is a dichotomy between community and business, local and external, tradition and the market that doesn't capture the complexity of class and racial struggle on the ground. The "culture of caring" logic was lost on me, and Buras's point that local schools and homes here are "situated on sacred ground" (82) is stated as an article of faith.

Readers may also be interested in a different and differently detailed take on charters by a New Orleans journalist whose account focuses on the narratives of a student, a teacher, and a school administrator respectively. In Sarah Carr's *Hope Against Hope: Three Schools, One City, and the Struggle to Educate America's Children*, Carr concludes that New Orleans schools have improved in the decade since Katrina but warns that education is no panacea for poverty.

If you want to destroy a government program, defund it first so it can't work and the people won't want it, and then privatize it, as Noam Chomsky has observed, and the history of public education in this country is a prime example. The next task, according to Chomsky, is to shift the focus of public attention from a sense of civic engagement to a sense that schooling is someone else's burden. Whether this is the "Master's Plan" or a new scheme of flexible labor, it amounts to a consolidation of control in private hands and an upward redistribution of resources, one might say, welfare for the ruling class.

Much of the controversy over charters seems to focus on whether they are better or worse than public schools (Carr 2013). A number of recent studies show that, by the dubious measure of standardized test performance, the differences between charter and public schools are "significantly insignificant." Buras would argue that they are worse for wresting control from communities and ushering in accumulation through dispossession and a whitewashing of the system. Her account shows how the state has engendered redistribution of services by drawing on reservoirs of capital while communities of color take a back seat and corporate interests drive the bus. It remains to be seen whether recent new legislation returning New Orleans to a locally elected school board—but keeping intact charter control over hiring and teaching—is much more than a Trojan horse. Time will tell.

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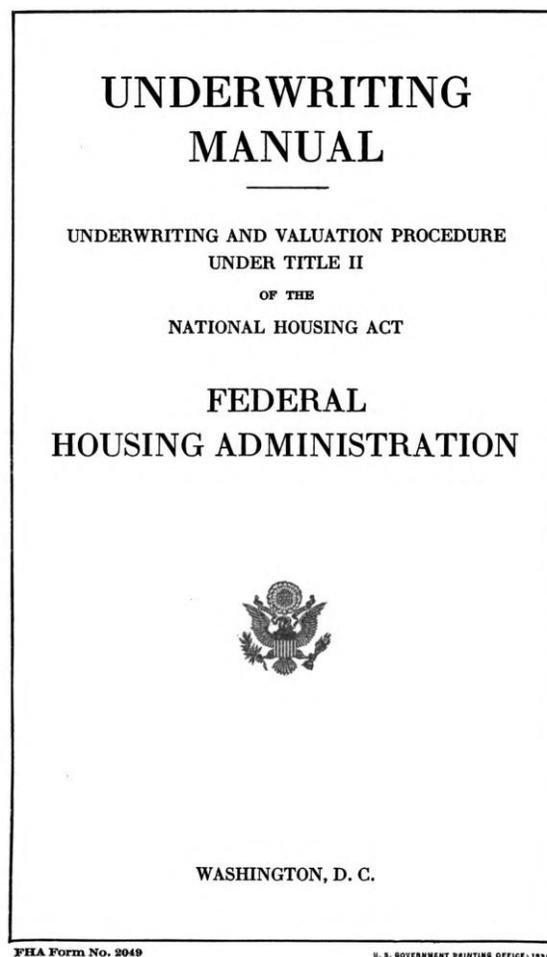
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# RADICAL TEACHER

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

Teaching Note  
Race, Housing, and the Federal Government:  
Black Lives on the Margins of the American Dream

By Richard Hughes



**A**s a historian at Illinois State University, I teach an undergraduate class to predominantly white middle class students that uses the history of race and American culture to teach historical methods. Despite substantial coursework in U.S. history and the social sciences and a general interest in the Black Lives Matter movement, history majors often know remarkably little about the historical issues that lay behind the movement. When specifically asked to describe the “relevant issues, origins, images, and larger implications” of the phrase “Black Lives Matter,” their written answers rarely include information beyond the killing of Trayvon Martin in 2012 or incidents of police brutality in places such as Ferguson, Baltimore, and New York City.

As a result, I introduce my students to the Federal Housing Authority’s (FHA) *Underwriting Manual* (1938) as a small window through which to examine the underappreciated role of the United States government in creating and sustaining a racialized version of the American Dream.<sup>1</sup> Used by federal officials since the 1930s to determine the value of neighborhoods and crucial access to the federal mortgage programs that fueled the housing boom of the mid twentieth century, the lengthy manual’s most important section is on page 1412. Buried deep in the seemingly innocuous bureaucratic manual, the section on the “Valuation of Amenity Income Dwelling” reveals the federal government’s critical commitment to a racial separation in 1938:<sup>2</sup>

**d. The degree of social and racial compatibility of the inhabitants of the neighborhood. The presence of socially or racially inharmonious groups in a neighborhood tends to lessen or destroy owner-occupancy appeal.**

I ask students to examine a brief excerpt from the *Manual* that includes the document’s *Preface* for larger context and the section mentioned above as well as some additional sources related to race and housing in U.S. history to contextualize and corroborate the *Manual*. The sources include historical and recent statistics on race, wealth, and housing; a 1937 photograph by Margaret Bourke-White juxtaposing African American flood victims and a billboard proclaiming “There’s No Way Like the American Way”; and brief excerpts from David Freund’s *Colored Property: State Policy and White Racial Politics in Suburban America* (2007), Ta-Nehisi Coates’s “The Case for Reparations” (2014), and Richard Rothstein’s “The Making of Ferguson: Public Policies at the Root of Its Troubles” (2014).<sup>3</sup>

The following includes the questions students used to analyze the *Manual* and aforementioned related sources as well as summaries of their answers to the larger question: “To what extent does the history of race relations and housing in the nation help Americans understand contemporary issues surrounding the phrase, ‘Black Lives Matter?’”

**A. Sourcing-** *Who wrote this? What is the author’s perspective? Why, when, and where was it written? It is reliable?* Students recognized the role of the Federal Housing Authority in representing the federal

government’s official policy on housing and race as well as how the agency reflected the intersection of American political culture and aspects of structural racism that led to profound and lasting inequities in numerous areas such as housing, employment, wealth, and education.

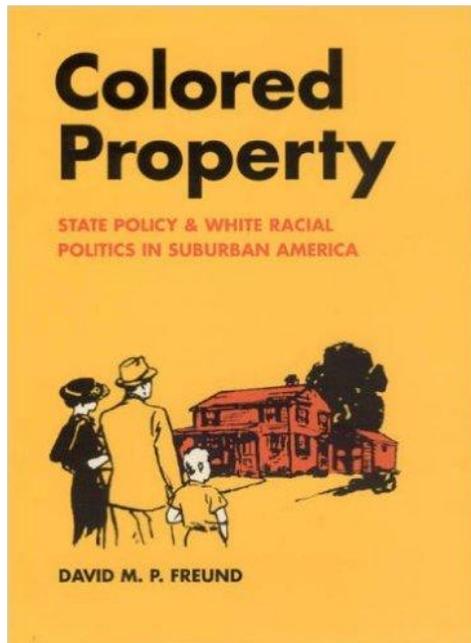
**B. Close Reading-** *What claims does the author make? What evidence and language does the author use and how do they indicate the author’s perspective?* Students identified the use of specific language such as “racially inharmonious groups,” “evidence,” and “detractions” in highlighting how federal officials relied on seemingly neutral bureaucratic language to create, as Freund argued, “a racialized vision of the market for housing” that equated the American Dream of home ownership with separation from the economic threat of racial minorities.<sup>4</sup>

**C. Contextualization-** *When and where was the document created and how might the circumstances affect its content?* Students situated the *Manual* within a larger narrative that includes the history of racial segregation, violence, economic inequality, the federal policies of the New Deal during the Great Depression, and the tremendous growth of suburbia after World War II.

**D. Corroboration-** *What do other documents say and do they agree? What documents are most reliable? What are other possible documents?* Students concluded that housing policies beginning in the 1930s and reflected in recent economic data such as median household wealth and homeownership according to race illustrate the links between the historic role of the federal government in fostering the birth of American suburbia, the expansion of the white middle class, and the persistence of racial inequities today.<sup>5</sup>

After a careful analysis and class discussion on the FHA’s *Manual*, my students returned to the original question about the “relevant issues, origins, images, and larger implications” of the phrase “Black Lives Matter.” In addition to references to the specific incidents mentioned previously, students identified the importance of a federal “system” of “white privilege” and “institutionalized racism” that reinforced racial segregation in housing and the political, legal, and social realities of racial economic inequality. Referencing “a broader sense of racial discrimination,” one student wrote, “Even after their emancipation after the Civil War, African Americans have faced many forces preventing them from living the ‘American Dream.’” Students understood that the ongoing struggle for black lives occurs within a cultural and physical landscape that is hardly accidental or some sort of natural state. Nor is it the product of extremism simply destined to be defeated by a story of unfolding American progress. Instead, the Federal Housing Authority’s

*Underwriting Manual* of 1938 provided students with the historical lens to reframe more recent conflicts over race and the criminal justice system as part of a larger more complicated narrative that has long defined the “American Dream” in ways that directly or indirectly marginalized black lives.



## Notes

1. Federal Housing Administration, *Underwriting Manual: Underwriting and Valuation Procedure Under Title II of the National Housing Act*, Washington, D.C., February 1938 (available in the public domain via [www.hathitrust.org](http://www.hathitrust.org)).
2. *Underwriting Manual*, p 1412.
3. Margaret Bourke-White, “The Louisville Flood,” 1937, <http://collection.whitney.org/object/8061>; David Freund, *Colored Property: State Policy and White Racial Politics in Suburban America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Ta-Nehsi Coates, “The Case for Reparations: The Atlantic Monthly, June 2014, 55-71; Richard Rothstein, “The Making of Ferguson: Public Policies at the Root of Its Troubles” Economic Policy Institute, October 15, 2014, <http://www.epi.org/publication/making-ferguson/>.
4. Freund, 141.
5. Reading Like a Historian, Stanford History Education Group, <https://sheg.stanford.edu/rh>.



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# RADICAL TEACHER

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

## Teaching Note Black Lives Matter in Information Literacy

by Angela Pashia



PROTEST MARCH IN RESPONSE TO THE JAMAR CLARK SHOOTING, MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA (IMAGE: FIBONACCI BLUE)

For many academic librarians, teaching information literacy is a core component of librarianship. Depending on one's institutional context, this can happen in one-on-one interactions at a reference desk, in course-integrated instruction sessions (in which a librarian visits a class to teach students about finding credible sources for a term paper), and/or in a credit-bearing course.

Most people think of librarians teaching students to access books or articles, but information literacy involves much more. The Association for College & Research Libraries (ACRL) defines it as "the set of integrated abilities encompassing the reflective discovery of information, the understanding of how information is produced and valued, and the use of information in creating new knowledge and participating ethically in communities of learning" (ACRL 2015). This can be taught as a "neutral" practice. For example, we can teach students to evaluate information sources according to a simple checklist, usually including the authority (often focused on formal credentials) of the author, publication date, and purpose of the piece, without having to examine the power structures that enabled that author to become an authority or the ideological biases represented in the piece.

Critical information literacy (CIL) pushes us to raise the questions that get left out of that "neutral" approach. CIL asks practitioners to acknowledge that the range of information available, the learners, and those teaching information literacy are all socially situated entities. It is important to teach the ways in which "the existing information system mirrors the larger social and political order, which is characterized by a radically asymmetrical distribution of power, and is shot through, systematically and structurally, by racism, sexism, homophobia, militarism, and class oppression" (Beilin 2015). From this perspective, teaching Black Lives Matter should be a component of information literacy.

At the University of West Georgia, I teach a course titled "Information Literacy and Research." The course is not required, but it is included as one of the electives students may take to fill a core curriculum requirement. It covers a range of topics related to library-based research, including how to find, access, and evaluate appropriate information sources and how to use that information ethically. I employ CIL by encouraging students to examine the power structures involved in all of the concepts we discuss. I set the stage for this on the second day of class with a lesson that asks students to think critically about the university itself, and how that affects everything else that we will discuss throughout the semester.

We begin by watching a video posted on the University College of London's YouTube channel: "Why is my curriculum white?" (UCLTV 2014). This 20-minute video features students questioning the whiteness of the established canon in their respective fields, asking why more non-white and non-Western scholars are not included in the curriculum, and discussing the effects of that exclusion on themselves and their perceptions of academia.

After watching this video, I ask students to search online for the demographic profile of students and faculty at our university. Our student body is 53.2% white and 36.0% black/African American, while our faculty are 81.4% white and only 6.6% black/African American (UWG 2016). Most very quickly find data reported on various websites. After the students have a few minutes to search, I ask for a volunteer to share the website they found on the instructor computer. This opens a range of discussion topics for the remainder of the session: evaluating the reliability of the sites they found, asking where those sites are pulling their data from, and discussing why any of this matters in a class about library research.

Drawing connections between this video, the demographics of our university, and information literacy leads to questions about how we construct authority and what information gets left out of those constructions. Examining the authority of the creator of an information source is generally an important part in determining whether a source is credible. This makes sense, given that we do not want students citing just anyone who posts to the internet with a lot of opinions but no real expertise to support those opinions. Training students to seek out scholarly experts means that they will find information that is well grounded in published research. However, these markers of authority are socially constructed within the context of structures of oppression, including racism and sexism.

Discussions of scholarly authority, especially in the context of topics like the Black Lives Matter movement, need to also address the structures of racism and sexism that have been deeply woven into the foundations of academia and scholarly publications. When we examine the traits that distinguish a scholarly publication from a non-academic source, students learn that scholarly sources are generally written by people who hold the terminal degree in their field and have university affiliations. What does it then mean for the students' evaluation of those scholarly sources if they also consider that, based on data from fall 2013, 79% of "all full-time faculty in degree-granting postsecondary institutions" were white (NCES 2015)? When students rely entirely on scholarly sources to analyze the Black Lives Matter movement, what voices and perspectives are excluded? This can be countered by seeking out those scholars who intentionally give voice to marginalized informants, but budding researchers do not all inherently recognize the need to look for this. We return to the issues raised in this lesson repeatedly throughout the semester.

I encourage students to critically evaluate all of the information they receive, whether they plan to use it for a term paper or their own personal interests. Though students have received many dismissive messages about the value of social media, it can be a powerful tool for counter-narratives to the hegemonic discourse. As students learn about the information cycle—differences in the way different types of sources are produced, and the consequent time it takes for them to be published—we discuss how students may research a current topic in the weeks and months after an event. Scholarly sources should be used to provide a foundation for scholarly analysis, but

will not yet have been published about that specific event, so the researcher must turn to news reports. The most common way of constructing authority in this instance is to rely on the reputation of established news media sources for reports about the recent event. However, most news organizations are beholden to their parent companies, their advertisers, and the audience those advertisers speak to. This introduces a range of power dynamics that influence the way those news organizations frame a story.

One example I use to illustrate this is a series of tweets from August 11, 2014. At that point, local news networks had begun to report on the "unrest" and "riots" in Ferguson, Missouri, portraying a narrative of unruly mobs getting out of control. And then, a set of tweets re-framed that narrative. One protester posted a series of tweets alleging that the local news crew was filming selectively: not filming calm protests, not filming a car of white teens who rolled through the location shouting racist slurs, but then filming the angry reaction from the predominantly black crowd and broadcasting that as representative of the crowd's behavior. This leads to a discussion of framing, how the details selected for inclusion or exclusion can affect the implicit message of a news report, and how social media can either fill gaps or poke holes in news reports. Of course, selecting credible sources from the flood of tweets on a trending topic is challenging, so we discuss ways to evaluate the credibility of an individual twitter account. This is more work than simply accepting

the account posted on CNN based on the authority of an established news network, but it is important for students who want to begin to question the hegemonic narrative.

This work of questioning the biases and power dynamics inherent in the production of information is challenging for students. My impression has been that very few of the students I work with have ever been invited to examine or criticize their educations in this way. As you may imagine, some are resistant and others flourish.

I ask students to examine and reflect on these issues through various assignments over the course of the semester. By the end of the course, students are able to describe some of the ways power structures limit the information easily available to them and how they can seek out alternate perspectives. The danger in this, of course, is that questioning these structures may lead some to lend credence to perspectives that lack solid evidence, which is why it is important to emphasize the need to evaluate the evidence and context for those claims. However, encouraging students to be mindful of ways racism influences the production of information, to question dominant narratives, and to include a wider range of perspectives in their research, is a small step toward challenging implicit biases and structures of oppression, in order to make sure that Black Lives—including experiences, stories, and scholarship— Matter.

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# RADICAL TEACHER

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

## News for Educational Workers

By Leonard Vogt



LONG ISLAND UNIVERSITY/BROOKLYN LOCKOUT (PHOTO BY LEONARD VOGT)

## Lockout at Long Island University/Brooklyn

For the first time in U. S. history, a university locked out its faculty. On the first day of the Fall semester 2016, the Long Island University (LIU) Brooklyn campus locked out all 400 members of the faculty union from campus after their contract expired August 31. The proposed contract would slash adjunct salaries and pay faculty lower salaries than their counterparts at the Post campus on Long Island, New York. In addition, the lockout cut off professors' emails and health insurance and threatened that faculty would be replaced. When students went to class they found administrators trying to teach their classes, many of whom simply said they were unqualified to teach the classes and dismissed the students. As anger built around the lack of class room instruction (LIU costs approximately 40 to 50 thousand dollars a year), the students joined the faculty and rallied to have their professors back in class. By the end of the second week of the semester, the lockout was over (democracynow.org, September 13, 2016).

## Unions and Strikes

The National Labor Relations Board ruled in August 2016 that graduate students who work as research and teaching assistants at private universities have a federal right to unionize, ending efforts at graduate student unionization going back to 2000. The ruling on the case came from a petition filed by graduate students at Columbia University. One of the organizers said the petition was not particularly about money but rather "a question of power and democracy in a space in the academy that's increasingly corporatized, hierarchical" (*The New York Times*, August 23, 2016). For a fuller history of this struggle for graduate student rights, see [www.truthout.org](http://www.truthout.org) for August 28, 2016 and for a personal narrative by onetime graduate student Joseph Ramsey, who revisits previous attempts to unionize, see [www.insidehighereducation.com](http://www.insidehighereducation.com), September 8, 2016.

The Southern Workers School (SWS) met August 5-7 to continue their study of the political economy of the Southern region of the United States. SWS trains and develops rank-and-file workers to organize the South and in their training sessions discusses such issues as the role of slavery in the capitalistic development of the United States, historical organizing campaigns such as Operation Dixie and the Civil Rights Movement, women's oppression in the workplace, and protections for LGBTQ workers (portside.org, August 19, 2016).

In a strike authorization vote held September 7-9, 2016, over 5,500 faculty members at the 14 Pennsylvania

state universities sent a message to their union leaders to call a strike, if necessary, to ensure that contract negotiations would not include cutting adjuncts' pay by 20 percent. The tally of the three-day strike-authorization voteshowed that 93 percent of the 82 percent of the Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculty members who cast ballots voted in favor of a strike.

On April 27, for just a single day, full and part-time faculty from Teachers (AFT) Local 2121 at the City College of San Francisco went on strike—and it worked! By July, to head off another strike, the college agreed to a union contract with substantial raises (*Labor Notes*, portsidelabor.org, September 7, 2016).

## K-12

Education Secretary John King's proposed regulations for national implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) indicates a renewed emphasis on high stakes tests, and possible financial punishment for the growing movement of "opt out" and test boycotting (truthout.org, June 16, 2016).

Even though corporal punishment in U. S. schools has declined rapidly in the last 20 years, it is still legal in 19 states and, according to Education Week Research Center, it is actually used in 21 states. "More than 109,000 students endured beating or other forms of physical punishment during the 2013 to 2014 school year at over 4,000 schools" and this corporal punishment was used across all grade levels from kindergarten to high school ([www.truthout.org](http://www.truthout.org), September 4, 2016).

"Teachers Take on Student Discipline" (*Labor Notes*, June 14, 2016) discusses how the activist group Teachers Unite are using and promoting "restorative practices" to deal with student discipline. Teachers and students meet to discuss inappropriate student behavior and the root problems such as stress, anxiety, and problems at home that might make students demonstrate behavior problems. Teachers Unite are devoted to the idea of not turning over these practices to outside specialist trainers who would not have the relationships with students necessary to make such practices successful.

In "A Turning Point for the Charter School Movement" (Truthout, August 30, 2016), a battle over charter schools in Massachusetts is seen as a microcosm of the charter school debate across the country. Massachusetts Democrats passed a resolution opposing charter school expansion and said the pro-charter school campaign is "funded and governed by hidden money provided by Wall Street executives and hedge fund managers." Across the country, public sentiment against charter schools has appeared in the form of the NAACP and The Movement for



LONG ISLAND UNIVERSITY/BROOKLYN LOCKOUT  
PHOTO BY LEONARD VOGT

Black Lives calling for a moratorium on charters and a series of highly negative reports by *The New York Times* on the controversial New York City charter chain Success Academy. Charter school criticism even reached HBO when, on August 21, 2016, John Oliver's "Last Week Tonight" show in an almost 20 minute segment exposed the charter school industry's fraud, waste and abuse. To see Oliver's dissection of charters, go to [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l\\_htSPGAY7I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l_htSPGAY7I).

The Department of Defense gave its three-hour enlistment exam (the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery known as ASVAP) to 700,000 in 12,000 high schools during the 2013-2014 school year. If that's not bad enough, 81 percent of the students taking this exam during that school year had their results sent to military recruiters without the parents' consent ("High School Students' Test Results Are Being Sent to Military Recruiters Without Consent," *World Beyond War*, August 10, 2016).

In May 2016, the school board in Portland, Oregon, adopted the most far-reaching policy on teaching climate justice in U. S. schools. For full details, read Bill Bigelow's article at [www.commondreams.org](http://www.commondreams.org).

In response to a decade-long lawsuit arguing that Connecticut has failed to provide adequate funding for its poorest school districts, a Connecticut judge has ordered the state to fundamentally overhaul its public education system, saying the state is "defaulting on its constitutional duty" and has "left rich school districts to flourish and poor school districts to flounder" (DemocracyNow, September 8, 2016).

## Education in Mexico

Ten Years ago the "Oaxaca Commune" movement, as named by its supporters, was born when riot police beat, arrested and pushed out of the Oaxaca town center striking teachers. (See *Radical Teacher* 81 and its lead article on the use of alternative media to help organize the teachers' strike). And the battle continues. Two years ago 43 future teachers from the Ayotzinapa Normal School disappeared with yet no one held responsible. These attacks against striking teachers are an effort by the Mexican government to impose neoliberal education reforms in the southern state of Oaxaca and eventually privatize education. For more current government attacks on teachers, see [portside.org](http://portside.org) (June 22, 23, 26, and 30), [democracynow.org](http://democracynow.org) (June 20, 21, and 23), and *In These Times* (September, 2016).

## Racism in Education

Black Lives Matter activists, after successfully pushing some colleges to address racism on campus and make curriculum more inclusive, are now reaching into K-12 education, where there is much work to be done against corporate education reform. In July of 2016, the NAACP voted to call for a moratorium on charter schools, saying charters "do not represent the public yet make decisions about how public funds are spent" and contribute "to the increased segregation rather than diverse integration of

our public school system" ([truthout.org](http://truthout.org), September 8, 2016 and *Common Dreams*, July 30, 2016).

The Department of Education recently released a report showing that every state in the United States spends less on pre-k-12 education than on correction facilities. Over the past 20 years, the report continues, while spending on public education remained stagnant, spending on the prison system rose by approximately 90 percent ([portside.org](http://portside.org), July 24, 2016).

"New Report Underscores Serious 'Equity Gap' in Public Education" (*Washington Post*, June 7, 2016) says that "black children were nearly four times as likely to be suspended as white students, and nearly twice as likely to be expelled. The same pattern showed up in pre-school. Black children represented 19 percent of all preschoolers but accounted for 47 percent of those who received suspensions."

## The New McCarthyism in Education

The University of California, Berkeley, offered a course examining Palestine "through the lens of settler colonialism," sparking off a controversy which suspended the course because a coalition of Jewish organizations called the course "anti-Semitic" and "anti-Israel." After a week of protest criticizing the course suspension as a threat to academic freedom, it was reinstated (*The Guardian*, September 19, 2016), but not without comparisons of the ban to a new McCarthyism in education (see Ellen Schrecker's June 30<sup>th</sup> article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*).

Governor Andrew Cuomo of New York signed an executive order creating a blacklist of organizations that boycott or divest from Israel or encourage others to do so, a list that could include schools or colleges, from potentially receiving taxpayer funding (*The New York Times*, June 12, 2016).

A website and social media initiative called Canary Mission posts information designed to slander student, faculty and community activists for Palestinian rights as anti-Semitic, extremist, and sympathetic to terrorism, and uses this information to contact universities and encourage them not to accept these students. However, graduate admissions faculty have signed a statement saying, "We unequivocally assert that the Canary Mission website should not be trusted as a resource to evaluate students' qualifications for admission. We condemn Canary Mission as an effort to intimidate and blacklist students and faculty who stand for justice for Palestinians."

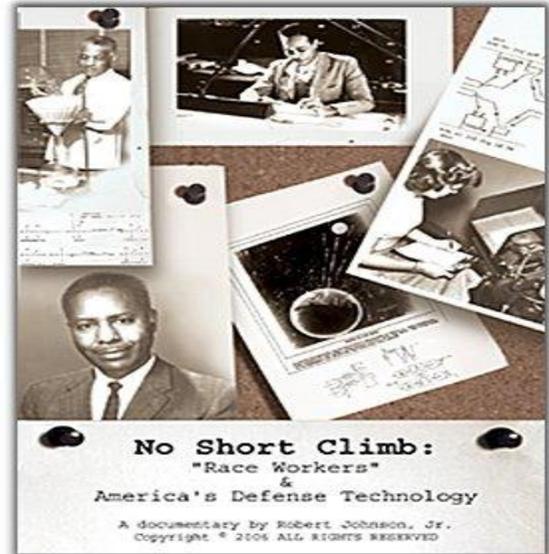
## Education and Poverty

A partnered report on student debt from *Consumer Reports* (August 2016 issue) and *Reveal* from The Center for Investigative Reporting ([RevealNews.org/student debt](http://RevealNews.org/student%20debt)) shows that 42 million Americans owe over \$1.3 trillion. The report explores how the crisis began and what parents and students can do about it.

Trump University has brought national attention to the exploitation of for-profit education (one of Trump's victims even appeared on the stage of the Democratic Convention) but his is only one of many. Diane Ravitch's blog of June 24, 2016 cites "Squalor in Higher Education: Who Protects Predatory For-Profit Colleges?" which gives names and institutions that become immensely wealthy as students become even poorer. The report ends by saying, "A key reason why such predatory for-profit colleges have been able to continue receiving billions annually in taxpayer dollars while ruining the financial futures of students . . . is that national power players, politicians, lawyers, academic leaders [and] celebrities have been willing to vouch for these companies, serving as their paid lobbyists, board members, investors, and endorsers."

Student poverty is reaching new levels, with 58,000 students homeless (truthout.org, May 29, 2016) and many more students buying less and even going hungry (portside.org, July 18, 2016).

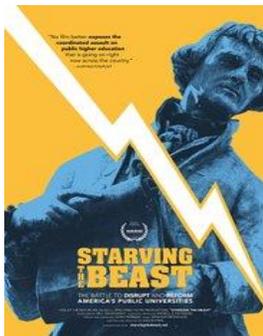
According to *The Atlantic's* "There is No Excuse for How Universities Treat Adjuncts," thirty-one percent of adjunct faculty across the country are living near or below the federal poverty level.



about nonviolence in labor, civil rights, immigrant rights, and community organizing over the last 50 years.

*Jumbo Wild* is a documentary highlighting the tension between the protection of wilderness and the ever increasing growth of development.

*Our Mockingbird* uses Harper Lee's 1960 novel as a lens to view race, class, gender, and justice then and now.



## Resources

*Starving the Beast: The Battle to Disrupt and Reform America's Public Universities* is a new documentary that taps into national current concerns like inflated tuition, student debt and the intersection of politics and education, exposing the coordinated assault on U.S. public higher education.

*No Short Climb: "Race Workers" and America's Defense Technology* is a documentary showing the major contributions made by African American scientists and technicians to defense weaponry. Just before WWII, African-Americans were unable to find jobs because of their race. As the country geared up for war, the government began recruiting Blacks for military and civilian service jobs. *No Short Climb* presents the previously unknown story of the contributions made by Black scientists and technicians during WWII.

The current *African Studies Quarterly* (Vol. 16, Issue 2) has articles like "Commodifying Water in Coastal Tanzania," "Water Vendors in Niamey," and "University-Based Music Training and Current South African Musical Praxis."

Bullfrog Films ([www.bullfrogfilms.com](http://www.bullfrogfilms.com)) has three new documentaries appropriate for school and college students.

*Love & Solidarity: James Lawson & Nonviolence in the Search for Workers' Rights* is a 38-minute documentary



LOVE & SOLIDARITY



OUR MOCKINGBIRD



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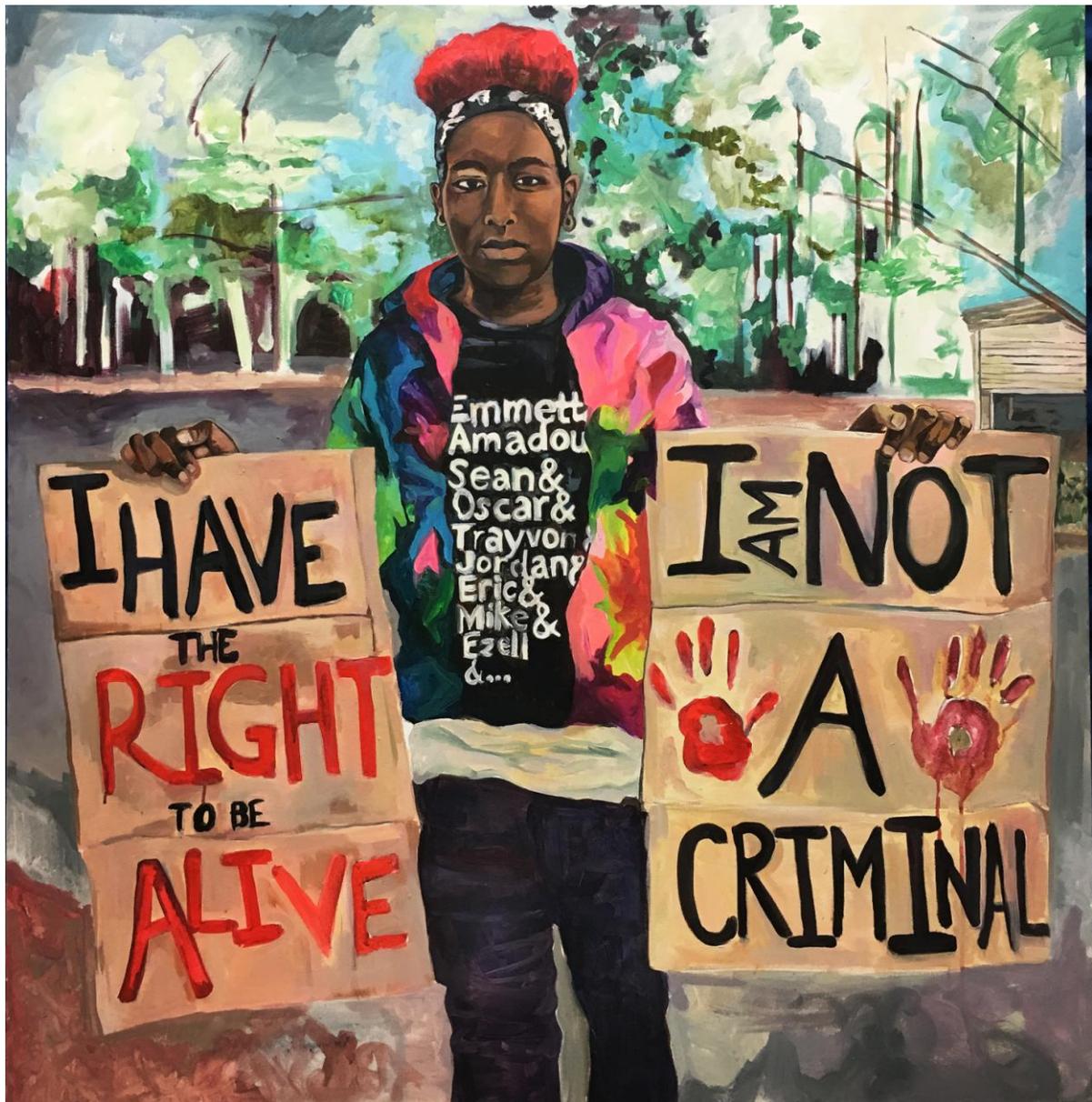


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**Keisha N. Blain** is Assistant Professor of history at the University of Iowa. Her work has been published in the *Journal of Social History*; *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society*; and *Palimpsest: A Journal on Women, Gender, and the Black International*.

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**Chitra Ganesh** is a Brooklyn based artist whose drawing, installation, text-based work, and collaborations suggest and excavate buried narratives typically absent from official canons of history, literature, and art. Ganesh graduated from Brown University with a BA in Comparative Literature and Art-Semiotics, and received her MFA from Columbia University in 2002.

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**Nicole Hala** is an Adjunct Assistant Professor in the Department of Social Sciences at Bronx Community College. She holds a Ph.D. in Sociology from Columbia University. Her research and teaching engage various topics, including inequality, identity, contentious politics, and financialization, especially in higher education, an issue around which she has organized in the past.

**Ted Hall** is an Assistant Professor at Indiana University. He teaches courses on critical pedagogy, race, language and emerging technologies. He studies the intersections among youth, education, race, and culture.

**Richard Hughes** is an Associate Professor of History at Illinois State University, where he teaches courses in U.S. history and history education. His research interests focus on the history of race and education in the twentieth century and the scholarship of teaching and learning in history.

For nearly twenty years, **Ileana Jiménez** has been a leader in the field of feminist and social justice education. In an effort to inspire teachers to bring intersectional

feminism to the K-12 classroom, she launched her blog, *Feminist Teacher* in 2009; her Twitter handle, @feministteacher, and hashtag, #HSfeminism, further support the national and global movement to bring feminism to schools. Currently, Ileana teaches high school courses on feminism and activism, queer literature, Toni Morrison, and American literature at LREI (Little Red School House & Elisabeth Irwin High School) in New York. In 2010, she was named one of the 30 Women Making History by the Women's Media Center; later that year, she was named one of the 40 Feminists Under 40 by the Feminist Press. She is also the 2011 recipient of the Distinguished Fulbright Award in Teaching. In 2012, she appeared on "Melissa Harris-Perry" to talk about safe schools and inclusive curricula. She is published in *One Teacher in Ten in the New Millennium: LGBT Educators Speak Out About What's Gotten Better... and What Hasn't* (Beacon, 2015); *SLUT: A Play and Guidebook for Combating Sexism and Sexual Violence* (Feminist Press, 2015); and *Feminist Utopia Project: Fifty-Seven Visions of a Wildly Better Future* (Feminist Press, 2015).

**Kalli Jackson**, 16, junior, didn't know what feminism was until joining the feminism club at LREI as a freshman. Once she recognized the issues affecting women of color, she realized she needed to be a part of Black feminist thought and action. Learning about feminism as a high school student changed the way she views herself and the world around her.

**Christopher Lee Kennedy** is a teaching artist and organizer who works collaboratively with schools, youth, and artists to create site-specific projects that explore relationships between the built and natural environment, queer identity, and alternative education. These projects generate publications, research, performances, and installations that invite new understandings of ecology, community, and social equity. Kennedy holds a B.S. in Engineering from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, a M.A. in Education from NYU, and a PhD in Education and Cultural Studies from the University of North Carolina.

**Jesse Kohn** teaches history at the Saint Ann's School in Brooklyn, New York.

**Ellana Lawrence**, 15, junior, loves creating films and participating in social justice movements. She only recently became involved in social justice work about two or three years ago when she began to notice the blatant attacks on the Black community by police officers. From then on, she felt like it was her responsibility to encourage others to get involved and end injustice.

**Erica R. Meiners** is author of several books including *Right to be Hostile: Schools, Prisons and the Making of Public Enemies* (2009), *For the Children? Protecting Innocence in a Carceral State* (University of Minnesota 2016) and articles in wide range academic journals, magazines, blogs and anthologies including *Meridians*, *Social Justice*, *Women's Studies Quarterly*, *Captive Genders*, and *No More Potlucks*. A member of her labor union, University Professionals of Illinois, she is the Bernard J. Brommel Distinguished Research Professor at Northeastern Illinois University, where she teaches classes

in justice studies, education, and gender and sexuality studies. Erica co-founded and still teaches at an alternative high school for people exiting prisons and jails. Currently a Soros Justice Fellow, Erica is writing and organizing around reducing our nation's reliance on criminalization to end sexual violence.

**Heather Cherie Moore's** research explores the intersections of Black identity, informal education, social justice, and mass media. She received her doctorate from the American Studies program at Purdue University in 2015. Currently, she is an Assistant Professor of Community and Justice Studies & Black Studies at Allegheny College.

**Angela Pashia** is an Associate Professor and Instructional Services Librarian at the University of West Georgia. Her academic background is in cultural anthropology, but she now focuses on teaching critical information literacy.

**Nicole Polier** is an anthropologist and attorney in New York City.

**Robyn Spencer** taught African and African American studies and history at Penn State University from 2001-2007. Before that, she was a Visiting Predoctoral Fellow at Randolph College in Lynchburg, Virginia. Her areas of interest include black social protest after World War II, urban and working-class radicalism, and gender. She is completing a book on the Black Panther Party and will teach courses at Lehman on twentieth-century African American history. She is currently an Associate Professor in the Department of History at Lehman College in New York, NY.

**LabeebahSubair**, 16, junior, is a Black, Nigerian born, Muslim feminist. She lives in Brooklyn, New York, where she has observed many issues in her community, leading her to be an advocate for social justice for her generation.

**Charity Hope Tolliver** is the Founder and Project Director of Black on Both Sides. A seasoned and nationally recognized youth development specialist, Tolliver grew up in the Englewood neighborhood of Chicago. She is a foster mother, writer, and spoken word artist, and former director of one of the largest and oldest organizing groups in Chicago, Southwest Youth Collaborative. In over thirteen years in the field of Youth Development, she has worked on campaigns on a broad range of issues, including fair housing, labor rights, school reform, prison reform, and LGBT youth rights. In 2012 she was selected as one of seven activists nationwide to receive the Alston Bannerman Fellowship.

**Donna Troka** is an Associate Director at the Center for Faculty Development and Excellence. As adjunct faculty in the Institute of Liberal Arts (ILA), she teaches special topics courses in American studies and interdisciplinary studies. Her publications include the co-edited volume *The Drag King Anthology*, and articles titled "Archivists and Faculty Collaborative Course Development" in *Provenance*, "Critical Moments: A Dialogue Toward Survival and Transformation," in *The Caribbean Review of Gender*

*Studies*, and “You Heard My Gun Cock’: Female Agency and Aggression in Contemporary Rap Music,” in *African American Research Perspectives*. For more about her teaching, research, and activism please see [www.donnatroka.com](http://www.donnatroka.com).

**Nicole Trujillo-Pagán**, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor at Wayne State University in the Department of Sociology and the Center for Latino/a and Latin American Studies. Her current research is on immigration policy and the criminalization of undocumented immigrants. In the past, she has published articles on the “immigration industrial complex” and Latino labor and recovery in New Orleans.

**Lora Vess** is an Assistant Professor of Sociology in the Department of Social Science at the University of Alaska Southeast in Juneau. She teaches a range of sociology classes related to inequality and the environment.

**Danielle M. Wallace**, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor of Africana Studies at William Paterson University in Wayne, NJ. She earned her doctorate in African American Studies at Temple University in Philadelphia, PA. Her teaching and research interests include community-centered social justice education, the role of Black student organizations in historical and modern-day social movements, gender and sexual politics in the Black community, and the gender socialization of Black men and women. In addition to her ongoing research on the dating, marriage, and mate selection ideals of college educated Black men and women, she is conducting research on the 1964 Paterson Uprising and its potential role in the establishment of a Black Students Union and Department of Black Studies at William Paterson University.

**Chad Williams** is Associate Professor and Chair of African and Afro-American Studies at Brandeis University and is the author of *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era*.

**Kidada E. Williams** is Associate Professor of history at Wayne State University and the author of *They Left Great Marks on Me: African American Testimonies of Racial Violence from Emancipation to World War I*.

**Catherine W. Zipf**, Ph.D., is an architectural historian and author with expertise in historic preservation. Her research examines women's participation in American architectural and decorative arts history during the 19th and 20th centuries. She earned an AB from Harvard University and a MaH and Ph.D. from the University of Virginia. Zipf lectures often at universities, conferences, museums, and non-profit agencies on topics ranging from women in architecture to preserving mid-century-modern structures. She has taught courses in architectural history and historic preservation at the University of Virginia, Roger Williams University, and Salve Regina University.



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