

# RADICAL TEACHER

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

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

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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students—all of them Black, many of them activists and leaders on campus, and all of them angry about the decision—were withdrawn.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.

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## 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).

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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.

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## 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.

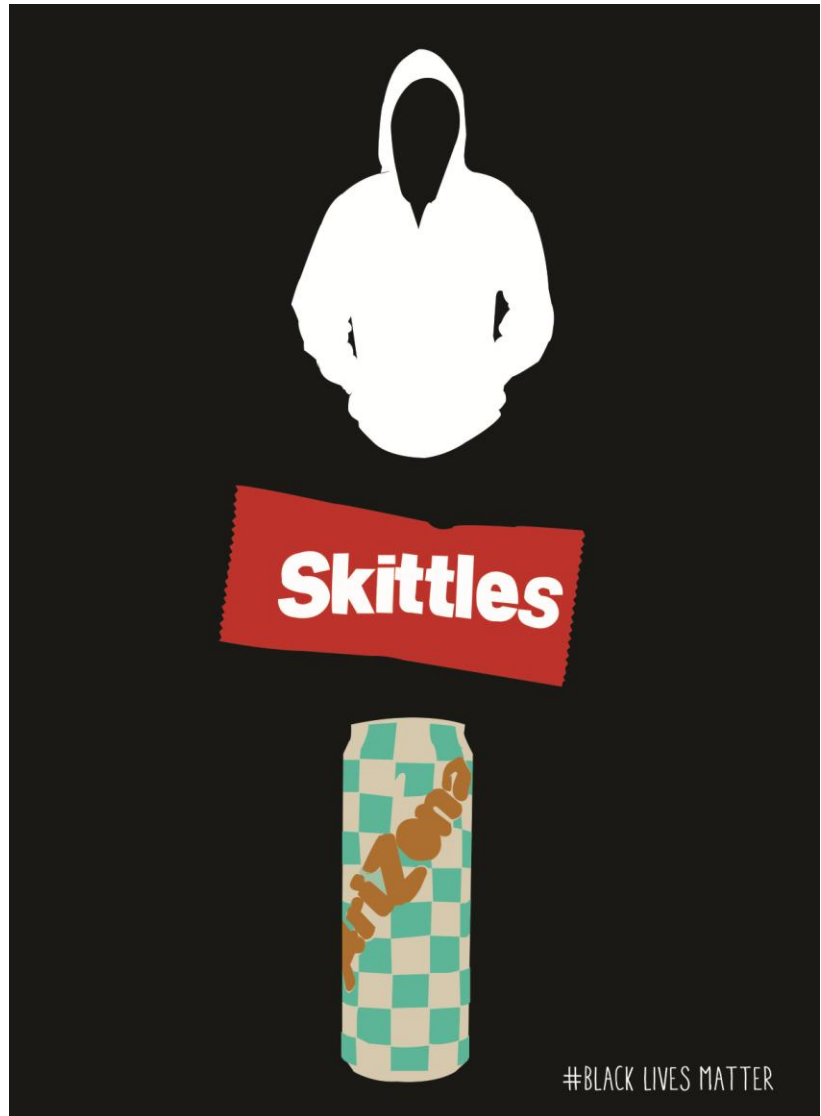
For example, Ashley saw a clear link between the racial tropes, lynching, and present-day police violence. She wrote,

*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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