

# RADICAL TEACHER

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

## Structural Racism and the Will to Act

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THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE STAND TOGETHER TO SEND A MESSAGE TO THE NATION. SAN FRANCISCO'S OCEAN BEACH. FEBRUARY 11, 2017. COURTESY OF STEFAN RUENZEL.

Each spring semester, I teach a graduate-level course entitled Race and Conflict. In 2017, it was scheduled to begin four days after Donald Trump's presidential inauguration and three days after the Women's March. As I revised the syllabus over the winter holiday break, having taught this course twice before, the post-election zeitgeist weighed heavily upon me. The national mood was one of unpredictability, and for millions of Americans, the outcome of the election was still generally unfathomable. It would be imperative, I thought, to keep two pedagogical principles in mind as I re-designed the curriculum: relevancy and flexibility. The content would counterbalance the growing narrative of unprecedented times by illuminating just how ingrained are the racial disparities of our nation. I would have my students examine the gravity of the situation—the structural racism that is and has always been greater than any one person—and consider models of collective resistance, our only real chance at “a more perfect union.”

As a new faculty member in the interdisciplinary School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University (GMU), it took me two years to really understand who my graduate students are and how best to provide them a rigorous education about race, inequality, and the role that we can play in shaping a more egalitarian society. Unlike traditional disciplinary departments where I had taught before, GMU's School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution sits at the nexus of theory and practice with a normative mission of attenuating direct, structural, and cultural violence at the interpersonal, communal, and/or (inter)national level(s). Like many of the graduate programs at our university, roughly half of our graduate students are working professionals with full-time jobs. Our commuter campus is located near Washington, D.C., where many of our students work for the government or in non-profit organizations. Needless to say, they wrangle hectic schedules to participate each week in three-hour seminars like mine. Students seem to appreciate that faculty expose them to the theoretical foundations of our field and related concentrations, but their primary objective is to acquire the knowledge and skillset to become agents of change.

In previous spring semesters (2015 and 2016), my curriculum provided a robust examination of racial phenomena, but the arrangements of readings and the framing of the assignments did not consistently facilitate an efficient feedback loop between the curriculum and certain significant unfolding socio-political events, such as the string of documented cases of police brutality against Black men, women, and children around the country and the groundswell of intersectional and leaderful resistance of #BlackLivesMatter and the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) that rose up in opposition. Another shortcoming of previous syllabi was my incorporation of readings that treated race-making outside the United States, an effort which admittedly stemmed from my desire to appease students who were primarily interested in racial conflict in other parts of the world. On its face, this kind of syllabus is not problematic, but with only a single course in the catalogue dedicated exclusively to race, a dearth of courses committed to exploring conflicts in the United States, and the obvious need to better understand the dynamics of

these conflicts, I planted the course in my full convictions that racial conflicts in the United States are plenty and complicated enough for their own semester of concentrated study. Incidentally, I found that the theories and analyses pertaining to the United States would prove useful to students who wanted to draw comparisons between this nation and others.

## Getting our Footing: Race Matters

The semester begins assuming very little about students' previous formal racial studies, but with over half of the students (54 percent) at our university identifying as people of color, and with a prominent proportion of the student body identified as international students, I presume that the students possess an array of racial knowledge and perspectives that is grounded in their varied life experiences. Indeed, the demographics of the Spring 2017 nineteen-person class were even more diverse than that of the university with almost two-thirds (63 percent) of students identified as people of color<sup>1</sup> and overall representation from the Millennial generation, Generation X, and the Baby Boomer generation. Bearing this diversity in mind, the first unit of the semester is geared toward asking and answering questions that will create a shared body of understanding about racial phenomena: What is race? How is it made intelligible? How does it operate with other categories of identity? What is racism? The intention here is to carefully examine the ways that we actively construct race, operate as agents of racialization, and shape inter-group and intra-group relationships and norms. In total, I design the first six weeks of the semester to demonstrate how race is used to create rules, generate statuses, and formulate ideologies.

The first reading comes from Michael Omi and Howard Winant's fourth edition of *Racial Formation in the United States* (2014). After treating their theory of racialization, we then bridge their chapter on neoliberalism and colorblindness with Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's (2006) theory of colorblind racism, exemplified by four ideological frames commonly deployed in White race-talk (abstract liberalism, naturalization, minimization of racism, and cultural racism). The next set of readings is dedicated to stretching our conceptualization of race and racialization to show how religious communities can be racialized (Garner and Selod, 2015), how racial groups can be gendered (Schug et al., 2015), how language is used to de/authenticate a racial group within the U.S. polity, and how bilingualism holds different implications for different racial groups (Rosa, 2016). We then examine interracial dynamics that serve as sources of intraracial conflict, such as how White racial dominance impacts or motivates in-group policing and contestations of racial authenticity. This set of readings draws upon Cathy Cohen's theories of secondary marginalization and contested membership (1996), Tehama Lopez Bunyasi and Leah Wright Rigueur's theory of “breaking bad” that treats the deviation from and policing of “group-owned” racial ideologies (2015), and Claire Kim's theory of racial triangulation explaining Asian Americans' “model minority” status relative to Blacks, and their “perpetual foreigner” status relative to Whites (1999). We

concluded this unit with a reading on implicit bias and the dire outcomes it can produce for job prospects (Bertrand and Mullainathan, 2004).

When mapping out a semester, I find it helpful to allow for some wiggle room to either take more time with a particular subject or to shift the readings around in order to embrace spontaneity. This semester, my big impromptu moment occurred during a week dedicated to "Racism and Resistance in U.S. Pop Culture/Media." Before the semester commenced, I imagined this unit would provide an opportunity to ingest and analyze whatever flurry of public meaning-making (i.e., memes, music videos, award show acceptance speeches) about the new administration there might be. Serendipity offered something better. Just two weeks prior to the aforementioned unit, the now highly-acclaimed racial horror film *Get Out* was released in theaters nationwide. I proposed that we repurpose our regularly scheduled class time to go to the movie theater as a group. The film itself made an immediate impression on all of us, and it was more than appropriate to reference it in our discussion for the weeks ahead as there were multiple paralleling themes to draw from our curriculum. We would reference the film to reflect upon racial exploitation, white liberalism, racial solidarity, and how reacting to the film through flinching or laughter is differently read when comparing the composition of particular types of audiences. The film fulfilled our week's theme of "racism and resistance" in ways I couldn't previously imagine, and by bringing friends and partners along to share the experience, the outing itself became a social opportunity for students to see one another in a more well-rounded light.

explained the gentrification of one student's hometown as a "racial project"; considered how the "All Lives Matter" response to "Black Lives Matter" is emblematic of colorblind racial ideology; and applied theories of racialization in the United States to better understand the status of Kurds in Turkey. I appreciate that several students approached this assignment as an opportunity to reflect upon phenomena that directly impact their lives, while other students found it more useful to make familiar something that exists at some distance from their everyday experiences.

## Whose Lives Matter?

After establishing a shared vocabulary and understanding of racial phenomena, we began a four-week unit dedicated to exploring the meaning of structural racism. The first set of readings, which focused on health disparities and mortality rates, included a lengthy report from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) (2013) and short articles from *The New England Journal of Medicine* (Ansell, 2015; Bassett, 2015) about how medical training, research, and treatment could serve the broader agenda of #BlackLivesMatter and the M4BL. Framing healthcare in the language of a movement that most students had singularly attributed to the world of law enforcement began to animate a sequence of dot-connecting between certain domains of life that are often imagined as discrete and race-neutral.

We next tied the realm of healthcare and well-being to our relationship with the environment. Here, many students were introduced for the first time to phrases like



SERIES OF SCREENSHOTS OF A MAN PARTICIPATING IN THE #GETOUTCHALLENGE. IMAGES FOUND ON VIDEO, "STEPHEN CURRY NAILS THE GET OUT CHALLENGE! #GETOUTCHALLENGE." SOURCE: SUPER CELEBRITY WORLD YOUTUBE CHANNEL, PUBLISHED MARCH 9, 2017: [HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=21WXWWFNDLG](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21WXWWFNDLG). ACCESSED DECEMBER 29, 2017.

Going to the movies and sharing an experience that compelled us to engage in social commentary as a group ended up being the perfect bridge to cross as students prepared their first assignment. For this paper, students were asked to identify a theory or argument from the assigned readings that they found compelling, clarifying, and/or troublesome and either (1) discuss how it illuminated (or complicated) certain observable phenomena in the world, and/or (2) put that theory or argument into conversation with additional theories or arguments from the same batch of assigned readings. Framed as "theory application," the assignment enabled students to connect the dots between abstract and concrete phenomena. Notable papers analyzed a local talk show debate about "cultural competency" training for public school teachers; explored whether Mormons are a racialized group;

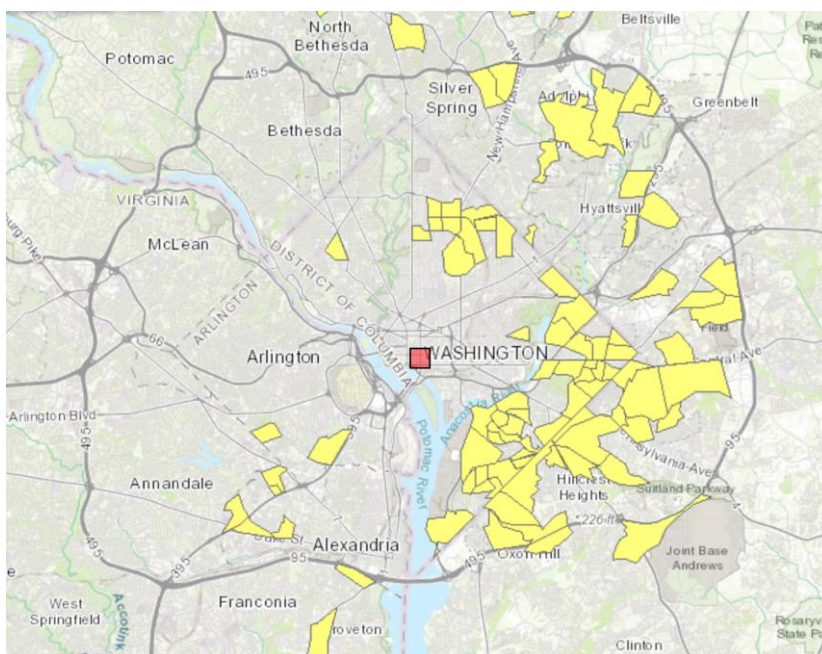
"environmental racism," "food desert," and "food justice." Together, we looked at interactive USDA maps that identified a region's proximity to grocery stores, followed by a series of Census-derived maps that colorfully illustrate racial segregation. Certain students were visibly stunned, not necessarily because they didn't already know, for example, that middle- and upper-income predominately White areas tend to have plentiful options for shopping and eating, but seeing a geography mapped out in terms of what people need to survive and maintain health, often with stark lines of division running alongside major roadways or city jurisdictions, drove home the materiality of racism. We looked at how different activists and community-based responses to food deserts can at their worst unintentionally replicate cycles of white dominance and patronization (Passidomo, 2014), and at their best

create liberatory possibilities. To imagine small, but powerful steps that people can take to reshape their community's access to good food, we watched a TED talk by Ron Finley, a self-described "guerilla gardener" from South Central Los Angeles, who started organizing "dig-ins" and growing vegetables and fruit trees in the parkways of his neighborhood.<sup>2</sup> Finley's work inspired at least one of my students, who told me at the conclusion of the course that she had planted her own garden that was already yielding a small crop.

We followed our look at healthcare, food, and the environment with a unit on policing and incarceration, the institutions my students understood as most obviously racialized and detrimental. Along with two chapters from Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow* (2010), I assigned one law journal article that beseeched us to think about how Latinxs are similarly and differently profiled, arrested and detained by state and federal policing agencies relative to Blacks (Delgado and Stefancic, 2016), and another provocative article about the limitations of criminal justice reform and the larger project of challenging white supremacy more broadly (Butler, 2016). To round out our unit on the racialized nature of policing in the United States, I assigned a recently published PEW research report (2017) that delves into the attitudes and opinions of the police themselves, a group often considered guarded and opaque. By going "behind the badge," PEW's findings explain how police from across the country think about their profession and the #BlackLivesMatter movement, as well as a host of consequential policy measures, like gun control. The report identifies both attitudinal cohesion and profound fissures within the profession along lines of rank, race, gender, and age. With new light shed on the people who are charged "to protect and serve" our communities, this article helped students better understand the spectrum of contention between the police and the general public, as well as the challenges police face with one another on the job.

The final unit on structural racism examined public schools and their role in either perpetuating or overturning the systemic devaluation of people of color and other marginalized groups. At present, most public schools from kindergarten through high school are still failing to fully integrate the contributions of Black, Latinx, Asian, and Native American people into their curricula. By minimizing or omitting the ideas, inventions, decisions, and actions of people of color and willfully or unconsciously ignoring the contradictions between the creed and deeds of the country throughout time, many schools function as institutions of hierarchical reproduction. However, several classrooms and entire schools around the country are exposing racial, gendered, and class-based hierarchies and are reaching for greater inclusion in order to provide a more candid, relevant, and empowering

education. The clash between these pedagogies currently surfaces in the nationwide conflict between proponents of race-conscious and colorblind public school curricula, well demonstrated by the advent and subsequent ban on ethnic studies in the state of Arizona. In class, we read "An Open Letter to the Citizens of Tucson" by then-Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Horne (2007) accusing ethnic studies teachers of indoctrinating their students to be anti-American, ethnically chauvinistic, and racially resentful towards Whites; we examined House Bill 2281 (2010), the legislation banning ethnic studies; and we watched the documentary *Precious Knowledge* (2011), which chronicles the four-year battle between colorblind and race-conscious stakeholders in the city of Tucson. With fundamental questions about the purpose of public education and benchmarks of optimal civic knowledge hanging in the



SCREENSHOT OF MAP ILLUSTRATING FOOD DESERTS IN THE WASHINGTON D.C. BELTWAY REGION. AREAS IN YELLOW DENOTE "LOW-INCOME CENSUS TRACT[S] WHERE MORE THAN 100 HOUSING UNITS DO NOT HAVE A VEHICLE AND ARE MORE THAN 1/2 MILE FROM THE NEAREST SUPERMARKET, OR A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OR SHARE OF RESIDENTS ARE MORE THAN 20 MILES FROM THE NEAREST SUPERMARKET." MAP CREATED BY TEHAMA LOPEZ BUNYASI USING THE INTERACTIVE MAPPING TOOL FOOD ACCESS RESEARCH ATLAS PROVIDED BY THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE'S ECONOMIC RESEARCH SERVICE. SOURCE: [HTTPS://WWW.ERS.USDA.GOV/DATA/PRODUCTS/FOOD-ACCESS-RESEARCH-ATLAS/GO-TO-THE-ATLAS/](https://www.ers.usda.gov/data/products/food-access-research-atlas/go-to-the-atlas/). ACCESSED DECEMBER 29, 2017.

balance, students in my class were encouraged to think about why ethnic studies matters, to whom it matters, and what it would mean if this ban is to one day be found constitutional by the Supreme Court, especially given that the nation's public school system is already majority-people of color, with national demographics projected to follow suit in the next 30 to 35 years. By tying together public school curricula, mass incarceration, policing, the environment, and healthcare, this portion of the Spring 2017 syllabus treated a wide scope of racial violence and conflict and animated creative thinking about how to actively address interlocking obstacles to a healthier society.

## In the News: A Finger on the Pulse

The penultimate assignment of the semester included a short powerpoint about a news item that was in some way related to the readings or the theme of our class. Students were required to post their presentation with an embedded discussion question onto Blackboard (an online classroom tool); their peers were then expected to read and respond. This was a helpful assignment because it allowed students to immediately address daily events that were grabbing news headlines and social media feeds. Staggered over the last four weeks of class, presentations treated a wide range of racial phenomena with reflective and engaging analysis.

One woman discussed the airing of and backlash against the protest-themed Pepsi commercial starring model Kendall Jenner, asking the class, "Are these innocent advertising mistakes or components of a bigger racial issue?" Her peers responded with thoughtful commentary about how they believed colorblindness contributed to the tone-deafness and misappropriation of #BlackLivesMatter protests, which were believed to be the commercial's source of inspiration. Another woman discussed artist Kara Walker's gargantuan sugar sculpture, *Sugar Baby*<sup>3</sup>—a 'Mammy-Sphinx' with protruding breasts and genitalia, asking her peers whether some Black artists' critiques about Walker's "extreme" stereotypical images in public spaces might be understood as a form of racial policing.



9:15 AM - 5 Apr 2017  
 SCREENSHOT OF REV. BERNICE KING'S TWEET IN REACTION TO A PROTEST-THEMED PEPSI COMMERCIAL STARRING KENDALL JENNER. ACCESSED DECEMBER 29, 2017.

Other presentations responded to more nakedly political acts, such as when Attorney General Jeff Sessions expressed his frustration with United States District Court Judge for the District of Hawaii Derrick Kahala Watson, after Watson halted Trump's ban restricting travel from several majority-Muslim countries. Sessions remarked, "I really am amazed that a judge sitting on an island in the Pacific can issue an order that stops the president of the United States from what appears to be clearly his statutory and Constitutional power." Drawing on Kim's theory of racial triangulation discussed earlier in the semester, this student asked his peers, "Why do you think Native Americans/Alaska Natives/Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders have been delineated as sub-American?" and

"Does Sessions represent the greater societal perspective over indigenous peoples?" Another woman in class used her presentation to highlight and trouble what seemed to her an over-representation of White people at the Women's March and Climate March.



12:23 PM - 20 Apr 2017  
 SCREENSHOT OF SENATOR MAZIE HIRONO (HI)'S TWEET RESPONDING TO ATTORNEY GENERAL JEFF SESSION AFTER HE MADE A PEJORATIVE COMMENT ABOUT U.S. DISTRICT COURT JUDGE FOR THE DISTRICT OF HAWAII DERRICK KAHALA WATSON AND THE STATE OF HAWAII FOLLOWING WATSON'S DECISION TO SUSPEND DONALD TRUMP'S TRAVEL BAN.

The story of the violent removal of a seated airline passenger aboard a United Airlines plane in Chicago was treated over two weeks by three students as the story grew legs and became deserving of additional analysis. During the week that the story broke, two students referenced racial triangulation, gendered race prototypes, and model minority archetypes to explain why they thought Dr. David Dao, the passenger, was selected for ejection. They probed stereotypes about Asians' willingness to cooperate and submit to authority, and they reflected upon the socially-constructed imagination that Asian men are effeminate and incapable of resistance. Weeks later, when media outlets were reporting that Dao allegedly had a history of substance abuse, one student wrote that these accounts worked to sully the model minority narrative that may have led to his "randomly" chosen removal, and he anticipated that the defamation of his character would work to undermine the compassion extended to Dao, and mollify the indignation that started a dialogue about passengers' rights, and drove the airline's stock prices into a temporary downward spiral.

## Racial Realism, Reparations, and Wildest Dreams

The unit on structural racism painted a dire scene. Each week's readings made a very clear case that the life chances of the American people—both citizens and denizens—are predictably and differentially influenced by race. Alongside each distressing theme, however, were examples of people awakening to their agency, working with others to shape the world in a more egalitarian vision. To underscore the significance of people taking matters into their own hands, I designed the following week to ask two important questions that every champion of egalitarianism should be asked: Is racism permanent? If so, is racial justice still worth fighting for?

The prospect of permanent racism was presented in dialectic fashion, starting with Derrick Bell's science fiction short story "The Space Traders" (1992a) and his more academic argument "Racial Realism" (1992b), which asserts that (a) racial inequality is an integral and indelible fixture of American society, (b) Black people can avoid despair and reap other life-giving benefits once they accept that they will never be treated as equal to Whites, and (c) resistance to oppression is nevertheless invaluable to the human spirit. John A. Powell's, "Racial Realism or Racial Despair?" (1992) counters Bell's thesis by arguing that while strides forward are slow-moving, current times are undoubtedly better for Black people than they were hundreds of years ago. He continues by arguing that the despair of Black people is not predicated upon their belief in an unbelievable principle (equality); rather their despondence is a byproduct of the material reality of their sub-standard homes, schools, jobs, and overall standing as citizens. Our conversation in class demonstrated a wavering between the two critical race theorists. In some senses, students admitted that the premise of Bell's short story was believable—that the modern U.S. government would trade away the lives of Black people for material resources—and they entertained the idea that perhaps there is something more triumphant and fulfilling than racial equality. On the other hand, students were compelled by Powell's insistence that Black people are not powerless, and that equality, on its face, is worth striving for because it is part of what makes us human. In the end, they seemed to understand that both Bell and Powell find value in resistance, no matter how formidable racism is.

We concluded this discussion of permanent racism with Lawrie Balfour's "Unthinking Racial Realism: A Future for Reparations?" (2014). In this article, Balfour writes that reparations are often cast aside as unfeasible even within sympathetic circles, but she proposes that in publicly taking up the matter of reparations with all seriousness, we can unleash new democratic possibilities. Taking Balfour's recommendation at face value, I looked at my students' solemn eyes and asked them, "In your wildest dreams, what does reparations look like?" With gestures of amusement, many of them looked as if they hadn't been asked about their dreams in a long time. Before anyone had the courage to be the first to talk, I started passing around blank pieces of paper and said I was giving them five minutes to respond in writing. I asked that their dreams remain anonymous so that they could write more freely and not feel as self-conscious when I later read their responses aloud. Below is an abbreviated list of what they wrote:

- laws against saying the N-word if you are not Black
- free healthcare for life
- de-colonize love
- Trump apologizes for all of his negative and derogatory statements made publicly, admits racism is alive, that he has had a hand in it, and that it needs to be stopped
- houses, cars, and gas for everyone

- complete debt forgiveness
- make it mandatory for the racial makeup of the Supreme Court to reflect that of society
- repair infrastructure in Flint, MI
- freedom for all people in prison for non-violent drug convictions, restoration of voting rights, and a home suitable for the size of a person's family
- White people will no longer be threatened by the existence of their Black brother, but empowered by their tenacity and resilience
- undocumented youth under DACA granted citizenship, as well as parents
- women are paid equal salaries to their male colleague in the same position
- mandatory Black history being taught in all public schools
- no more food deserts
- more memorials honoring the oppressed
- reparations for me is accepting responsibility for the past, the present and the future
- trauma-healing resources for people who have survived this racialized system
- truth and reconciliation commissions to create awareness of racism and social structures that continue to oppress
- \$\$\$
- groups would get to vote and decide for themselves what they want their reparations to look like
- laws to prevent any of this from later being taken away

After shuffling the collected papers, and reading them off with declarative flair, I told them that I thought it was really important for us to talk about our dreams, especially when those dreams are for all of us. Pondering the prospect that racial inequality is never-ending and unamendable at the beginning of class and then deliberating on the potentiality for justice and rectification at the end wound up being a thought-provoking and emotionally demanding exercise. The difficulty of these topics nurtured a certain growth and maturation in their thinking, which was well-demonstrated for the remainder of the class.

## Modeling Collective Action

Asking my students whether racial equality is worth struggling for, even if they never see the fruits of their labor and even if their efforts never bear fruit at all, is a question of will and commitment. The struggle is a collective one in which we can all play a part. To model collective action, I invited local activists to visit as guest

speakers so that they could discuss their motivations, goals, strategies, trials, victories, and sources of endurance.

During our unit on policing and incarceration, a member of the local Black Youth Project 100 (BYP 100) chapter discussed their new advocacy campaign to revise the role of police escorts for paramedics during health-related emergency calls. She shared with the class why and how her organization uses intersectionality as a guiding principle, and discussed the merits of all-Black organizations working in tandem with all-White organizations.

In the penultimate week of class during our unit on White Resistance to Racial Dominance, a member of Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ)—an organization working to equip and mobilize White people in the broader movement for racial justice—spoke about how White numbness to racial inequality undermines the humanity of White people. She explained that it is strategically and ethically important to take cues from her organization's Black comrades regarding whether to escalate the intensity of direct action when they participate in protests side-by-side; if Whites "up the ante" without the consent of their more racially vulnerable partners, it is likely that the people of color around them will be unevenly targeted by antagonistic parties.

Our final speaker, from the Virginia Coalition of Latino Organizations (VACOLAO) helped us think about the importance of building ties between allied partners that extend beyond their shared political goals. When this organization—which works to secure immigrant rights and improve the lives of Latinxs throughout the state—joined forces with a Muslim immigrant advocacy group, they knew that their common interests would be better served by reaching out to elected officials together or sharing resources to set up information sessions for their constituents. However, to sustain their partnership and commitment to one another, the two groups took additional steps to build personal relationships by planning social events like hosting an art show at the local Islamic center for the general community. Despite the uniquely challenging times in which he now works, the speaker reminded my class that making time for fun and community-building helps activists persist. To hear three people from different racial backgrounds talk about the strategies, hardships, and joys of working with others to bring about a more just existence helped my students feel hopeful, empowered, and more aware of what they should bear in mind when working within and across racial lines.

## Distillation and Resistance

For our final paper, I gave students the option of writing a letter to someone they know describing four topics from the course, and explaining what is at stake in discussing these matters. At first glance, the assignment sounds perhaps too easy for a graduate-level course. However, being able to articulate complicated and controversial ideas in everyday language is both challenging and necessary. Eleven of my nineteen

students selected this option; seven of the letters addressed family members, three addressed friends, and one was written to the student's co-workers.

A handful of letters challenged their addressees. One male of color lovingly confronted his immigrant mother about the way she used to tell him that their ethnic group was better than others, and that this mentality was emblematic of racial triangulation which pits certain racial minorities against each other in their subordination to Whites. Others read as notes of caution, such as one from a Black woman urging her male adolescent cousin to be mindful of colorblindness and all the ways it may impact his life. One White woman told her conservative father how she could not isolate the knowledge she had gained about structural racism from the lessons he taught her about every person's equal worth before God. A second White woman writing to her father explained how after "watch[ing] in dismay as [her] classmates and friends fear what will become of them because of the new structures of violence and discrimination" she began to "question a lot about [her]self and what [she] believe[s], but in a good way," deciding she could "no longer ignore the injustices [she] see[s] in the laws, policies, and social structure of our society."

The letter to co-workers was written by a White woman who teaches at a local school. Her letter to a majority-White faculty was framed as a follow-up to the critical racial dialogues they have been organizing in-house in hopes of better serving their majority students of color. Recognizing that the school was going through particular growing pains, she explained that while she holds no animus toward any group of people, she realizes that implicit biases may be affecting the way she carries out her work with students and other teachers. She asked, "Will you help me check my own biases, every day? Will you join me in doing the same?" After interweaving various subject matter from class and explaining that she better understands that White people have a role to play in racial justice, she ended her letter, "May this time of discomfort and unease prompt us to create racial change that truly embodies the justice, beauty, truth and goodness we so dearly value." After turning in grades for the semester, she wrote me to say that she decided to send the letter to her principal and other faculty members, and that it had helped them see why she was taking particular race-conscious stands at their meetings.

## Concluding Thoughts

Race and Conflict is an intense course because it demonstrates to students that millions of lives are at stake when we either perpetuate or challenge the racial status quo; one way or another, we end up playing a part—there is no neutral ground here. The skillset of asking good questions, thinking for oneself, applying abstract ideas to make sense of current events, explaining complex concepts through everyday language, and exercising the courage to dream aloud empowers students to become agents of change. As an educator, I am humbled and privileged to play a role in the acquisition of these tools. Ultimately,

however, the will to act is something people must develop for themselves.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>The racial self-identifications of my students included Black/African American, Hispanic/ Latinx, Asian/Asian American, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and White.

<sup>2</sup>A YouTube video of this TED talk can be accessed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EzZZ qpZ4w>.

<sup>3</sup>The long name of the sculpture is "A Subtelty: Or the Marvelous Sugar Baby, an Homage to the unpaid and overworked Artisans who have refined our Sweet tastes from the cane fields to the Kitchens of the New World on the Occasion of the demolition of the Domino Sugar Refining Plant."

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- Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. 2014. *Racial Formation in the United States (4<sup>th</sup> edition)*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Passidomo, Catarina. 2014. "Whose Right to (Farm) the City? Race and Food Justice Activism in Post-Katrina New Orleans." *Agricultural Human Values* 31 pp. 385-396.
- Pew Research Center, Jan. 2017, "Behind the Badge: Amid Protests and Calls for Reform, how Police View their Jobs, Key Issues and Recent Fatal Encounters between Blacks and Police."
- powell, john a. 1992. "Racial Realism or Racial Despair?" *Connecticut Law Review* 24 pp. 533-551.
- Precious Knowledge*. Directed by Ari Luis Palos. 2011. USA: Dos Vatos Productions, Inc. DVD.
- Rosa, Jonathan. 2016. "Racializing Language, Regimenting Latinas/os: Chronotype, Social Tense, and American Raciolinguistic Futures" *Language & Communication* 46 pp. 106-117.
- Schug, Joanna, Nicholas P. Alt, and Karl Christoph Klauer. 2015. "Gendered Race Prototypes: Evidence for the Non-Prototypicality of Asian Men and Black Women." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 56 pp. 121-125.



# Syllabus: Race and Conflict

CONF 721

Spring 2017

Wednesdays 4:30pm-7:10pm

Founders Hall 210

Dr. Tehama Lopez Bunyasi

Email address: [tlopezbu@gmu.edu](mailto:tlopezbu@gmu.edu)

## Course Description

The beginning of this course will be dedicated to understanding what race is, how it functions, and how people become racialized. We will then examine the racial ideology of colorblindness, inter-racial dynamics that lead to intra- (and inter-) racial conflict, the role of bias in perpetuating inequality, and examples of racism and resistance to racism in U.S. pop culture. We will then spend four weeks covering racial conflict, inequality, and violence in the realms of health, the environment, incarcerating institutions, and education. In the last fourth of the course, we will study arguments for and against racial realism, and will conclude with the possibilities of coalition-building. Ultimately, this course is geared toward providing a foundation from which students will be able to think critically about racial conflicts in the United States, as well as in other parts of the world.

## Expectations for Participation

Although the professor will often begin each class with brief comments and some points of clarification, much of the course will run as a seminar, reliant upon dialogue between students. A successful, productive class will require that you do the following:

- Come to class each day with both generous and critical commentary prepared
- Summarize the central thesis/argument of the assigned reading
- Give examples of how the thesis/argument is supported
- Identify weaknesses/strengths in the thesis/argument and methodology
- If appropriate, identify to whom/or to what the author is responding
- Identify questions that you think will illuminate the text for you
- Identify question that you would like to ask your classmates (at this level of education, some of your best learning will come from listening to your peers as you pick one another's brains)
- Respectfully listen to the views and ideas of others
- Remember that learning in community is a special experience, and it is one that is enhanced with a **compassionate disposition**.

Regular attendance is expected; if one does not attend, one cannot participate. During class discussions, the professor will be expecting people to raise their hands so that they may be called upon. When raised hands are not forthcoming, she will call on people at random.

## Basis for Grading for Master's Students:

Theory application (midterm) 7-page paper due March 22	35%
Final 7-page paper due May 10	35%
News connection presentation (due throughout semester)	10%
In-class participation throughout semester	20%

## Basis for Grading for PhD Students:

Theory application (midterm) 7-page paper due March 22	25%
Final 15-page paper due May 10	60%
In-class participation throughout semester	15%

## Grading Scale

A 93-100

- A- 90-92.9
- B+ 87-89.9
- B 83-86.9
- B- 80-82.9
- C 70-79.9\*
- F <70\*

### Required Texts

- Excerpts from Alexander, Michelle. 2010. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: The New Press.
- Ansell, David. A. 2015. "Bias, Black Lives, and Academic Medicine." *The New England Journal of Medicine* 372 (12) pp. 1087-1089.
- Balfour, Lawrie. 2014. "Unthinking Racial Realism: A Future for Reparations?" *Du Bois Review* 11(1) pp. 43-56.
- Bassett, Mary T. 2015. "#BlackLivesMatter—A Challenge to the Medical and Public Health Communities." *The New England Journal of Medicine* 372 (12) pp. 1085-1087.
- Excerpt from Bell, Derrick. 1992. *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bell, Derrick. 1992. "Racial Realism." *Connecticut Law Review* 24(2) pp. 363-379.
- Bertrand, Marianne and Sendhil Mullainathan. 2004. "Are Emily and Greg More Employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A Field Experiment on Labor Market Discrimination." *The American Economic Review* 94 (4) pp. 991-1013.
- Black, Sara Thomas, Richard Anthony Milligan, and Nik Heynen. 2016. "Solidarity in Climate/Immigrant Justice Direct Action: Lessons from Movements in the US South." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 40(2) 284-298.
- Excerpt from Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. 2006. *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Brown, Hana and Jennifer A. Jones. 2016. "Immigrant Rights are Civil Rights." *Contexts* 15(2) pp. 34-39.
- Butler, Paul. 2016. "The System is Working the Way it is Supposed to: The Limits of Criminal Justice Reform." *The Georgetown Law Journal* 104 pp. 1419-1478.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *CDC Health Disparities and Inequalities Report—United States, 2013*. *MMWR* 2013; 62 (Suppl 3).
- Cohen, Cathy J. 1996. "Contested Membership: Black Gay Identities and the Politics of AIDS." In *Queer Theory/Sociology*, ed. Seidman, Steven, pp. 362-94. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers.
- Delgado, Richard. 2013. "Precious Knowledge: State Bans on Ethnic Studies, Book Traffickers (*Librotraficantes*), and a New Type of Race Trial." *North Carolina Law Review* 91 pp. 1513-1553.
- Delgado, Richard and Jean Stefancic. 2016. "Critical Perspectives on Police, Policing, and Mass Incarceration." *The Georgetown Law Journal* 104 pp. 1531-1557.
- Eichstedt, Jennifer L. 2001. "Problematic White Identities and a Search for Racial Justice." *Sociological Forum* 16, 3 pp. 445-470.
- Garner, Steve and Saher Selod. 2015. "The Racialization of Muslims: Empirical Studies of Islamophobia." *Critical Sociology* 41, 1 pp. 9-19.
- Gest, Justin. 2016. "The White Working-Class Minority: A Counter-Narrative." *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 4(1) pp. 126-143.
- Excerpt from Hochschild, Jennifer L., Vesla M. Weaver and Traci R. Burch. 2012. *Creating a New Racial Order: How Immigration, Multiracialism, Genomics, and the Young Can Remake Race in America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Horne, Tom. "An Open Letter to the Citizens of Tucson." June 11, 2007.
- House Bill 2281. State of Arizona House of Representatives. 49th Legislature. Second Regular Session. 2010.
- Jungkunz, Vincent. 2011. "Dismantling Whiteness: Silent Yielding and the Potentiality of Political Suicide." *Contemporary Political Theory* 10, 1 pp. 3-20.

- Kim, Claire Jean. 1999. "The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans." *Politics & Society* 27,1 pp. 105-138.
- Lopez Bunyasi, Tehama and Leah Wright Rigueur. 2015. "'Breaking Bad' in Black and White: What Ideological Deviance Can Tell Us about the Construction of 'Authentic' Racial Identities." *Polity* 47, 2 pp. 175-198.
- McKanders, Karla Mari. 2010. "Black and Brown Coalition Building During the 'Post-Racial' Obama Era." *Saint Louis University Public Law Review* 29(2) 473-499.
- Excerpts from Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. 2014. *Racial Formation in the United States* (3rd edition). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Passidomo, Catarina. 2014. "Whose Right to (Farm) the City? Race and Food Justice Activism in Post-Katrina New Orleans." *Agricultural Human Values* 31 pp. 385-396.
- Pew Research Center, Jan. 2017, "Behind the Badge: Amid Protests and Calls for Reform, how Police View their Jobs, Key Issues and Recent Fatal Encounters between Blacks and Police."
- powell, john a. 1992. "Racial Realism or Racial Despair?" *Connecticut Law Review* 24 pp. 533-551.
- Pulido, Laura. 2015. "Geographies of Race and Ethnicity I: White Supremacy vs. White Privilege in Environmental Racism Research." *Progress in Human Geography* 39, 6 pp. 809-817.
- Rodriguez, Javier M., Arline T. Geronimus, John Bound, Danny Dorling. 2015. "Black Lives Matter: Differential Mortality and the Racial Composition of the U.S. Electorate, 1970-2004." *Social Science and Medicine* 136-137 pp. 193-199.
- Rosa, Jonathan. 2016. "Racializing Language, Regimenting Latinas/os: Chronotype, Social Tense, and American Raciolinguistic Futures." *Language & Communication* 46 pp. 106-117.
- Schug, Joanna, Nicholas P. Alt, and Karl Christoph Klauer. 2015. "Gendered Race Prototypes: Evidence for the Non-Prototypicality of Asian Men and Black Women." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 56 pp. 121-125.

## Course Schedule

The following schedule is subject to change according to the learning needs of the class.

### **Jan. 25. Introductions**

Introductions. Syllabus review.

Class activity

### **Feb. 1. Racial Formation in the United States**

Readings to be completed for February 1:

"The Theory of Racial Formation" by Michael Omi and Howard Winant, pp. 105-136

### **Feb. 8. Colorblindness**

Readings to be completed for February 8:

"Colorblindness, Neoliberalism, and Obama" by Michael Omi and Howard Winant, pp. 211-244

"The Central Frames of Color-Blind Racism" by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, pp. 25-52 (second edition)

### **Feb. 15. Racializing Religion, Gender and Language: Implications for Normativity and Marginalization**

Readings to be completed for February 15:

"The Racialization of Muslims: Empirical Studies of Islamophobia" by Steve Garner and Saher Selod, pp. 9-19

"Gendered Race Prototypes: Evidence for the Non-Prototypicality of Asian Men and Black Women" by Joanna Schug, Nicholas P. Alt, Karl Christoph Klauer, pp. 121-125.

"Racializing Language, Regimenting Latinas/os: Chronotype, Social Tense, and the American Raciolinguistic Futures" by Jonathan Rosa, pp. 106-117.

### **Feb. 22. Inter-Racial Dynamics as Sources of Intra-Racial Conflict**

In-Class Documentary: Most Honorable Son

Readings to be completed for February 22:

"The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans" by Claire Kim, pp. 105-138

"Contested Membership: Black Gay Identities and the Politics of AIDS" by Cathy Cohen, pp. 362-394

"'Breaking Bad' in Black and White: What Ideological Deviance Can Tell Us about the Construction of 'Authentic' Racial Identities" by Tehama Lopez Bunyasi and Leah Wright Rigueur, pp. 175-198

### **March 1. Implicit Bias**

Readings to be completed for March 1:

"Are Emily and Greg More Employable than Lakisha and Jamal: A Field Experiment on Labor Market Discrimination" by Marianne Bertrand and Sendhil Mullainathan, pp. 991-1013

Implicit Association Test

### **March 8. Racism and Resistance in U.S. Pop Culture/Media**

Going to the Movies! Class trip to see Get Out

### **March 15. Spring Break**

### **March 22. Health Disparities, Environmental Racism, and Environmental Justice I**

Using USDA maps to visualize food deserts: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/go-to-the-atlas/>

Theory Application Midterm paper due

Readings to be completed for March 22:

"CDC Health Disparities and Inequalities Report—United States, 2013" by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, pp. 1-184

"#BlackLivesMatter—A Challenge to the Medical and Public Health Communities" by Mary T. Bassett, pp. 1085-1087

"Bias, Black Lives, and Academic Medicine" by David A. Ansell and Edwin K. McDonald, pp. 1087-1089

"Black Lives Matter: Differential Mortality and the Racial Composition of the U.S. Electorate, 1970-2004" by Javier M. Rodriguez et. al., pp. 193-199

Geographies of Race and Ethnicity 1: White Supremacy v. White Privilege in Environmental Racism Research" by Laura Pulido, pp. 809-817

### **March 29. Health Disparities, Environmental Racism, and Environmental Justice II**

TED talk: Ron Finley: A Guerilla Gardener in South Central LA

Readings to be completed for March 29:

"Whose Right to (Farm) the City? Race and Food Justice Activism in Post-Katrina New Orleans" by Catarina Passidomo, pp. 385-396

"Solidarity in Climate/Immigrant Justice Direct Action: Lessons from the Movements in the US South" by Sara Thomas Black, Richard Anthony Milligan, and Nik Heynen, pp. 284-298

### **April 5. Policing and Incarceration**

Guest speaker from Black Youth Project (BYP) 100

Readings to be completed for April 5:

"The Lockdown" in The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Era of Colorblindness by Michelle Alexander, pp. 58-94

"Behind the Badge" by Rich Morin, Kim Parker, Renee Stepler, and Andrew Mercer, pp. 1-88

"Critical Perspectives on Police, Policing, and Mass Incarceration" by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, pp. 1531-1557

"The Cruel Hand" in *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Era of Colorblindness* by Michelle Alexander, pp. 137-172

"The System is Working the Way it is Supposed to: The Limits of Criminal Justice Reform" by Paul Butler, pp. 1419-1478

### **April 12. Education: Color-Conscious v. Color-Blind Educational Pedagogies**

In-Class Documentary: Precious Knowledge

Readings to be completed for April 12:

"Precious Knowledge: State Bans on Ethnic Studies, Book Traffickers (Librotraficantes), and a New Type of Race Trial" by Richard Delgado, pp. 1513-1553

"An Open Letter to the Citizens of Tucson" by Tom Horne. June 11, 2007.

House Bill 2281. State of Arizona House of Representatives. 49th Legislature. Second Regular Session. 2010.

### **April 19. Is U.S. Racism Permanent?**

Readings to be completed for April 19:

"The Space Traders" by Derrick Bell, pp. 158-194

"Racial Realism" by Derrick Bell, pp. 363-379

"Racial Realism or Racial Despair?" by John A. Powell, pp. 533-551

"Unthinking Racial Realism: A Future for Reparations?" by Lawrie Balfour, pp. 43-56

### **April 26. White Resistance to Racial Dominance**

Guest Speaker from Showing Up for Racial Justice

Readings to be completed for April 26:

"Dismantling Whiteness: Silent Yielding and the Potentiality of Political Suicide" by Vincent Jungkunz, pp. 3-20

"Problematic White Identities and a Search for Racial Justice" by Jennifer Eichstedt, pp. 445-470

### **May 3. Building Coalitions**

Guest Speaker from Virginia Coalition of Latino Organizations

Readings to be completed for May 3:

"The White Working-Class Minority: A Counter-Narrative" by Justin Gest, pp. 126-143.

"Black and Brown Coalition Building During the 'Post-Racial' Obama Era" by Karla Mari McKanders, pp. 473-499

"Immigrant Rights are Civil Rights" by Hana Brown and Jennifer A. Jones, pp. 34-39

"Cohort Change" by Jennifer Hochschild, Vesla Weaver and Traci Burch, pp. 113-138

### **Instructor's Intellectual Property**

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