

ISSUE 110

RADICAL TEACHER

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



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

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Introduction: Carrying the Banner of Socialism

by Michael Bennett



SOCIALISM - WORKERS IN SOUTH AFRICA GO ON STRIKE! BY JACOB ANIKULAP, 2009

A space on the agenda at the end of every *Radical Teacher* board meeting is reserved for a political discussion—sometimes based on an article or articles that a board member has circulated in advance, other times focusing on a topic we hope to address in future issues; occasionally the discussion arises from email exchanges about recent political developments; and not infrequently it's a topic that someone throws out on the spur of the moment. If the meeting has gone on too long, we have been known to dispense with the political discussion altogether (out of exhaustion, time constraints, or, lately, depression at the political moment we inhabit). It's difficult not to get discouraged politically in the wake of the most recent presidential election, but this fact also generated my favorite recent topic, which carried over two board meetings: What does one do to remain hopeful in these dire times?

My own answer to this question was to focus on the counterreaction to Trump, especially among those who are generally considered "college-aged." I am encouraged by the fact that young people currently view socialism more favorably than capitalism (Magnus, Rampel), they supported the one self-described "democratic socialist" candidate in the most recent presidential election by a significant margin over any other candidate (Blake), and they comprise the largest bloc of members contributing to the growth of Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). DSA, which doubled in size during Bernie's campaign, and doubled again after Trump's election, has become the largest socialist organization in the United States since the turn of the 20th Century (Williams). For someone who has been a member of DSA since I was college-aged, this development has been both surprising and encouraging, reenergizing my commitment to the growth of the organization. After taking early retirement from Long Island University, I joined the national board of the DSA Fund (the educational branch of DSA). Many of my *Radical Teacher* colleagues have been enthusiastically supportive of this development, for which I am supremely grateful.

I should point out, however, that *Radical Teacher* is resolutely non-sectarian, and the views presented here are my own. We don't end *RT* meetings by secretly transforming into a Maoist cell group. In fact, the *RT* board screens out sectarians who feel that there is only one true shining path to liberation. This non-sectarianism is what attracted me to both *RT* and DSA. For me, the D in DSA is crucial. I'm not entirely sure what a socialist future looks like, but I consider that a strength. I think that the future should be arrived at through pragmatic change that is democratically determined. It seems clear to me that this future would include healthcare for all, guaranteed food & housing, and fully financed free public education from nursery school to graduate school. But we will have to wait and see.

Though not tied to any one vision of a socialist future, *Radical Teacher* is committed to socialism. Not long ago, we revisited the subtitle of our journal—"a socialist, feminist, and anti-racist journal on the theory and practice of teaching"—and decided that we are still invested in the word "socialist" and not just "anti-capitalist" or some other word that completes the triumvirate of gender, race, and

class. What's more, we are dedicated to what has come to be called "intersectionality": the ways in which class, race, gender, and other modes of social classification are imbricated with one another (Collins, Crenshaw). So, for us, the kind of feminism engaged in by radical teachers is simultaneously socialist and anti-racist; anti-racist thought needs to be grounded in gender and class analysis; and socialism is always inflected through race and gender. This proposition is at the core of radical teaching.

As you might imagine, adherence to these core beliefs means that we end up rejecting a large number of submissions that come our way. For queries and essays that are not submitted for a particular themed issue (those go to the editors of that issue), the manuscript co-editors, Sarah Chinn and I, are the first line of defense. We weed out essays that don't have radical politics, fail to address the theory *and* practice of teaching, or are so poorly written that we can't imagine the author(s) making a successful revision. All the essays that make it past this initial cut are sent to two readers who advise us on the next step: Reject, Resubmit for Review, Revisions Required, or Accept. The answer is almost never "accept as is." Essays typically need to add more about the nuts and bolts of teaching (the "practice" part of theory and practice); explore how and why the teaching described is "radical"; and/or need work on grammar, phrasing, and structure. Unlike many journals, however, we are willing to work closely with authors on multiple revisions if we feel that a publishable essay might emerge from this process.

Among the most frustrating back-and-forths are those about what counts as "radical." We get far too many essays that are liberal or well-intentioned, or that describe themselves as "critical" or "progressive," but they're not radical. They might, for instance, be feminist but they're not socialist feminist. They might address race, but from the perspective of a touchy feely multicultural or tolerance model. They might be anti-capitalist, but with a doctrinaire Marxism uninflected by gender and race. They might embrace a radical politics, but in a highly technical language that runs counter to our commitment to provide a space for all educators, from pre-K to doctoral. Sometimes people are willing to be challenged about their politics, and the result can be a rather startling realization on the part of the author about the differences between liberalism and radicalism. Sometimes we have a parting of the ways because even multiple revisions aren't able to craft an essay that fits into a journal called *Radical Teacher*.

We also receive a pleasingly large number of essays that meet all our criteria, sometimes after much revising but also on occasion with very little back-and-forth. In the case of the current issue, we were particularly fortunate to work with authors who for the most part fully responded to reviewers' comments without further prompting by Sarah and me. These authors clearly articulated their radical politics, while keeping an eye on both pedagogical theory and practice. Many of the essays emphasized how challenging but necessary it is to engage in radical teaching within the constraints of this difficult political moment.

Dan Colson's essay "Teaching Radically with Koch Money" and Jaime Madden's "Instructor or Customer

Service Representative?: Reflections on Teaching in a For-Profit College” directly confront two of the realities of teaching in a time of conservative and neoliberal assaults on higher education: having to rely on corporate money to fund colleges and universities (Colson) and trying to work within the constraints of the for-profit sector (Madden). Dan Colson narrates his experience of applying for a grant from his university’s Koch Center for Leadership and Ethics, and teaching the redesigned Survey of Later American Literature the grant funded. Colson explores the Koch Center’s rhetoric, focusing especially on the space between their putative neutrality and their clear embrace of right-wing definitions of freedom. The course Colson taught redeployed the Center’s language about “leadership,” “ethics,” and “freedom” in order to foreground their circumscribed notions of these concepts. Colson’s essay concludes with some thoughts about how to resist higher education’s seemingly inexorable shift rightward by reshaping the language and emphases of organizations like the Koch Center, ultimately suggesting we combat these neoliberal tendencies by battling them directly on the ground of “freedom.” Jaime Madden’s essay offers a critical retrospective engagement with her experience teaching at a for-profit institution of higher education. Madden interrogates the institution’s “customer service orientation,” which created distinctive expectations for how instructors interact with their students and for how they are expected to foster this orientation in student behavior. Madden provides an interesting tour of the institution’s spatial configuration and marketing campaign before focusing on two aspects of the for-profit educational experience: 1) the classroom experience within a generic sociology course that attempted to work against the customer service orientation; and 2) a close reading of a course textbook assigned to all incoming students, which reveals most clearly the dual operations of neoliberal individualism and a customer service orientation. Both of these essays explore the complex and calculated negotiations of teachers and students with academic capitalism.

Colson’s essay concludes with some thoughts about how to resist higher education’s seemingly inexorable shift rightward by reshaping the language and emphases of organizations like the Koch Center, ultimately suggesting we combat these neoliberal tendencies by battling them directly on the ground of “freedom.”

Though most submissions to *Radical Teacher* focus on post-secondary education, we are also happy to publish germane essays that come our way about non-traditional teaching environments (community centers, labor unions, archives, ...) and primary or secondary schools. The latter is the topic of Rachel Jean’s “Promoting Social Action through Visual Literacy: *New Pioneer* & *The Labor Defender* in the Secondary Classroom.” Given the task of developing

her students’ “visual literacy,” Jean chose to disrupt her students’ expectations based on contemporary visual media by presenting them with left-wing political magazines from the 1920s-1930s: *Labor Defender* and *New Pioneer*. Jean maintains that using these unfamiliar and politically charged materials helped her students to reach the learning goals of visual literacy while broadening their cultural values and encouraging their ideals of social action. Her essay is another example of how teachers can maneuver within constricting circumstances (in this case, core standards for visual literacy) to achieve radical ends.

The other two essays in this issue focus on historical and contemporary anti-racist social movements and their representations. Tehama Lopez Bunyasi’s “Structural Racism and the Will to Act” describes how today’s Black liberation movement inspired her to revise a graduate course on race and conflict, encouraging students to think about how contemporary institutions and social practices determine the value of life at the color line. Initially, Lopez Bunyasi was inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement to revise her curriculum to more directly address contemporary manifestations of the Black radical tradition; in the epilogue, she ponders another round of revisions given the outcome of the 2016 presidential election. Jennifer Ryan-Bryant’s essay “Anti-Racist Pedagogy In and Against Lynching Culture” develops a specifically anti-racist pedagogy to address the legacy of lynching and its representations in the United States. She and the students in her class were anxious to avoid replicating the ways in which the topic of lynching is often circumscribed (through the assumption that the term only applies to the past) or commodified (through marketing horrific images). Ryan-Bryant and her students worked to connect earlier anti-lynching campaigns by Ida B. Wells and others with contemporary movements to resist the harms inflicted on black bodies. They also made a conscious decision mostly to eschew visual images of lynching so as to avoid replicating the specularization of the black body evident in early postcards of lynchings that were circulated as souvenirs of white supremacy.

The fact that both of these essays focus on structural racism as an outgrowth and enforcer of predatory capitalism is a perspective shared by the author and subject of the interview reprinted from Truthout.org in this issue of *Radical Teacher*. Chris Steele’s “Decolonizing the Classroom: Embracing Radical Internationalism” investigates ways to decolonize the classroom through employing internationalist Black radical historical perspectives. The article features an interview with the prolific historian Gerald Horne, who discusses the importance of how history is framed in the classroom regarding people of color, colonialism, resistance, and representation. As we head from 2017 into 2018, the internet has blown up over the disagreement between prominent Black intellectuals Ta-Nehisi Coates and Cornel West. Though one can critique West for the tone and strategy of his critique of Coates, it’s difficult for radical teachers to disagree with many of his claims. For instance, West argues that Coates’s “gross misunderstanding of who Malcolm X was—the greatest prophetic voice against the American Empire—and who Barack Obama is—the first

black head of the American Empire—speaks volumes about Coates’ neoliberal view of the world.” West maintains that it is necessary to confront such a neoliberal view because he stands “with those like Robin DG Kelley, Gerald Horne, Imani Perry and Barbara Ransby who represent the radical wing of the black freedom struggle. We refuse to disconnect white supremacy from the realities of class, empire, and other forms of domination—be it ecological, sexual, or others.” In republishing this interview with Gerald Horne, *Radical Teacher* is also declaring where we stand: at the intersection of socialist, feminist, and anti-racist movements contesting the center’s neoliberalism and the right wing’s combination of libertarianism, sexism, and white supremacy.

It is difficult not to get discouraged by the apparent ascendancy of this right-wing version of the triumvirate of class, sex, and race. And many of my *Radical Teacher* colleagues have in fact been quite depressed by the forces unearthed in the wake of Trump’s victory, as have I. However, working with DSA and interacting with students, teachers, and others who proudly carry the banner of socialism into a new era has made me more sanguine. I truly believe that the most recent election is the last or next-to-last gasp of white supremacy as a determining factor in presidential elections (though it will linger, as it has since the founding, in the marrow of the

body politic). The counterreaction to Trump gives me hope for the future. This hope is shared by the authors published in this issue of *Radical Teacher*. Since its founding, this journal has been dedicated to socialism, feminism, and anti-racism; we will continue to act on this dedication; thank you for joining us in this freedom struggle.

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Teaching Radically with Koch Money

by Dan Colson



CHARLES AND DAVID KOCH - THE KOCH BROTHERS BY DONKEYHOTHEY, 2015

In 2014, Kansas's Emporia State University (ESU) announced the opening of the Koch Center for Leadership and Ethics, a new initiative with the mission "To explore the impact of principled entrepreneurship in a free society and to apply market principles to management."¹ As *Radical Teacher's* readers might expect, this news elicited mixed responses. Many of us worried the Koch Center's origins (it was funded largely through donations from the Fred and Mary Koch Foundation, Koch Industries, and three Koch employees/ESU alumni) signaled the further encroachment of right-wing influence on our campus. The university, though, insisted the new center was a boon; and, lest any of us who don't want Koch funds shaping our school be concerned, the self-congratulatory announcement ensured us that "the work supported by the Koch Center will be grounded in academic freedom and will positively impact students, faculty and the community."

Obviously, the trite adoption of "academic freedom" and the empty claim the Center would have positive effects did not allay our concerns, but this is the reality of decreased state support for education: colleges and universities—even public ones—will seek external funding; and forces that wish to counter the bogeyman of left-leaning, purportedly radical, anti-American higher education will gladly fund programs that espouse free-market values.² So, while we clearly should resist the influx of money from groups like the Koch Foundation, for many of us, we must also ask a dishearteningly practical question: what do we do once that ship has sailed? Once our campuses have Koch Centers?³

This essay narrates my efforts to do precisely that: to take meaningful (if admittedly small-scale) political action that fights my own university's embrace of right-wing, free-market "investments" in higher education. In what follows, I explore my campus's Koch Center as an example of the neoliberal rhetoric, objectives, and initiatives that accompany the influx of money from these sources. Then, I recount my experiences taking some of that money with the express purpose to use it for radical ends: to work directly against the Center's agenda. By focusing on students' responses to the class, I describe one model for—and, more importantly, the stakes of—resisting higher education's seemingly inexorable shift rightward by reshaping these free-market proponents' emphasis on "freedom."

Neoliberal Rhetoric in the Contemporary University: The Struggle over "Freedom"

The Koch Center opened during ESU's previous president's tenure. He oversaw a campus-wide push toward "leadership," so the Center's website still contains a large amount of language emphasizing this focus:

The center's goal is to engage students, faculty, and others in an open and ongoing discussion about ethical leadership in the life of an individual, in business and other organizations, and in communities. Our activities and research will explore how ethical leadership can be

most effectively taught and learned within any field of study or endeavor.⁴

On its surface, this language may be filled with buzzwords, but it's notably missing explicit references to free-market ideals. The Center's website offers similar "guiding considerations" for its work: "What qualities result in ethical leadership?" and "How can these qualities be taught and learned?" These considerations, however, are built on a foundation of right-wing, capitalist ideology, because, as their mission statement suggests, "ethical leadership" is always connected to "principled entrepreneurship" and "market principles" in a "free society." The perhaps palatable emphasis on leadership and ethics is inextricably linked to pro-capitalist, free-market politics. All of the Koch Center's activities—the efforts to propagate its distorted vision of "leadership" and "ethics"—radiate from this reductive vision of free-market-neoliberalism-*cum*-freedom.

In Fall 2014, I received an email announcing one of these activities: the ESU Koch Center's faculty grant program. This ongoing initiative offers substantial grants to redesign or develop courses to align with the Center's objectives. Had the program called for proposals explicitly addressing "national prosperity" or "entrepreneurship" (as they emphasize in many of their materials) I would have been disheartened by the Center's presence, but I wouldn't have thought I could apply. The call for applications, however, asked for plans to "embed in a course being taught by the grant recipient a serious discussion about the impact of leadership and ethics in a free society."⁵ And, of course, they defined this "free society"—as solidly neoliberal, "wherein individual acts are largely free from restrictions on trade and wealth creation"—even suggesting a focus on a "free market society (wherein the forces of supply and demand are free of governmental regulation)." Crucially, though, the call also disavowed its own politics in a way that is disturbing, but also offered me an opening:

It is not the objective of this grant to advocate for or against any position, but to instead explore these ideas... In addition, the method by which these discussions are embedded and all other relevant issues are matters of Academic Freedom and are, therefore, to be solely determined by the course instructor.

Two elements of this striking disclaimer are worth discussing. First, the almost comical call for neutrality just after defining freedom as the unrestricted right to produce wealth. On one hand, we absolutely should resist this effort to treat neoliberal economics and their underpinning definition of freedom as politically neutral. In other words, we need not accept this creeping sense that capitalist visions of freedom are apolitical, while leftist alternatives are treated as partisan propaganda. On the other hand, though, the way ESU's Koch Center cloaks their political agenda as neutral—the uncritical, questionably ingenuous notion that free-market ideals aren't themselves a "position"—offers us a chance to present radical ideas that minimally reshape their language.

Second, the advertisement's appeal to academic freedom further strengthens our ability to redeploy their

faux-neutrality. In many cases, academic freedom appears as a necessary complement to the influence of right-wing donors on college campuses. *Citizens United* redefined the nature of political speech to include money; cynically co-opting academic freedom does something similar in higher education: no one can complain about the influx of these funds, because we already accept that individuals and institutions should enjoy academic freedom. Including language about academic freedom reinforces the apolitical nature of the Koch Center's agenda, yet simultaneously asserts the right of faculty, donors, departments, and entire universities to peddle neoliberal ideologies.⁶ This insistence on academic freedom—their own and that of their grant recipients—provides strategic opportunities.

If campus programs and initiatives like ESU's Koch Center want to present themselves as politically neutral, intellectually dispassionate, fully invested in higher education's traditional values (like academic freedom), we can rightly be angered. At the same time, we can meet their disingenuousness with calculated efforts to contest their putatively apolitical values. That's what I chose to do: I would apply for one of these grants, taking advantage of the opening their call for proposals offered, and designing a class embedded with their desired topics—leadership and ethics—that interrogated the "freedom" central to their mission. I would propose a course dripping with their rhetoric, yet intended to treat freedom as a question, a site of contestation, rather than a trite, neoliberal given.

While my ultimate goal was to teach a course critical of neoliberal understandings of "freedom"—to foster a space in which students could explore not just leadership and ethics, but the classically liberal "free" space the Koch Center wants them to inhabit—my objectives when writing my proposal were more basic. I wanted their money. I wanted *their* money to fund radical pedagogy. I wanted to use right-wing funds to resist the rightward drift of American higher education (and, in the process, have my course funded instead of the litany of expected courses this grant program typically supports).⁷ To that end, I proposed a revised version of my department's EG 241: Later American Literature—the survey of U.S. literature from the Civil War to the present. I set out to describe a survey that foregrounded the Koch Center's key concerns: it would be called American Literature, Freedom, and Leadership.

As I drafted the proposal, I found it easier than I expected to pitch my class to the Koch Center, because I actually do embrace the values they claim, just from a far different political perspective. I want my students to be ethical . . . by rejecting politics of hate and closely related neoliberal economic policies. I want my students to be leaders . . . who lead our world away from the austere libertarian fantasies of small government and Social Darwinism. I want my students to embrace freedom . . . as something more than the absence of restrictions—to seek the positive freedom of genuine opportunity for historically marginalized groups. I even want my students to make our world more prosperous . . . a shared prosperity that promotes equality instead of accumulation. For those

reasons, it wasn't difficult to redeploy the Koch Center's language.

I thus framed my revised survey as a thematic approach to American literary history, describing the course's subject matter as "a body of texts that circulate around and reflect upon freedom." The course would proceed with four major objectives:

1. Expose students to a range of texts that construct various conceptions of American freedom and leadership.
2. Encourage students to discuss ethics, leadership, and freedom as they appear in literature.
3. Ask students to explore through writing the changing and multiple forms of ethics and leadership revealed by analysis of American literature and its focus on freedom.
4. Invite students to consider how their educations—including work in the humanities, English, and literature—relate to their own goals as future ethical leaders.

These goals demonstrate fully the trap of the Koch Center's own language. I include a clear and direct embrace of their central mission: a consideration of how students—now and once they graduate—will navigate a "free society." But, as anyone reading these objectives in an issue of *Radical Teacher* will recognize, I locate freedom as the site of exploration. It's not a given background or universal ideal; it's a shifting, unresolved question. I thus redeployed their rhetoric in the hope they would either be so enamored with their own conceptions of freedom (and ethics, and leadership) that my efforts to interrogate them wouldn't even register; or feel the dissonance of their own imagined apolitical position when confronted with an (admittedly understated) alternative, forcing—consciously or not—an admission that if my reimagining of their ideals constitutes a "position," then so do their ideals. I likely will never know exactly why the proposal succeeded, but in December 2014, I was awarded a Koch Center Faculty Grant. The following semester, I would teach a class that asked students to interrogate neoliberal visions of freedom.

Teaching Freedom and Equality

In most respects, the course I designed was a standard American literature survey. It proceeded chronologically through major authors and literary movements (with a particular focus on women writers and writers of color); it relied on a mixture of lecture and class discussion; and it included a series of writing assignments focused on literary analysis. The most meaningful change I made from previous instantiations of this survey was the addition of a thematic focus: freedom and equality. I set out to foster an environment in which students would read texts, complete assignments, and have thoughtful discussions about the exact nature of values in which they likely believed, at some level. The goal, then, was to get

them to think more critically about “freedom” and “equality.” Thus, the course would address directly competing visions of freedom: both the neoliberal vision of negative freedom—a classically liberal insistence on individual sovereignty, Lockean natural rights, and minimal government/ restriction—and the alternate vision of positive freedom, with its recognition that extant conditions bely the fiction of equal opportunity at the core of negative freedom. In other words, the class would seek to elucidate the space Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor describes between neoliberal and radical understandings of freedom: “the gap between formal equality before the law and the self-determination and self-possession inherent in actual freedom—the right to be free from oppression, the right to make determinations about your life free from duress, coercion or threat of harm.”⁸ By adding “equality” as a complicating value—one that certainly isn’t coextensive with freedom and that may at times be irreconcilable with it—I hoped to invite students to engage directly with the Koch Center’s mission, so they might think critically about the problematic aspects of freedom (its relationship to systemic racism, income inequality, sexism, anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric, etc.) and, ultimately, recognize that “freedom in the United States has been elusive, contingent, and fraught with contradictions and unattainable promises—for almost everyone.”⁹

By adding “equality” as a complicating value—one that certainly isn’t coextensive with freedom and that may at times be irreconcilable with it—I hoped to invite students to engage directly with the Koch Center’s mission, so they might think critically about the problematic aspects of freedom...

Foregrounding questions of freedom and equality—especially in ways that lead students away from trite and reactionary notions of each—is not without risks when teaching in Kansas. And those risks don’t exist only outside the classroom. Many students have been inculcated into the state’s widespread right-leaning atmosphere. A fair number come from rural, predominantly white school districts, or Johnson County—a hotbed of suburban conservatism, just west of Kansas City, that holds over 20% of the state’s population and thus wields an outsized influence on state politics—spaces that often justify Kansas’s reputation as a definitively red state. So, as I prepared to teach this course, I worried that students would either actively resist radical approaches to “freedom” or, perhaps more likely, simply remain in a state of obstinate inertia—that they would find alternate, more complicated understandings of freedom almost literally unthinkable. In the remainder of this essay, then, I want to discuss my students: their responses to the course’s themes; the ways in which they challenged me and their peers when engaging with these themes; the evolution I

saw in some students over the course of the semester; and, ultimately, their final essays, where I hoped to see a more nuanced approach to freedom by semester’s end.

First Impressions

Early in the semester, I assigned the first of four sets of discussion questions. For each set, students were asked to craft two questions that would “invite your peers to analyze the [day’s assigned] text in order to reveal its themes, especially the way in which it constructs or critiques ‘freedom’ and/or ‘equality.’” Each student then would write a brief response to one of their own questions. This particular set of discussion questions was to address “The Passing of Grandison,” a late-nineteenth-century short story by Charles Chesnutt set in the 1850s (in the wake of the Fugitive Slave Act). The story recounts the tale of Grandison, a slave owned by the Owens family. Dick Owens, the son of a plantation owner, hopes to win the hand of Charity Lomax by freeing Grandison—a self-serving act of generosity and bravery. Dick takes Grandison north and, in a series of increasingly absurd attempts, gives Grandison the opportunity to flee. Grandison refuses each opening. Eventually, Dick has Grandison kidnapped and taken to Canada. Dick returns to the plantation only to have Grandison turn up after a few weeks (seemingly the ever-faithful slave). Shortly thereafter, Grandison disappears with his entire family. Asking students to discuss “freedom” and “equality” in a text about slavery, I hoped would offer some insight into their extant ideas about these themes. By this point in the semester, I saw I probably wouldn’t get anything overtly racist, but Chesnutt’s story complicates freedom with its depiction of Dick’s facile understanding of it and Grandison’s agential pursuit of only a certain type of freedom, and it explores equality with a slave eventually outwitting his bumbling master. In short, I was curious to see how attuned my students were to a racially-conscious take on freedom far detached from the oversimplified neoliberal notion—so prevalent in their home state—that freedom is coextensive with government non-intervention.

Student submissions to this early assignment were eye-opening, with two main, interrelated trends immediately obvious. First, I noticed that more students focused their attention on Dick Owens than on Grandison. Granted, they weren’t praising Dick—or focusing on *his* freedom—but they centered their analysis on what he did to Grandison, rather than what Grandison did for himself (and his family). For instance, one student offered an extended reading of Dick’s actions, finding in them “a statement on the hypocrisy and ignorance of justifications for slavery.” Another claimed “Owens lacks the sincerity, and the understanding of Grandison’s position, to make a true difference in Grandison’s life.” To many students, Dick is feckless and clearly wrong, but he remains the center of the story’s commentary on freedom, because he—as a slave owner—impedes it. Focalizing Dick suggests to me a privileging of negative liberty. Writing on a story about slavery, students, perhaps unsurprisingly, echoed common

right-wing refrains: realizing freedom requires only removing he who restricts it, because freedom itself is merely an absence of these restrictions. Put bluntly, many students implied that simply removing Dick Owens would—with no subsequent steps—make Grandison free.

Second, I saw in the students who did attend more directly to Grandison, a tendency to embrace one pervasive apologia for neoliberal understandings of freedom: the personal responsibility to exercise one's liberty, even in states of obvious non-freedom. In fact, one student boldly declared "Grandison can have a sort of freedom while being enslaved, but is incapable with the lack of equality to exercise it; which is why in the end of the story he escapes with his loved ones." Obviously, this statement demonstrates a limited awareness of slavery's horrors. It also, though, transposes contemporary notions onto an antebellum narrative. The student first suggests that slavery, as such, does not unilaterally foreclose on freedom: Grandison "can have a sort of freedom." What stands in the way of Grandison's freedom is inequality. How then can a slave remove this obstacle? Escape. Once again, I see the impulse to cast freedom—and now equality—as mere acts of negation: removing the direct source of Grandison's oppression will inexorably produce his freedom.

I don't wish to suggest here that my students' work demonstrates some underlying embrace of racism and/or slavery (even if they sometimes minimize their significance). Instead, I see in their work the insidious traces of neoliberal conceptions of "freedom." These traces became a bit more obvious during an extended class discussion about the differences between negative and positive liberty, and the relationship of these potentially irreconcilable definitions to "equality."¹⁰ To exemplify the differences between these competing definitions of freedom, I used two simple examples. The first asked students to consider if they are free to go to Hawaii tomorrow. Their initial reaction was predominantly "of course." They recognized there might be consequences (e.g., their grades would suffer if they missed classes), but they clearly—and rightly—recognized their own negative liberty: no one—and certainly not the government—was directly prohibiting them from flying to Hawaii. Some of the more practical students, however, quickly pointed out that they couldn't afford a plane ticket and the like. That is, they saw that no matter the absence of concrete restriction, they might be unable to travel to Hawaii tomorrow. One student, though—let's call him Tom—vociferously denounced these trivialities. For him, their lack of money (or a private plane) had nothing to do with their freedom: they are free to get that money, so they are free to travel to Hawaii.

We then transitioned to the next example: the ubiquitous American belief that children can be anything they want to be. Did they see themselves as free in this sense? This example challenges my students, because I find most of them (in this class and others) to be realistic, nearly to the point of fatalism. They are students at a small state school in Kansas; most in this course plan to be

public school teachers; and they're tragically aware that the millennial generation has inherited a dearth of opportunities. Though it pains me to say it, I've found ESU students see all too clearly the mythical nature of the "American Dream"—by their late teens, many have already rejected the empty rhetoric that they can be whatever they want to be. So, while they readily expressed their own negative liberty—since they couldn't locate any direct and immediate "they" who was restricting them the way Dick Owens restricted Grandison—they were hesitant to call this "freedom." But not Tom. Tom insisted that he and everyone else in the class could be whatever they wanted to be. If they did not reach their goals, that had nothing to do with freedom. During the semester, Tom spoke in class enough that I know he's no Randian, no staunch advocate for the austerity Kansas experiment. If anything, I found him a mostly reasonable, heavily cynical student. Thus, I don't interpret his in-class defense of negative liberty as a firmly held right-wing politics. Rather, he voiced a viewpoint I should have expected: he simply could not think of "freedom" as a relevant concern. Personal responsibility, on the other hand—that he understood. As this class session unfolded (and in other conversations throughout the semester), I saw in him an internalization of neoliberal notions of freedom. And, I noticed his expression of this idea *that he didn't even recognize as an idea* resonate with other students. They weren't quite so vocal, but at times the class atmosphere took on a sort of inertia: they found rejecting certain established beliefs almost literally unthinkable.

As the semester progressed, then, I saw how my teaching choices invited binary thinking (slave/free) that resonated uncomfortably with homologous contemporary notions of freedom (in which freedom means only the absence of direct and purposeful restriction).

One student—I'll call her Sharon—responded to the Chesnutt story with more nuance than many of her peers. Her primary argument was that Grandison "destroys the structure of the autonomy he had as a slave, while building up a new autonomy as a free man." In some respects, her analysis was exactly what I'd hoped for: a thoughtful take on a story that narrates a slave's escape. Sharon's argument and close reading were *good*, yet she wasn't immune to an oversimplified notion of freedom: if one is no longer a slave, one is free. As the semester progressed, then, I saw how my teaching choices invited binary thinking (slave/free) that resonated uncomfortably with homologous contemporary notions of freedom (in which freedom means only the absence of direct and purposeful restriction). For one, the course's chronological structure suggested a linear progression: from slavery to freedom, *then* equality. This trajectory, of course—the myth of

progress that claims the Civil War gave freedom, the Civil Rights Movement produced equality, and now race (gender, etc.) no longer matter—is precisely the story of “freedom” the course was designed to challenge. Thus, Sharon’s success on this early assignment certainly doesn’t mean the class was succeeding. Put bluntly, having my students recognize that slaves aren’t free isn’t exactly a win.

I realized then (and much more strongly now) that I had been naïve. Sure, I knew there was a decent chance I’d have some libertarian or self-consciously “conservative” student who would actively challenge any interrogation of neoliberal “freedom.” I didn’t find that student, though. What I did find were students who had already unwittingly learned this version of freedom. They had trouble conceptualizing freedom as anything else. My goals, then, met not active resistance, but uncritical stasis. Students could recite a definition of “positive freedom,” yet they clearly stopped short of thinking that’s what “freedom” really means. Consequently, my efforts to use “equality” as a competing, complicating value fell flat: as with Grandison, all that my students—and the marginalized people about which we read all semester—needed to be equal, was to be free in this limited sense.

Tentative Hope

This internalized, passive embrace of neoliberal freedom became especially noticeable when we reached the Harlem Renaissance. In retrospect, this moment in the semester marks a point of division, not a neat separation between students who “got it” and those who didn’t, but a sliver of space that suggests my class was accomplishing something, just not for all students. In the class’s Harlem Renaissance unit, I contextualized the literature with material on Jim Crow, lynching, the Red Summer of 1919, etc. This context would, one might hope, inherently complicate the idea that Grandison’s freedom required only Dick Owens’s absence. Obviously, the end of slavery—the removal of all the Dick Owenses—didn’t achieve full freedom or equality for Black Americans. Surely students see that, right?

During this unit, I assigned another set of discussion questions, which were to focus on one of a handful of black modernist poems. Two students’ responses are indicative. First, there was a student I will call Claire. She was a quiet student, typically only speaking in class if I directly called on her, and her work up to this point had largely sidestepped questions of freedom. So, I didn’t have much of a sense of her views. For this assignment, however, she—to her credit—approached freedom directly, constructing a question about Langston Hughes’s “The Negro Speaks of Rivers”: “Does the speaker in this poem experience negative liberty or positive liberty?” On its surface, this query had a great deal of potential to get at some of the key issues in the interstices of our course’s themes and the treatment of Black Americans in the first few decades of the twentieth century. Claire’s answer to her own question, though, focused entirely on negative

liberty. She attributed to the speaker a sort of freedom tied to knowledge: “the speaker has negative liberty by knowing all of these rivers.” She granted that this knowledge was in some ways forced upon them—“they wouldn’t have had to know these places and experience these places if it wasn’t for the way these African Americans were treated at the time”—yet she ultimately



LANGSTON HUGHES BY CARL VAN VECHTEN 1936

concluded that possessing knowledge of “these rivers [that] are history to . . . African Americans” demonstrates the speaker’s freedom (negative liberty). In short, she ignored the focus on positive liberty in her own question and thus suggested that the speaker of this Jim-Crow-era poem enjoyed freedom through the knowledge gained from historical oppression. As with students’ responses to “The Passing of Grandison,” Claire’s reading of Hughes’s poem did not signal willful dismissal of alternate definitions of freedom (ones invested in equality). Rather, as she tried to grapple with post-Civil-War, pre-Civil Rights African American poetry, she—seemingly unconsciously—fell back on notions of freedom that circulate so widely in conservative political spaces: her question implied she *wanted* to complicate her understanding of freedom, but at a time after “Abraham Lincoln [freed] the slaves” (her response’s gesture toward historical context), she simply couldn’t shake the more simplistic view. For Claire, and a fair number of other students who wrote about freedom in Harlem Renaissance poetry, if these poets/speakers/characters aren’t slaves, they must be free. Many responses, then, read as efforts to reconcile uncritically internalized conceptions of neoliberal freedom with analysis of poems that challenge them.

Perhaps the most striking thing about this set of discussion questions is the very small number of students who even mentioned “equality.” Despite being given an assignment prompt that stressed equally the course’s focus on “freedom” and on “equality,” and despite my efforts to foreground inequality under Jim Crow, a majority of students again focused on “freedom.” Nevertheless, some students did evince a more fruitful struggle with these issues, for instance, Sharon, who provides an example of the growth I saw and the concomitant hope I have for teaching these themes. Sharon also chose to write about “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” and she too focused her questions on freedom: “How does the journey through the various rivers mentioned by Hughes describe a journey (to or away from) freedom?” Her response echoed some of the pervasive binary thinking as it argued that when the speaker “travels down the various rivers, his sense . . . of freedom is slowly being demolished, as [he] journeys away from a true freedom.” Sharon here read the poem’s move from the Congo and the Nile to the Mississippi as a narration of the journey from Africa to the Americas—a move from freedom into slavery. Had she stopped there, I’d see her work much as I saw her response to “Grandison”: a well-written analysis that reiterated the linear narrative of African American experience and thus subtly reinforced the notion that if one is not a slave, one is free. But, in her conclusion, Sharon noted that “although the speaker of the poem eventually journeys ‘back’ to freedom, the freedom after the Civil War is not comparable to the freedom felt bathing in the Euphrates or building a hut by the Congo; the freedom is never regained.” This claim—and a handful of similarly insightful comments from other students—suggests to me a large measure of hope. Sharon saw that the end of slavery alone did not produce freedom; she recognized in a Harlem Renaissance poem a commentary on incomplete freedom; and, though she doesn’t use the word, “equality” haunted her response as she gestured toward the post-Civil-War inequality that necessarily foreclosed on black “freedom.” These moves collectively offer me hope that attention to historical questions of freedom and equality might unsettle the reductive, neoliberal conceptions of freedom that saturate my students’ environment. As I moved toward the semester’s end, then, I waited to see what the students imagined themselves *doing*—in their communities—to exercise “leadership” and “ethics” as they connected to the course’s themes.

The Stakes of Teaching Freedom

As the course’s culminating project, I assigned a “Literature, Leadership, and Ethics Essay” that directly echoed the Koch Center’s language. This assignment asked each student to explore how the “course’s content . . . and skills . . . can help you impact your world.” It invited them to “brainstorm the impact you’d like to make,” going beyond their careers to consider “how you will make a mark—how you will make the world a better place.” And, crucially, the essay should “pay especial attention to the course’s themes of ‘freedom’ and ‘equality’ and to the

broad concepts of ‘leadership’ and ‘ethics’: how might the content and skills help you be a leader in your community? how might they help you behave ethically? how might they help you actively define and pursue ‘freedom’ and ‘equality?’” As I’ve noted throughout this essay, I approached this class with a specific set of goals. I hoped not just to see growth in knowledge about post-1865 American literature, analytical skills, and writing ability (the course’s basic objectives). In addition, I wanted to inspire students to go into their worlds with a more critical perspective on the ubiquitous American value of “freedom”; to treat freedom as a contested term, rather than a trite given; and, ultimately, to act in such a way that they further our world’s pursuit of equality, even when that objective appears at odds with common understandings of freedom. The final essay, then, was my chance to see what I’d done with Koch money. The results were tentatively encouraging, but more pressingly, they demonstrate the necessity of combating these right-wing voices.

A majority of students in my surveys are education majors destined to be teachers. I thus received a number of essays focused on what they could do in the classroom. Claire imagined “assigning literary works that shine a light on inequality and injustices present in our society”; another felt the responsibility to “make our youth realize that racism, sexism, and other forms of prejudice are still an issue today [or] we will never be able to move forward”; a third sought to fight the “casual sexism and racism present in the education system [and] the continued erasure of works by female and minority authors.” These future teachers embraced the call to use literature as a means for elucidating inequality and, consequently—even though I’m not sure they fully recognized it—for challenging simplistic notions of “freedom.”

Several students also focused on political action, whether small or large scale. One lamented her “family members . . . thoughtless and inconsiderate” political Facebook posts and committed herself to engaging with the “older generation of [her] family,” because “one comment can start a thought process which could lead to an even greater change.” Another mentioned “voting for candidates that reflect the kind of person I want to be,” which she described as one who will “fight the good fight for those who are defenseless.” And one proposed “actively participating in movements” dedicated to redressing social problems like “injustice, racism, immigration, women’s rights, [and] poverty.” This commitment to local and broader political involvement—from the highly personal individual persuasion, to the expected emphasis on voting, to activist participation—would warm the heart of any radical teacher.

If, though, the goal of the class was to encourage students to think critically about definitions of “freedom” that saturate their state and their university—to tackle head-on the Koch Centers of the world—then two essays are simultaneously the most encouraging and the most challenging as a I continue teaching the course. On one hand, there is a student I’ll call Jared. He was one of the

class's most vocal students and, in many of his comments, he seemed to embrace the course's interrogation of "freedom." He wrote:

When I was told that the class themes would be "freedom" and "equality" I thought to myself "duh, that's what America is all about." What I was missing was the fact that, yes those are what America is about, but they are not what America is doing. And how could I [not] see that? Since day one we are all force fed this idea of "America, home of the brave, and land of the free. The land of opportunity and the American dream!" and it made sense. My family immigrated and we made it alright.

On the other hand, there is a student I'll call Maria. I don't recall her speaking more than a handful of times the entire semester and her written work approached the course's themes with an opaquely neutral voice. So when I started to read her essay, I knew almost nothing about her. She wrote:

I have many things in life going against me as an undocumented Hispanic female in a same-sex relationship. Using what I have learned in . . . this course I can define and pursue "freedom" and "equality." Freedom to me, personally, is being able to travel anywhere I want without the fear of being deported to a place I've never known... Freedom is being able to show the world that women are equal to men in every aspect. Freedom is being able to go out in public and hold hands with my girlfriend without the snarky remarks and rude looks from those who disagree with my choices.

Together, Jared and Maria prompt me to conclude this essay not with an evaluation of my course's "success," but an affirmation of its necessity. Because ultimately, no matter the extent to which we can inspire one class-full of students to think about political involvement, their communities' incomplete freedom and equality, and the very nature of these disputed terms, we'll still be fighting a tide that at times feels unstoppable.

Teaching Radically in a Koch World

In our current political context, this course seems a small thing. It will not stop the influx of funds from right-wing, free-market ideologues. It will not reverse the cuts in public funding that make ideologically-freighted money appealing to many colleges and universities. And, it will not quiet the shrill voices who claim conservatives are the *real* oppressed people on our campuses. If anything, it will do the opposite, because the course stands as an unapologetically political exercise objecting to the conflation of "freedom" with unrestricted economic activity, the treatment of equality as a simple byproduct of eliminating government intervention, and the disturbing, increasingly visible Trump-era links between this neoliberal rhetoric and reinvigorated ethno-nationalist xenophobia. By teaching this course and writing this essay, I provide one more piece of ammunition for critics of radical pedagogy.

But in the face of insistent attacks on the purportedly leftist professoriate and concomitant calls for even more right-wing influence on college campuses, we must act.

We must act because of Jared and Maria. They are the reasons I taught this class. Jared is the student I want to unsettle; Maria is why I want him to be unsettled. I'm pleased to read in Jared's essay his claim that the course revealed the incompleteness of American freedom and a suggestion that trite, neoliberal pursuits of that "freedom" have produced inequality. Maria, though, reminds me that there will always be students entering our colleges with the views Jared held at the semester's beginning; there will always be the Claires who unconsciously accept the neoliberal notion that if one is not a slave, one is free; and there will always be Marias, silently feeling the weight of those views. That's why we must fight the Koch Center's influence, their falsely neutral political values that insist Maria is already free and that Jared should take America's claims of freedom at face value.

Yes, we must continue to organize; to resist the ongoing public divestment from higher education; to combat the influx of right-wing funds with their unsubtle call for colleges and universities to teach their circumscribed notions of "freedom"; to fight for the soul of higher education.

This single course, limited as its effects might be, offers one model for action. Yes, we must continue to organize; to resist the ongoing public divestment from higher education; to combat the influx of right-wing funds with their unsubtle call for colleges and universities to teach their circumscribed notions of "freedom"; to fight for the soul of higher education. At the same time, we must also continue our small-scale efforts. Even when this rightward trend appears inexorable, we must remember that, every semester, *we shape students*. I propose we use our classrooms—where we teach students to think critically about things like reductive, self-serving, harmful definitions of freedom—to meet the Koch Centers of our world head on. Ultimately, my grant proposal and the literature survey it funded were driven by a refusal grounded in the belief that we fight for our students. I will not cede the right to define "freedom" to these calloused champions of the free-market; I will not accept that "freedom" is more important than equality; I will not let our nation's history and literature of inequality and oppression be ignored; and I absolutely refuse to abandon the Jareds or the Marias to the Koch Center and its increasing power on my campus. As teachers, we must fight for the very words others want to claim. We must tell our students—those saturated by neoliberal ideology and those who suffer from its effects—that freedom is not what they say it is. Freedom is not simple. Freedom is intimately tied to race, class, and gender. True freedom is a radical ideal.

Notes

¹ This language comes from ESU's press release announcing the Koch Center's opening (<http://www.emporia.edu/news/06/18/2014/koch-center-for-leadership-and-ethics-named-at-emporia-state-university/>).

² Right-wing efforts to influence college campuses often pitch their actions as responses to the scourge of leftists in academe, which they imagine to be both a large majority of professors and to be stifling any dissent. The justification for increased right-wing influence is closely linked to efforts to expose/demonize purportedly radical—and “anti-American”—faculty members, like the “Professor Watchlist” (<http://www.professorwatchlist.org>), which has been much in the news recently.

³ The number of instructors in this position is growing by the month. Koch-related sources have poured funds into literally hundreds of colleges and universities. *Polluter Watch* maintains a database of these institutions (<http://polluterwatch.org/charles-koch-university-funding-database>). In addition, the intrusive actions accompanying these funds are being exposed at an increasing rate. For instance, *UnKochMyCampus* (<http://www.unkochmycampus.org>)—which is an excellent resource for those interested in the influence of Koch funds on college campuses—recently released a report on events at Florida State University (<http://www.unkochmycampus.org/progress-coalition-2017/>). Obviously, the various Koch foundations represent only some of the right-wing efforts to purchase influence. There are many others. See, for example, Donors Trust—a sort of clearinghouse for right-wing donations—which offers advice for donating to colleges and universities (<http://www.donorstrust.org/strategic-giving/donating-to-colleges-and-universities-a-few-guidelines/>).

⁴ References to the Koch Center's mission, guiding questions, and objectives in this section come from their website (<https://www.emporia.edu/business/kochcenter>).

⁵ I quote here, and in the remainder of this section, from the call-for-proposals distributed by the Koch Center and circulated widely via campus email lists.

⁶ Proponents of traditional academic freedom will note how this definition shifts away from efforts—like those by the American Association of University Professors—to protect faculty's rights to pursue politically unpopular topics (in their teaching and their research). It expands “academic freedom” to include freedom for outside donors—not subject to the disciplinary vetting of tenure and the like—to influence academic endeavors.

⁷ As one might expect, the majority of funded projects come from ESU's School of Business. As I draft this article, the Koch Center's website includes the projects funded from Fall 2014 through Fall 2015—three semesters. In the program's first three semesters, the Center funded 26 grant projects: three from Management, two from Finance, four from Marketing, four from Information Systems, one from Business Education, and one from Business (all departments in the School of Business); three from Mathematics and Economics; two from the hard sciences; and five from education. My project remains to my knowledge the only humanities course funded by the Koch Center. The list of grant recipients and their projects can be found on the Koch Center's website.

⁸ Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor. *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*. Chicago: Haymarket, 2016. 192.

⁹ Taylor, 192.

¹⁰ I drew basic definitions of negative and positive liberty from the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* as a starting point. Negative liberty: “On the one hand, one can think of liberty as the absence of obstacles external to the agent. You are free if no one is stopping you from doing whatever you might want to do.” Positive liberty: “On the other hand, one can think of liberty as the presence of control on the part of the agent. To be free, you must be self-determined, which is to say that you must be able to control your own destiny in your own interests.” (<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/liberty-positive-negative>).



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RADICAL TEACHER

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

Instructor or Customer Service Representative?: Reflections on Teaching in a For-Profit College

by Jaime Madden



CUSTOMER SUPPORT PLATFORM BY SONIACHAT8 VIA WIKIMEDIA, 2016

Introduction

A few years ago at a meeting of the National Women's Studies Association, I found myself describing to a colleague my experiences as an instructor at a for-profit educational institution in Austin, Texas. "Remind me," she said, "What is the name of the college where you teach?" "Virginia College," I replied. Not as widely known as some of its peer institutions—including the University of Phoenix, a larger chain—I was prepared to explain how students of Virginia College earn associate's degrees and diploma certificates in a range of vocational fields. But Virginia College was familiar to my colleague, a resident of Georgia, since the college has twenty-seven campuses located throughout the southeastern states, apart from its one campus in Virginia. "Oh yes! They recently opened a campus in my town," she exclaimed in recognition. "They moved in to occupy the space that K-Mart vacated." Hearing this detail, I knew she had it right. This location resembled its strategies elsewhere: the building where I taught had, likewise, previously housed a big-box store selling jewelry, furniture, and electronics. Indeed this spatial location of the college symbolized its presence within the community and its intentions as a for-profit educational institution.

Several months before this conversation, I had responded to an employment announcement circulated by Virginia College. The institution was hiring an Adjunct Instructor of Sociology and sought qualified applicants. The job announcement—which was posted to the classified advertisements website "Craigslist"—explicitly stated what it required of competitive applicants: a Master of Arts and excellent skills in customer service. I therefore arrived for the interview prepared to discuss the short-term jobs held during college and graduate school that were now "paying off" in making me a more desirable candidate for a teaching job. It was my hope that the teaching job would contribute to my preparedness for additional doctoral work. I also arrived attuned to the college's relationship with the processes of knowledge commodification; I knew that my willingness and ability to participate in that process would determine my experience there.

What I did not expect is how little my actual qualifications mattered. I was hired to teach Introduction to Sociology but also taught psychology and college preparation during my one year there; I was even told to consider responsibilities in more remote subjects such as mathematics. Despite my lack of graduate education in these areas, simply having undergraduate courses and prior general work experience under my belt were determined sufficient qualifications; the college sought to extract from me an array of services well beyond the scope of my MA training. A new instructor's openness to teaching multiple subject areas is lucrative for such colleges. My flexibility, like that of other new instructors, arose out of financial constraints, but it benefited the college enormously: new instructors are compensated less per credit hour than instructors with a long tenure there.

Indeed, in a *Chronicle of Higher Education* news report, Goldie Blumenstyk quotes William A. Darity's

observation that scholarly attention to for-profit higher education is "long overdue, given the sector's growth, its cost, and the high proportion of low-income and minority students who enroll in the colleges."¹ The Institute for Higher Education Policy, a research organization located in Washington, D.C., explains that students in the for-profit sector are more likely than those in the non-profit sector to be "older, female, non-White, independent, and first in their family to attend college."² Given the demographic of students affected by for-profit education, it is especially imperative to turn a critical, feminist, and antiracist eye to this sector. Students are treated as consumers of a degree that promises employment, but this promise frequently goes unfulfilled. Almost all students in the for-profit sector use federal loans, and they comprise about 47% of those who default on those loans.³

The promise of employment is often not realized, and on top of that, tuition is particularly high. At the Austin location of Virginia College, students earn associate degrees and diploma certificates. To give a sense of the range of fees, a student there can expect to pay \$14,482 for a diploma certificate in customer service, \$24,070 for a diploma certificate in medical billing and coding, \$38,452 for an associate degree in paralegal studies, \$38,472 for an associate degree in business administration, and \$39,172 for an associate degree in surgical technologies. Students at other locations that offer bachelor's degrees would pay, for instance, \$73,360 for a bachelor's in Network Management. Similarly, a bachelor's degree earned online in Health Service Management costs \$73,700.⁴

In this essay, I offer a critical retrospective engagement with my experience teaching for that one year at Virginia College. I look back at my classroom experiences and I offer a theorization of what I term a "customer service orientation" in for-profit institutions—both a distinctive expectation the college has about how instructors interact with their students, as well as a skill instructors are asked to foster in students.⁵ It is an orientation that not only refers to the expectation that instructors serve students, as others have noted, but in this context also references the college's intention to teach students how to serve customers in their promised future jobs. In the introduction to the *Radical Teacher* cluster on commercialization, Richard Ohmann identifies decreased support for public higher education as causing significant changes—faculty furloughs and online courses among them—that together can be summarized as "commercialization."⁶ The customer service orientation I identify is undoubtedly a form of commercialization. In this essay, I present an analysis of two aspects of the for-profit educational experience: 1) the classroom experience within a generic sociology course, where students and I worked against the customer service orientation; and 2) a close reading of a course textbook assigned to all incoming students, which reveals most clearly the dual operations of neoliberal individualism and a customer service orientation. Much of this essay is autoethnographic: I use my experience at Virginia College to reflect on current conversations shaping the field of Critical University Studies.

Analyzing the racial, class, and gendered coordinates of for-profit higher education is critical. Despite being the instructor, I was almost always the youngest person in my Virginia College classroom. Nonetheless I had the highest level of education and my authority was reinforced by my whiteness and class identity. I recognized the predatory nature of the college, and I tried to align my goals with my students'. I worked to "teach outside my race" and subvert prescribed syllabi whenever possible in order to sharpen critical thinking skills.⁷ In the *Radical Teacher* cluster on commercialization of education, Joe Berry and Helena Worthen explain that teachers and students will benefit from organizing for common interests that oftentimes conflict with those of "owners and managers." They note that most instructors in for-profit settings are working class and have "much in common" with their students.⁸ This kind of solidarity is what I strove to achieve. On a related note, Brenna Ryan shares her experiences teaching English at a for-profit college in order to relieve the "guilt" she experiences as a result of "capitalizing on the misfortune of those [she] purport[s] to help."⁹ The for-profit sector is responding to and profiting from wider conditions of job insecurity and structural inequalities, and I echo a statement made by Tressie McMillan Cottom about this sector: "We built this. All of us, we built this."¹⁰

For-profit institutions may in fact be an ideal setting to examine incipient kinds of neoliberal subject formation that are also found in public sector institutions. The classroom scenes detailed in this essay depict complex and calculated negotiations with academic capitalism.

Scholars of academic capitalism highlight the contradiction between the stated goals of universities as non-profits and the profit motives that undergird them. Unlike those scholars of academic capitalism who focus their critique on public research universities and consider the increasing privatization of non-profit institutions, I attend here to the sector of education that is already privatized.¹¹ My work on for-profit settings—where there may not be a contradiction between the institution's stated goals and undergirding motives, and where students' debt and financial constraints are neither new nor startling—contributes to understanding logics that inform both non-profit and for-profit sectors. My focus on the sector that is already privatized could indeed serve as a critical lens to reexamine the non-profit sector. I seek to *not* position for-profit institutions as the force against which traditional colleges and universities should work to resist academic capitalism and neoliberalism. Instead, I believe the resemblances between the two sectors are greater than we suspect. At public institutions, faculty and staff are at once positioned within and outside the public sector and frequently function, as Sheila Slaughter and Larry L. Leslie assert, as "state-subsidized entrepreneurs."¹² At for-profit institutions, instructors and students are prompted to

understand themselves as entrepreneurial subjects and to view this entrepreneurialism not as a contradiction to their roles but rather as a brand and an advantage. For-profit institutions may in fact be an ideal setting to examine incipient kinds of neoliberal subject formation that are also found in public sector institutions. The classroom scenes detailed in this essay depict complex and calculated negotiations with academic capitalism. In effect, my work contributes to the vein of Critical University Studies scholarship that emphasizes the ideological and institutional facets of neoliberalism, that "master narrative" of our time.¹³

Physical Space and Customer Service

During the job interview at Virginia College and again during all subsequent visits of the following year's employment, I experienced the physical design of the institution as akin to a gated community. Arriving for the interview at a two-story building located next to a Volvo dealership and across from a competitor for-profit institution, there were few signs of a campus or college. After all, as Ohmann says about the better-known University of Phoenix, "shaded walks" and "well-stocked libraries" do not make profit.¹⁴ At Virginia College, walking through the expansive and open parking lot, I first noticed that the building has no exterior windows and only one entrance. It is at that entrance that a uniformed police officer sits during all hours of operation, leading me to wonder what the officer's presence signaled to students. Students of color are, both on and off the campus, in danger of police violence. No one enters the building without successfully unlocking the door with their identification card, and the responsibility for directing visitors to the front desk falls to the officer. The parking lot, I would learn, is a place where students enjoy socializing after classes. They quickly shed the uniforms they are required to wear when in the building—scrubs for students studying the medical fields and business attire for all others—and the outdoor space becomes lively. The officer presides over this social space as well, alert to unwelcome presences: one scholar studying for-profit colleges reports that an officer even threatened her with arrest when she tried to interview students in the parking lot.¹⁵

Before my interview, like all visitors, I got a nametag in exchange for scanning my driver's license, and then I waited in the lobby watching the college's televised commercials that run on repeat. It was only after I was hired that I was able to gain physical access to the rest of the institution. I would learn the building's classrooms, designed for lecture and lab instruction, as well as its faculty spaces. On the walls of the faculty kitchen and copy rooms, motivational posters encourage teaching relationships characterized by customer service, prescribing that we "always give more than is expected." Other posters displayed in the hallways connecting the classrooms also offer motivational advice, although their messages are intended to appeal to audiences of prospective and current students. Career counseling information is positioned alongside these posters. During

campus tours, enrollment officers prompt prospective students to take note of the visual materials displayed throughout the hallways. The importance of the visual cues in this setting cannot be understated. They are a medium through which current and prospective students are instructed to visualize their futures.

Featuring individuals at work in their fields of study, or in the process of earning a degree, the motivational posters are intended to represent the perspectives of satisfied students and alumni. Through image and text, they are telling their personal stories of success, as realized via their educational achievement. For instance, in one image, a student smiles into the camera as she confirms new employment through a handshake with her future employer. "To me," she says, "success is my first day in my new career..." Her employer reaches across the desk to shake her hand, while her own gaze is directed backward, at the camera, where she invites the viewer into the scene. She seems to say: "This is my new life and it can be yours, too." In a second image, a student stands at the entrance to a classroom while behind her the instructor dictates. "Success to me," she says, "is learning what it takes to thrive in a new career..." There is a direct relationship, the images suggest, between the learning that happens in the classroom and what is achieved in one's career. The posters depict ways that Virginia College supposedly grants individuals the freedom to define success for themselves and then achieve it. The images are intended to motivate and inspire, but they also make demands on the personal. If viewers can work to visualize and define success for themselves, the images assert, they may attain it.

The motivational posters are familiar to most of us and their content is widely applicable rather than particular. In fact, in the for-profit setting, the college self-preservation when it ensures that *everyone* can recognize themselves in the images and their narratives. While each motivational poster does include a Virginia College logo, it is actually their lack of specificity—and their general and customizable definition of "success"—that implies, coercively, that all current and prospective students are responsible for defining and achieving "better" and more secure futures. As the above examples make clear, the posters position the educational institution as facilitating future success in the market. To do so, like the literature of the self-help genre, they implicitly reference alleged past failures. A poster that represents a graduate's "success story" might presume a past self that has struggled—and in ways not unlike that of its presumed audience. The problem is constructed as one of the self, and specifically a poorly managed self. This is a message intended to be widely applicable and to allow current and prospective students to identify with former students, who seem to tell them: "My new life can be yours, too."

A View from a Classroom

The motivational posters, which we might usefully recognize as simultaneous producers and products of neoliberal individualism, are deeply entrenched in Virginia College's customer-service orientation. I was able to more

fully understand the posters' implications for students once I entered the classroom. The first introductory sociology class I taught was a component of the limited general education curriculum, and the only liberal arts course many students would be required to complete. Introduction to Women's Studies is also listed in the corporate course catalog, although the administration did not make the course available.¹⁶ Since my training was in this interdisciplinary, I assigned reading materials from women's studies and structured my course to support critical discussion and student engagement. By the end of the course, students understood several important theories and methodologies of the field.

These pedagogical choices were possible despite severely limited academic freedom. As the literature I received during New Instructor Training phrased it, "You have academic freedom and may teach the course material any way you choose to as long as you follow the syllabus."¹⁷ In addition to requiring a standardized syllabus produced by the educational corporation, the college mandated, in accordance with their agreement with Pearson Publishing, that a particular sociology textbook be prioritized. Students were required to purchase new editions directly from Virginia College as part of their tuition. In addition, the standardized syllabus requested that students be graded on their performance of "professionalism"—a concept that I will explore through thick description of my classroom experiences.

The motivational posters, which we might usefully recognize as simultaneous producers and products of neoliberal individualism, are deeply entrenched in Virginia College's customer-service orientation.

Even while maintaining the curricular frame of the sociology course, I intended to help students "steal what they can," as Fred Moten and Stefano Harney say.¹⁸ The decisions I made when structuring and choosing content for the class supported this, but the biggest departure I made from the standardized curriculum was my intention to position students as knowers rather than consumers—an effort itself supported by our course content and design. For instance, as I will discuss through reference to student experiences, I recognized and rewarded a different definition of "professionalism" than Virginia College intended. I also worked to position students as knowers when I met with them individually to have conferences. Only administrators have office space at Virginia College, so these "office hours" were held in an empty classroom and scheduled during our regular class meeting. Students and I met to discuss their work and progress and I was especially compelled to offer encouragement and to recognize strengths in creative and critical thinking. During our classroom discussions, students were often unsure about their knowledge and I wanted the conferences to be a way to provide feedback, and to explicitly mark and support their intellectual undertakings. During the

meetings, I noted a student's ability to ask questions of the assigned material, to place seemingly unrelated texts in conversation, or relate what they were learning about systems and structures to their own experiences.

At the level of course content, Virginia College required me to prioritize the Pearson textbook, but I supplemented it with a bounty of articles and films. For instance, we used the textbook to define terms including "class system" and "caste system," but then read significant excerpts from Barbara Ehrenreich's study of low-wage work, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*.¹⁹ We discussed these excerpted chapters, like all assigned materials, in a structured seminar-style format. I began by contextualizing the text and its author, and I commented on how it "fits" within the syllabus—building our understanding of what came before and preparing us for what would follow. I asked students to consider Ehrenreich's audience. Who does she seem to be writing for? People who are low-wage workers? People who are unfamiliar with low-wage work although they might benefit from these forms of labor? We noted how the text has circulated and how it has been received. Students commented on Ehrenreich's no-nonsense writing style, the relationships she cultivated with co-workers, and the research decisions she made in the field. Students discussed their own experiences in low-wage jobs, and one student noted that her work as a migrant agricultural farmer could not be represented by Ehrenreich. We discussed not just how class and caste systems differ, as the textbook prompted, but also how these structures of power are racialized, gendered, and intersecting with immigration and other systems. The comments I received on the end-of-quarter course evaluations affirmed the choices I made regarding course structure and content, and administrative management monitored my sociology classes increasingly less with each passing term.

Near the end of my time at Virginia College, I taught a course on the topic of college preparation titled "Learning Framework," which required a tightly standardized and regulated curriculum. This course revealed most clearly the dual operations of neoliberal individualism and a customer service orientation; it was also taught primarily by women. All incoming students of Virginia College are required to complete the course during their first term of study—a mandate motivated at least in part by the course's perceived role in retaining students, which is of obvious financial interest to the college. Described as a course that teaches learning frameworks particular to adult education and personalized to individual need, the course also intends to facilitate "life skills" important to educational and career success.²⁰ Furthermore, the course's required textbook, titled *Thought Patterns for a Successful Career*, is a sign of the college's intention to influence the ways students *think* about their prior struggles in both classroom and workplace, as well as the college's proclaimed ability to lead students to success.²¹ As the school's posters suggest, students are purportedly free to define "success" as they desire; moreover, they are constructed as responsible for doing so. And as the text's title indicates, individual "thought patterns" are positioned as ultimately accountable

for either success or failure, thus placing notions of individual responsibility at the forefront.

In these classroom spaces, I found that the college intends relationships characterized by customer service to define the exchange that occurs between instructors and students. Students are constructed as buying a degree that will lead to advancement in a vocation, whereas instructors provide the degree on behalf of the college, and are coached to do so according to the tenets of excellence in customer service. For instance, the literature I received during New Instructor Orientation told new hires to say to students "Thank you, and come back."²² Yet within the sociology classroom, where students engaged materials from the field of women's studies and were supported in developing knowledge of structural and systematic inequalities, we challenged the college's "customer service" orientation and its exclusive emphasis on "job getting" rather than knowledge acquisition. As a result, the sociology classroom was at first fraught with conflicting expectations. Over the duration of the term, the students and I had reason to work together to create new models, and specifically ones that were in agreement with our supplemental course materials. This radical work was not possible in the "Learning Framework" classroom, where administration controlled the curriculum.

The unusual content and structure of the sociology course, in contrast to the college's emphasis on customer service and individualism, prompted some anxious students to ask how the course would apply to their future success in the workforce. After all, a student studying towards an associate's degree in an area such as surgical technologies might perceive sociology and women's studies course materials as extraneous, unlike coursework on medical terminologies, which is a predictable step in access to that vocation. In the context of the for-profit college, I undoubtedly found sociology and women's studies course materials to occupy a complex place. I repeatedly advocated for their relevance and their ability to challenge students, aiding their ability to think critically and carefully, and I did this especially as it existed in tension with the college's greater profit-driven purposes. For me, within the unique space of the sociology or women's studies classroom, where the skills students are learning include those of critical thinking and an ability to engage in respectful dialogue, the role of the feminist instructor needed renegotiation. The role of "instructor" and "mentor" is distinct from "customer service representative," and the clarification was my responsibility to make. Importantly, however, these new models had to be made in collaboration with the students.

Student Experiences at Virginia College

In *The Queer Art of Failure*, Judith Halberstam argues on behalf of an academy characterized by antidisciplinary knowledges, explaining that "the areas beside academia rather than within it, the intellectual worlds conjured by losers, failures, dropouts and refuseniks, often serve as the launching pad for alternatives precisely when the university cannot."²³ I likewise think it is necessary to look to the spaces in between—to the gaps, fissures, and seams. I

have taught at two traditional state-funded research universities and a private elite research university, apart from teaching for one year at Virginia College, and it is undoubtedly the case that many of my students at Virginia College are among the best critical thinkers I have encountered. This is not the kind of student-subject the for-profit college intends to produce, however. In this setting, where the focus is on job-getting rather than the production of knowledge, students found reasons for intellectual curiosity and engagement. In the section that follows, I will share examples of three students I met who illustrate the contrast between the visions of success that the college upheld and my own standards of success.

An especially wise student, Lawrence (not his real name), became invested in a selection from *The Miner's Canary* that I assigned to the introductory sociology class.²⁴ Always very quietly and eagerly engaged, he found many ways to participate in the class meeting, and, as he sometimes did, he stayed after class to discuss *The Miner's Canary* further. It was in our after-class conversation that Lawrence told me that he had taken the assigned excerpt from *The Miner's Canary* to Port Aransas, Texas, where he and his family were vacationing. He told me that he "read it out loud in the car all the way to Port Aransas." It took almost the entire four-hour drive to read and discuss, he explained, in part because he and his partner worked to translate it into Spanish for his mother-in-law. He and his family wanted to know where the complete text could be purchased. This anecdote is useful for numerous reasons, only one of which is its focus on the students of for-profit institutions. I point to it here because the institutional structure did not accurately measure or aptly reward Lawrence's knowledge or that of many other students, and his engagement and critical thinking were not represented by a testing regime that valued memorization and repetition. Amidst pressures to be otherwise, he found reason for creative thinking and critical analysis. I guided him the best I could by offering additional resources and time. I wanted him to see that his knowledge was not only different from what the college rewarded (something he knew all too well) but also strong. It should be taken very seriously. The experience of teaching Lawrence was one of the most rewarding of my career so far.

In contrast, I faced a different challenge with another student called Matthew (not his real name). Even though he had "varying experiences with attending college in the past,"²⁵ as the Virginia College website implies is common among their student population, Matthew felt enthusiastic and hopeful about education and the new career that the institution would purportedly facilitate. In my introductory sociology classroom, he was excited to share his ideas and experiences, and he readily participated in discussion and exhibited a visible enthusiasm for the material. However, although speaking came easily to him, listening was a challenge and his participation was regularly inappropriate and offensive. He insulted other students when he disagreed with their ideas and stormed out of the classroom in grand displays. He was known for this behavior among students as well as instructors, and my interviewer even warned me in advance that Matthew would enroll in my class.

The institution framed Matthew's issue as one of "professionalism," which was a skill they expected him to imbibe through courses. All standardized syllabi, including our sociology syllabus, required that at least 20% of the final course grade be earned through the performance of professionalism, and administrators explained to Matthew the need to exhibit professionalism in the classroom because his future success in the workplace would be determined by his ability to master the skill. Matthew was undoubtedly aware of the requirement of "professionalism," and he attempted to exhibit the attribute through other means. For instance, he never attended class wearing anything less formal than a necktie, and he greeted his instructors with handshakes. His demeanor was, in fact, often charismatic. The instructors and administrators I met invested in his "success"—which was positioned as something the college would bestow, while his struggles were framed as personal failings. Matthew was offered leadership opportunities and called upon to accompany prospective students and other campus visitors. In those leadership spaces that rewarded a particular definition of "professionalism," his confidence carried him. In the classroom, by contrast, his disregard for his peers and the course material led others to regard him with a kind of nervous animosity. My sense was that he wanted to be taught how to participate appropriately in classroom discussion; had he fully known how to achieve those expectations he would have chosen to succeed by the institution's standards of "professionalism."

Rather than teach him to succeed to be professional by the institution's standards, which would supposedly lead to career success, I worked to frame our classroom challenges in the terms of the course content. I prioritized learning material. For instance, when his response to a peer's comment was inappropriate and offensive, he and I talked about the kind of learning space we wanted to create. We agreed that the course material certainly inspires passion and disagreement among students. We asked: Can that happen alongside learning or does disagreement preclude learning? What's best for the class? Matthew was intrigued by these conversations, which he found intellectually fascinating. He not only wanted to succeed by the institution's standards, but he also wanted to succeed by mine.

When Matthew did succeed by the institution's standards, rather than mine, he was held up as a leader and as a positive success story. Virginia College administrators invested in correcting what was positioned as personal shortcomings—such as his "temper" that led him to storm out of the classroom—through reference to professionalism and his future employability. After their interventions, administrators regarded him as a kind of archetypical student. Other students likewise worked to follow the rules of the institution and were rewarded. For instance, at the end of the term, each instructor was asked to present two members of the class with "Best Student" awards. The criteria might be interpreted according to the institution's definition of "professionalism," which included the ability of students to attend all classes, arrive on time, wear uniforms, and complete all formal requirements. These were the students who, like Matthew, became most

visible to the administrators responsible for placing students in internships and writing recommendation letters. They were students who performed behaviors—like “perfect attendance”—that supported retention efforts; in fact, they might even recruit others to attend. This was, in fact, the case for Matthew; he successfully recruited Lawrence. He was a student at Virginia College before recruiting Lawrence, a relative. For Virginia College and all for-profit companies, retention is a necessary concern. Students including Matthew are prompted to recruit their friends and family. In fact, the end-of-quarter student evaluations asked students whether they were likely to recommend the college to their friends and relatives. The school regularly sought to measure the satisfaction of their student-customers, and events like “Student Appreciation Day” were intended to support retention.

Recruiting practices were rewarded alongside other behaviors that reflected the school’s definition of “professionalism”—and also, in turn, served retention efforts—but many *actual* “Best Students” were uninterested in sharing the institution’s values. These were students who dissented and were inclined to offer critique, and even shunned the ranking system. Some students were unable to share the values of the college—even if they wanted to—because work or family responsibilities made it difficult to be disciplined by the institution. I decided to appoint Pam (not her real name) as a “Best Student” because she asked pointed questions and was intellectually curious. Many of her peers arrived early and with their textbooks highlighted and papers typed (which were among the standards used by the institution for judging students as “good”), but I judged Pam’s careful and well-considered critical thinking skills more deserving. During a lesson on environmental sociology, for instance, she engaged deeply with the theory. While completing group work, she insisted on considering the lived impacts of environmental harms. She explored ideas fully and invested little in performing well on standardized tests. I suspect that although some of Pam’s peers might have more easily gained admission to a traditional institution, Pam would have been highly likely to succeed in an upper-level seminar on topics such as feminist theories, for instance. Virginia College would neither readily recognize nor reward such kinds of performance. Again, like Lawrence, she was not the particular subject the school intended to fashion.

An important complex feature of for-profit colleges such as mine was that the “customer service orientation” it expected of instructors sat alongside a strain of authoritarianism.

An important complex feature of for-profit colleges such as mine was that the “customer service orientation” it expected of instructors sat alongside a strain of authoritarianism. In my experience, instructors were coached to practice an authoritarian form of power even as they were asked to model customer service.²⁶ For instance,

the literature I received during New Instructor Orientation told faculty: “The students do not rule the class, you do.” In addition, the literature coached instructors to avoid allowing students to “see any fear or insecurities on your face or in your actions.”²⁷ (Such advice may have been important in order to establish their branding as reputable educational institutions.) The authoritarianism is, however, crafted in ways that are compatible with a model of customer service. For instance, the for-profit vision presents faculty as those who are authoritarian in style but also who, as previously noted, “always give more than is expected.” As Arlie Hochschild explains, when “emotional labor” occurs in commerce, the motive of profit is “slipped in under acts of emotion management, under the rules that govern them.”²⁸ Within the for-profit education system, students who respect authority are rewarded—including those who respond to learning models that emphasize passive absorption and memorization. In my sociology classroom, I worked against such models to instead support critical thinking and intellectual curiosity. As the anecdotes about Lawrence, Matthew, and Pam reveal, the position of students as knowers rather than consumers was central to my intentions. As a result, our teaching and mentoring relationships were transformed, as were our collective conceptions of “education” and “knowledge.”

“Thought Patterns” and the Neoliberal Principle of Individualism

Despite severely limited academic freedom in the sociology classroom, students and I had great reason to craft new models that contrasted the college’s “customer service orientation.” Our supplemental course materials required this of us. Importantly, while students including Lawrence and Pam were not the student-subjects the college intended to fashion, my hopes for Matthew were also quite contrary to the goals the institution set for him. Who and what, then, did Virginia College intend to cultivate? The textbook titled *Thought Patterns for a Successful Career* gives us a good example of the kind of student-subject Virginia College intended to produce and reward. As previously noted, the institution required all incoming students to participate in “Learning Framework,” a class on the topic of college preparation, for which *Thought Patterns* was the required text. The course served retention efforts—keeping students in school, purchasing classes—and the textbook therefore intended to influence the ways students understood their educational and workplace struggles, as well as the college’s self-declared ability to lead them to more positive experiences. The course tried to create a satisfied and hopeful affect among students, which then supported the college’s need to retain students.

Perhaps the most insidious feature of the curriculum in the for-profit institution was its message that students could participate more freely in the market by changing their innermost cognitive and emotional orientations. *Thought Patterns* exemplifies this process. Before analyzing the contents of the textbook, however, it is first necessary to describe its features. The book functions much like a workbook in that the student is guided through lessons in

which they are told to “apply themselves” by participating in reading and writing exercises that may be accompanied by video discussions led by Lou Tice, co-founder of The Pacific Institute, a consultancy organization and non-standard press.²⁹ Tice’s biography refers to his “singular style of teaching” and his ability to be “remarkably successful at empowering individuals to achieve their full potential.”³⁰ When administrative management gave me the instructional materials along with the standardized syllabus, my supervisor described Tice as a “timid lion.” The descriptor speaks to an affect that is intended to be at once caring, inspirational, and authoritative. In these videos, we find Tice at the front of a classroom full of attentive students. As he explains the contents of each unit, he draws images and writes text on a whiteboard in a way reminiscent of his days as a football coach. As a teacher and personal-coach of “Learning Framework,” his videos and textbook stand in for the work of an actual instructor. In fact, Virginia College’s commitment to The Pacific Institute’s specific curriculum meant that I did very little teaching for that course. That curriculum was central to the school’s conception of “Learning Framework” and a departure or outright challenge would cause alarm. In addition, my own education prepared me to design a sociology course but not one on the topics of adult learning and “life skills.”

The table of contents lists the titles of the 21 units that comprise the text. The units include “What’s Holding Me Back,” “Leaning in the Right Direction,” “My Future is Up to Me,” and “If It’s to Be, It’s Up to Me.”³¹ As the titles show, the textbook resembles the genre of self-help. Even beyond the similarities in rhetoric, I judge both its corporate model of business, as well as its intentions to individualize and pathologize, to converge with some of the field’s popular literature. Each unit of the textbook includes an overview and bulleted lists of objectives and key concepts. For the lesson on “What’s Holding Me Back,” the key concepts include: conditioning, capable, smart, and stuck.³² The student is then prompted to answer “reflective questions” before reading a 2- to 3-page essay that functions as a “lesson learned.” In some cases, it is an inspirational story narrated by Tice, while in others it is more overtly instructional. Finally, each unit provides the student with blank pages where they are encouraged to keep a journal.

Within the textbook, we see an aggressive emphasis on individual responsibility to think in a particular way. The Pacific Institute understands individuals as “responsible for their own actions,” as the text makes clear. The introductory pages proclaim: “*Thought Patterns for a Successful Career* is designed to build your understanding, with a structured process, of how your mind works, and how you can control the way you think to achieve success—in any part of your life.”³³ All one needs to do, it seems, is think in a particular way and market-based reward will flow freely without regard to structural and systematic determinants. It is our *responsibility*, the text says, to abide by particular thought patterns. “By applying yourself to this program,” the text instructs, “by giving it your own reflective input, you will see that most barriers to personal growth and development are self-imposed.”³⁴

Again, the individual is responsible for applying themselves, and for abiding by those “thought patterns” prescribed by the textbook, which are guaranteed to lead to productivity.

In addition to the textbook, students purchase notecards that function as “pocket affirmations” as well as audio materials narrated by Tice. These supplemental materials are intended for use outside of the classroom, although their message complements that of the videos and textbook. The affirmations apply to classroom participation and workplace success, but also to the student’s personal life. For instance, one reads: “Because I sincerely care about myself and the quality of my life, I am financially responsible.” A second statement reads: “I assume the full responsibility for achieving a workable level of understanding in my communications with others.” The audio materials likewise reinforce the work of the videos and textbook when, for instance, Tice claims that lack of dream, lack of idea, and lack of aspiration serve as barriers to success rather than lack of resources.³⁵ Tice invokes the rhetoric of self-care and quality of life, buttressing his mandate to act responsibly. The various ingredients of the curriculum are designed to be followed step-by-step in order to produce a product/subject that fills a void that, they are told by the institution, is self-generated.

As a whole, the curriculum describes itself as a process and one intended for application rather than passive absorption. The student is a co-author with The Pacific Institute and Tice, according to the text. “Like you,” the introductory remarks claim, “[the text] is a work in progress.”³⁶ Yet, the text is undoubtedly prescriptive. It naturalizes its own politics—constructing its claims as reasonable and “common sense.” In addition, the alleged correlation between an individual’s thoughts and their market-based achievements are framed in terms of personal responsibility. For instance, in the instructional unit titled “If It’s to Be, It’s Up to Me,” the student reads about forethought and the process by which we mentally construct something before it materializes. The text gives the example of preparing dinner from a recipe, since the recipe propels one’s mind forward, into a future product that has yet been created. “Forethought is using your imagination to create the future before it happens,” the text explains, “and you do it so easily. It is important to know that it’s ordinary.”³⁷ Here again, the text is attempting to revolutionize individual thought patterns even as it constructs its claims as ordinary. In truth, the events of our futures are not created according to a formulaic recipe. Structural and systemic determinants and inequalities determine our life chances. For people whose lives are subject to constant unpredictability and insecurity, such a claim is abusive, and not entirely unlike other forms of abuse. Students who are vulnerable are made to feel that their future success in the market is dependent on the institution. That institution has set itself up as the remedy to the past struggles the student has endured because of supposedly personal rather than structural failings; students are blamed for their own suffering. In addition, the textbook’s assertion that a recipe is a useful comparison point is indicative, I judge, of its more general tendency to conceive of an individual’s productivity in the

market in terms of standardized and simplistic inputs and outputs, thus reflecting the operations of neoliberalism.

Later in the same unit, the textbook asks students to consider the process by which their mentors have helped them to envision their goals—seeing in them great potential even before they could see it in themselves. While the text seems to support mentorship, it also tells students that individuals need to mentor themselves, and to be responsible for self-improvement. The text says: “You need to mentor yourself, otherwise you’re hoping that some mentor will come along and turn you from a frog to a prince or a princess. You need to turn yourself from the frog to the princess or the prince.”³⁸ One’s present state is presumed to be the place of the frog, and The Pacific Institute claims to be the intervention that will facilitate our individual progress, a process that is paradoxically judged to be self-determined. In the context of a for-profit college, this process is always tied to upward progression within the market economy, and the emphasis on individual responsibility suggests that the market is open and waiting for participation. It is as easy as following a recipe, according to the institute.

My experience underscores the generative potential of teachers using classroom strategies that encourage divergences, inconsistencies, and ambiguities.

The attributes of *Thought Patterns* also characterize other projects of The Pacific Institute.³⁹ Another curriculum worth discussing is titled *STEPS—A Guide to Self-Sufficiency*. It targets those who are unemployed and, according to the website, combines “proven mental technology skills” with skills related to locating and maintaining a job. Moreover, the program “provides the mental and emotional boost to successfully transition from unemployment to employment, allowing individuals to be fully accountable for their personal and financial futures.”⁴⁰ There is an explicit emphasis on the supposed power of thoughts or “mental technology skills”⁴¹ to lead to success within the market, as well as an emphasis on personal accountability or individual responsibility for productivity.

Conclusion

It is useful to ask: what kind of student does Virginia College intend to produce? Those intentions—exemplified by the *Thought Patterns* textbook—are not exclusive to the realm of for-profit education, but rather must be connected to other projects and to greater structures. The hallmark of neoliberalism is to generate subjects who, through particular attitudes and efforts to be productive in the market economy, also serve the interests of neoliberalism itself. In fact, the processes of neoliberalism are usefully glimpsed through a description of particular subjectivities. The for-profit institution I taught at clearly tried to shape its students’ thoughts and values and redirect critical critique and political dissent.⁴² From the physical space to

the kinds of students who were rewarded to the textbooks assigned, the institution created an intensely neoliberal environment, which it presented to students as the outside world they would need to negotiate. However, it was not always successful and I saw this especially clearly in the sociology classroom.

This analysis might serve us as we work to anticipate, on a more generalizable scale, both increasing and new forms of corporatization. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos and President Trump, who has recently settled the lawsuit against Trump University, will champion corporatization. Trump University, a real estate program, was neither accredited nor degree-granting, despite its misleading characterization as a university. In the upcoming years, what new forms of corporatized education will we contend with? For those of us invested in traditional colleges and universities, for-profit schools like Virginia College or the recently-defunct ITT Technical Institute might be positioned as the force against which we should fight; but as previously noted, I do not think this strategy is wise. Not only does it misidentify the source of problems we all face, it also harms the large numbers of underserved and vulnerable students who fill the halls of such institutions. Instead, I hope my analysis—and our collectively-produced work in the upcoming years—can benefit more students at for-profit colleges such as the one I described. As we critique the for-profit sector, we must also critique ideologies that create “winners” and “losers” or “deserving” and “undeserving” in all settings.

My experience underscores the generative potential of teachers using classroom strategies that encourage divergences, inconsistencies, and ambiguities. Instead of attempting to “rule the class” while performing a controlled authoritarianism in conjunction with a “customer service orientation,” as the literature produced by Virginia College instructed, I sought pedagogical strategies that could productively “break” the standardized form in order to facilitate new intellectual and emotional connections.⁴³ Such efforts to “break form” are what I think should be the main recourse of instructors teaching in for-profit colleges, in order to remain responsible and accountable to students experiencing the ravages of academic capitalism.

Notes

¹ Goldie Blumenstyk, “Conference Brings Together For-Profit Colleges and Scholars Who Study Them.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (23 September 2012), para. 6.

² “A New Classification Scheme for For-Profit Institutions.” Institute for Higher Education Policy, July 2012. Accessed 15 June 2013. Available from World Wide Web: <[http://www.ihep.org/assets/files/publications/a-f/\(Report\)_For-Profits_Classification_July_2012.pdf](http://www.ihep.org/assets/files/publications/a-f/(Report)_For-Profits_Classification_July_2012.pdf)>, 2. The report produced by the Institute for Higher Education Policy was financed by USA Funds, a lending corporation.

³ Andrew Ross, *Creditocracy and the Case for Debt Refusal* (New York: OR Books, 2013), 118. Ross cites Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, US

Senate, For-Profit Higher Education: The Failure to Safeguard the Federal Investment and Ensure Student Success (July 30, 2010). 96% of students in the for-profit sector use federal loans.

⁴ "Consumer Information." Virginia College. Accessed 13 June 2016. Available from World Wide Web: <<https://consumerinfo.vc.edu/>>.

⁵ Henry A. Giroux is among the scholars who, like me, are concerned that students are regarded as consumers. See Giroux, *Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014).

⁶ Richard Ohmann, "Introduction: College for Dollars?" *Radical Teacher* 93 (Spring 2012), 9.

⁷ Bree Picower explains the importance of advocates and mentors in an essay about "teaching outside one's race" in an Oakland elementary school. She cites the work of Jacqueline Jordon-Irvine, who explains that teachers who are mentors and advocates are "willing to exercise resistance by questioning and defying rules and regulations that are not in the best interest of their students." See Bree Picower, "Teaching Outside One's Race: The Story of an Oakland Teacher." *Radical Teacher* 100 (Fall 2014), 119. Picower quotes Jacqueline Jordon-Irvine, *Educating Teachers for Diversity: Seeing With a Cultural Eye* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2003), 8.

⁸ Joe Berry and Helena Worthen, "Why We Should Support Organizing in the For-Profits" *Radical Teacher* 93 (Spring 2012), 36.

⁹ Brenna Ryan, "Learners and a Teacher, For Profit." *Radical Teacher* 93 (Spring 2012), 34.

¹⁰ Tressie McMillan Cottom, "How 'Admissions' Works Differently at For-Profit Colleges: Sorting and Signaling." *Some of Us Are Brave* (blog), 8 March 2013. Accessed 15 June 2013. Available from World Wide Web: <<http://wp.me/p28iGT-ki>>, para. 52.

¹¹ See Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades, *Academic Capitalism and the New Economy: Markets, State, and Higher Education* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

¹² Sheila Slaughter and Larry L. Leslie, *Academic Capitalism: Politics, Policies, and the Entrepreneurial University* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 9.

¹³ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 184. Mohanty utilizes, in her analysis, the work of Henry A. Giroux, "Vocationalizing Higher Education: Schooling and the Politics of Corporate Culture," *Beyond the Corporate University: Culture and Pedagogy in the New Millennium* Ed. Henry A. Giroux and Kostas Myrsiades (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 30. My work contributes to the vein of scholarship that emphasizes the ideological and institutional facets of neoliberalism. This

includes work by Sandra K. Soto, Chandan Reddy, and Aihwa Ong. See Sandra K. Soto, "Wearing Out Arizona." Rapoport Center Human Rights Working Paper Series, April 2011. Accessed 15 June 2013. Available from World Wide Web:

<http://blogs.utexas.edu/rapoportcenterwps/files/2011/06/4-2011-Soto-WearingOutArizona.pdf>, Chandan Reddy, *Freedom with Violence: Race, Sexuality, and the US State* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), and Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

¹⁴ Ohmann, "Introduction." *Radical Teacher* 93 (Spring 2012), 7.

¹⁵ Tressie McMillan Cottom, "Access, Competition, and For-Profit Higher Education." Conference of the Duke University Research Network on Racial and Ethnic Inequality, Durham, NC, 22 September 2012.

¹⁶ Virginia College at Austin, "Catalog," Vol. 14 (February 2012), 47.

¹⁷ The quotation is included on the document titled "Control of Your Class," which was distributed at New Instructor Training held during the 2010 summer term.

¹⁸ Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2013), 26.

¹⁹ Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2001).

²⁰ Virginia College at Austin, "Catalog," 41.

²¹ The Pacific Institute, *Thought Patterns for a Successful Career* (Seattle: The Pacific Institute, 2005).

²² The quotation is included on the document titled "Earn Your Stripes: Build Graduates Employers Will Want to Hire," which was distributed at New Instructor Training held during the 2010 summer term.

²³ Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 7.

²⁴ Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres, *The Miner's Canary: Enlisting Race, Resisting Power, Transforming Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

²⁵ Virginia College, "Why Choose Virginia College?" Accessed 16 December 2012. Available from World Wide Web: <<http://www.vc.edu/about-virginia-college/why-choose.cfm>>, para. 5.

²⁶ Cottom references her experience as an enrollment counselor when she describes the "benevolent authority" of administrators. See Cottom, "How 'Admissions' Works Differently at For-Profit Colleges," para. 39.

²⁷ The quotations are included on the document titled "Control of Your Class," which was distributed at New Instructor Training held during the 2010 summer term.

²⁸ Arlie Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 9.

²⁹ The Pacific Institute, *Thought Patterns for a Successful Career*, ix.

³⁰ The Pacific Institute, *Thought Patterns for a Successful Career*, v.

³¹ The Pacific Institute, *Thought Patterns for a Successful Career*, xi.

³² The Pacific Institute, *Thought Patterns for a Successful Career*, 10.

³³ The Pacific Institute, *Thought Patterns for a Successful Career*, 5.

³⁴ The Pacific Institute, *Thought Patterns for a Successful Career*, ix.

³⁵ The Pacific Institute, "What's Good Enough?" audio materials.

³⁶ The Pacific Institute, *Thought Patterns for a Successful Career*, viii.

³⁷ The Pacific Institute, *Thought Patterns for a Successful Career*, 144.

³⁸ The Pacific Institute, *Thought Patterns for a Successful Career*, 146.

³⁹ The materials produced by the institute include "educational solutions" as well as "corporate solutions" and "social solutions."

⁴⁰ The Pacific Institute, "Workforce Development." Accessed 13 May 2012. Available from World Wide Web: <http://www.thepacificinstitute.us/v2/index.php?name=social_workforce>.

⁴¹ The Pacific Institute, "Workforce Development." Accessed 13 May 2012. Available from World Wide Web: <http://www.thepacificinstitute.us/v2/index.php?name=social_workforce>.

⁴² Soto, "Wearing Out Arizona," 3.

⁴³ The quotation is included on the document titled "Control of Your Class," which was distributed at New Instructor Training held during the 2010 summer term.



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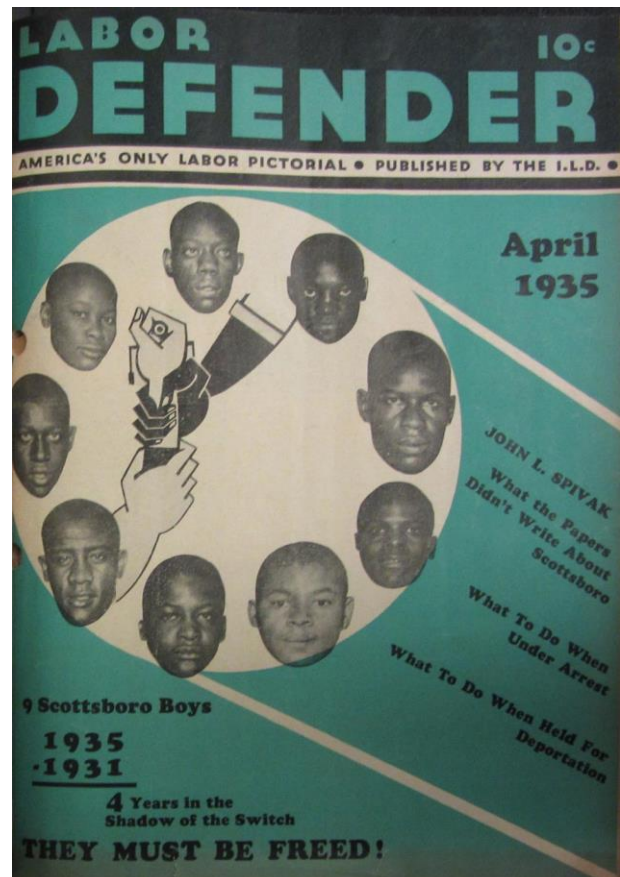
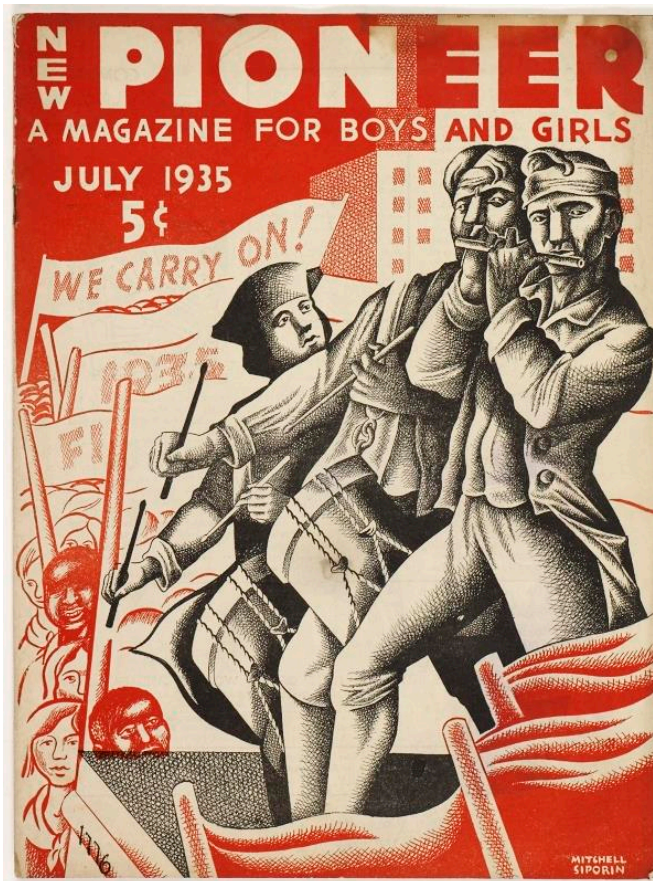
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RADICAL TEACHER

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

Promoting Social Action through Visual Literacy: *New Pioneer* & *The Labor Defender* in the Secondary Classroom

by Rachel Jean



LEFT: THE NEW PIONEER, MAY 1933

RIGHT: THE LABOR DEFENDER, JULY 1935

Introduction

In the past, Reading, Writing and Arithmetic have been the foundation of education. In fact, literacy was the primary goal of English education, and the term was defined as the comprehension of textual sources. However, legislation such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the Race to the Top Initiative of 2009 brought changes to curriculum and pedagogy across primary and secondary grade levels with waves of standards and assessments. Instead of simple comprehension, educators must teach skills that lead students to “College and Career Readiness,” a term coined by the Common Core State Standards Initiative and the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). The emphasis on “College and Career Readiness” skills is supposed to educate youth for the purpose of future success in academic and professional settings. According to Common Core Standards, students must “make comparisons and contrasts; and analyze and synthesize a multitude of ideas in various domains.” The first National Conference on Visual Literacy acknowledged visual literacy in 1969 as “a group of vision competencies a human being can develop by seeing, and at the same time, having and integrating other sensory experiences” (Ladevich 114). Society now recognizes technological platforms as viable knowledge sources in the 21st century. Since the Internet has overtaken former methods of knowledge disbursement, traditional literacy as a singular concept has vanished. In its place, multiple versions of literacy have emerged, including visual literacy.

Common Core and Radical Pedagogy

The mainstreaming of visual literacy via the Common Core and other mechanisms has not come without costs. The federal focus of Common Core and Race to the Top has instilled a fear of failure in American students. Regardless of which administration supported what law, the past decade of policy has paved a path of least resistance to create a competent workforce. While Common Core and its related policies might help create “College and Career Ready” citizens, they congruently place diverse learners at the bottom of the barrel. According to Diane Ravitch (2016), “standardized tests are best at measuring family income,” which is particularly a problem for students who come from poverty-stricken areas with fewer resources. Rather than measuring intelligence, current policies requiring standardized testing and matching curriculums measure what students do not have. For example, when assessments are completed with technology, students in low socio-economic areas will not be able to be as proficient because they do not have unlimited access to computers, laptops, and ipads to learn how to best navigate testing portals or keyboards.

The Common Core is simply a natural progression in a country that remains set against not poverty, but poor people; not barriers to immigration, but immigrants; not racism, but students of color. Crenshaw (1991) states, “Race, gender, and other identity categories are most often

treated in mainstream liberal discourse as vestiges of bias or domination—that is, as intrinsically negative frameworks in which social power works to exclude or marginalize those who are different” (1242). Current curriculum and exams attempt to disguise curriculum concentration on work production by focusing on set skills that are now “required” to succeed. Of course, these requirements leave little room for the development of students who have not had access to needed resources. The new standards erase time for extracurricular activities since students are often testing for hours each quarter. In certain counties in Florida, if students do not perform well on tests, choices for electives are taken away; they are required to take double blocks of reading instead. Thus, failing tests affects a student’s pursuit of self-discovery in the arts, music, and even sports. Instead of directing attention to academic disciplines, schools hold multiple practice preps in order to discover if a student has a potential to pass criterion-based exams. After-school extracurricular activities are replaced with intensive math, science, and reading courses leading up to yearly testing. Teachers must spend their time not only preparing for testing, but also scouring former assessments to discover student weaknesses. While data research methods hold merit, they should not take the place of actually teaching students. For data to have true value, it should be based on high quality instruction, not high quality assessments.

Since the Internet has overtaken former methods of knowledge disbursement, traditional literacy as a singular concept has vanished. In its place, multiple versions of literacy have emerged, including visual literacy.

Consequently, the trickle down from federal demands forces teachers to design practical methods to combat damaging policies. One way of fighting back is to engage in job actions; however, due to weak unions and backlash from districts, teacher strikes are controversial in many communities. On the other hand, some communities have sued the Florida Board of Education. For example, in 2016, in Alachua County, Florida, a group of citizens known as Citizens for Strong Schools, sued the Florida State Board of Education, demanding that they “Fulfill their constitutional duties under Article IX” (Citizens, 2016, 1). Article IX declares that the Florida Department of Education must “Provide a uniform, efficient, safe, secure and high quality system of free public schools that allows students to obtain a high quality education” (Citizens, 2016, 1). Citizens were concerned with the disparities among their county’s schools. Yet, Circuit Judge George S. Reynolds III sided with Florida, claiming, “there is not a constitutional level crisis sufficient to warrant judicial intervention” (Citizens, 2016, 8). Reynolds also placed the blame on district school boards for their misallocation of resources. Reynolds insisted that “Plaintiffs have failed to establish any causal relationship between any alleged low student performance and a lack of resources” (Citizens, 2016, 12). The Citizens

for Strong Schools raised their own support to file a lawsuit of merit against the state, but their case was absent from media reviews and they suffered a crippling blow.

Due to experiences like that of the Citizens for Strong Schools, one popular method of resistance in Florida against Common Core is a hidden one designed in the lesson plans of the classroom teacher. Rita Pearson (2013), author of the famous Ted Talk “Every Kid Needs a Champion,” stated, “So teachers become great actors and great actresses, and we come to work when we don’t feel like it, and we’re listening to policy that doesn’t make sense, and we teach anyway.” Pearson’s words, even if they are unknown to teachers, are demonstrated daily. A teacher’s hidden resistance meets the forced superficial standards but also takes students from a place of production to a place of realization, creation, and action. Teachers must use new material in the classroom, validating their choices within the regime of standardized testing, but holding their instruction to a higher goal, past competency and more essential than test proficiency. Teachers resist the ebbing tides of policy by finding methods to teach their students about justice, democracy, and the liberatory paths that others have followed before them.

Although lawmakers try to group students together and claim that new curriculum and standards will benefit everyone, the radical nature behind a hidden resistance is the simple belief that some students—young girls, students of color, those of non-normative genders and sexualities—need more. They need more than the ability to analyze literary texts. They need more than to be able to write an argumentative essay based on a rubric. This belief accompanies another: while everyone might have been born equal, they are not all treated as such. Stereotypes waylay immigrants and black boys. They haunt Middle Eastern students and others from developing countries, such as Haiti. Because students from developing countries are often learning English as a Second Language (ESL), teaching them about democracy and social justice is overwhelming. However, newer practices such as visual literacy can help construct a message of hope, especially with historical images projecting ideals of social justice and the struggles against injustices in society. If students study previous methods of social justices enacted by public groups who have organized to form cohesive and lasting change in situations in history, they could apply those same principles towards current problems of racism, inequality, and other injustices, learning to support and create movements such as Black Lives Matter.

Visual Literacy & Students in the American Classroom

Visual literacy is a newer concept, one that some English teachers might not consider valid. The components of being visually literate include being able to “analyze and interpret images to gain meaning within the cultural context . . . evaluate aesthetic merit of work, evaluate the merit of the work in terms of purpose and audience” and being able to “Grasp the synergy, interaction, innovation,

and/or feel of an image” (Bamford, 2003, 2). This list of abilities is not composed only of skills that fall into line with whatever standards might be policy. Visual literacy implies decision making, recognizing one’s feelings and culture, and owning the meaning behind what one might see. In 1978, Ausburn argued that “we live in an era of visual culture,” which leads to legitimate decisions concerning discrimination, interpretation, and communication (Bamford, 2003, 3). The way students evaluate what they see can motivate struggling readers to read. Images not only distort reality, but can also create it. With technology and media constantly flashing strong images in the faces of young people, their minds are being formed through the way they judge images, interpret them, and discuss them with others. The more visually literate students become, the more successful they can become in judging their own realities. This is not only a valuable skill, but also a vital one, especially for immigrant students and students of color.

As notions of a classic education have been replaced, educators also struggle to teach the most diverse population of learners in American history. The main challenge in teaching visual literacy in the classroom is the plethora of images that have encouraged students to judge images at face value. According to the *Journal of American Culture*, “Educators have a special and urgent challenge to transform lazy looking into visual proficiency” (Emanuel). Instead of critically pondering images to increase creative thought, students tend to be dismissive of images that they passively consume due to the sheer volume currently available. When one considers the number of images available to students, it is not surprising that students would see pictures as a worthless commodity with which they need not actively engage. In fact, students have also developed a similar viewpoint about democracy, partly because it is represented as beyond their reach. Former students have often voiced the belief that they cannot change anything, feeling as if developments within society are beyond their control. In response, I started to insert units on self-esteem into my curriculum (See figure 1), but this small effort seemed to have little effect in shifting student mindset about democracy and the waves of injustice that students are party to on a daily basis.

Due to my belief in resistance through pedagogy, I constantly searched for ways to incorporate units of social justice in my classroom to help empower students to believe in their own ability to have an impact in their communities. I am a middle school teacher at a Title 1 middle school in South Florida, with a “majority minority” student population. While some would call my classroom “urban,” I prefer non-labels that do not carry negative connotations. My students are Black—either Caribbean or African American—and Hispanic/Latino. They are from areas of few resources, in terms of family income, wealth, freedom, and safe resources, such as convenient libraries and parks. As a result, they are often grade-levels behind in their literacy skills. At the age of eleven or twelve when they enter my sixth grade classroom, their ideas concerning stereotypes and racism are not vague concepts or possibilities; they are realities. Each year, students walk into my room defiant, defeated, or both. My goal has

become to share this truth and pair it with the best reality I can offer: They contain the ability to create change.

Visual Literacy in the Classroom: Trial and Error

In order for my students to celebrate success, I often focus my attention on visual literacy, which in turn helps build other literacy skills. Students are on more equal ground when they are studying a picture than when they are attempting to read articles that can be confusing and uninteresting to those struggling with textual literacy. I began my pedagogical practice of using visual literacy when I taught a unit on the Freedom Riders last year. I showed students a black and white picture from the Nashville Sit-ins (Figure 2) and gave them five minutes to answer these questions with single words on chart paper in groups: When do you think this picture was taken? What was happening? How do these people feel? Where are they? When are they? Who are they? List details about their clothes, surroundings, and facial expressions. Their response and the following discussion was so deafening that I realized I had found a key to unlocking their potential. Their answers for the picture above included: "Old"; "eating in a restaurant, probably lunch or breakfast, it's daylight"; "Look surprised, scared"; "guarded, like they're afraid someone might hurt them"; "maybe the 60s, looks like pictures I've seen from then"; "Civil rights"; "poor", "Old fashioned clothes"; "not like criminals." Students proceeded to defend their answers in a class discussion. Finally, students watched a short clip and read a paragraph about the Freedom Riders, and revisited the picture. During the unit, this process was repeated several times, until students became more skilled at finding meaning within historical images. Their response was so positive, I developed a plan to use more images likely to lead to discussions of social justice.

Next, I used images of Malala Yousefzai during a unit on a book about her. As students read the book, they also "read" images of the people of Pakistan, including Malala and her family. At the end of the unit, students created picture books and comic strips as a summary of their learning (Figure 3). I had assumed that, because the Malala story is a more current story, students would be even more riveted. I was wrong. While students did like the story, I did not find the level of engagement that I had a few months before during the Freedom Riders unit. Students were content to be drawing and creating a product, but the connection to visual literacy seemed superficial. Students also were less challenged because the images were readily available. Instead of having to research issues that are not all over the media, they could Google search Malala Yousefzai's name and receive video clips by the dozens. Some students watched the documentary *He Named Me Malala* before we finished reading the book and were then unengaged, as if they had learned everything they needed to know. At first, I could not discover what had gone wrong. I had attempted to replicate the process that had been so successful, but I felt like it was lacking in some way. This led me to question what was so different about the two units.

These questions led me to realize that students were more taken with older black and white images because they held an aura of mystery. Because the photos from the first unit were older and could not be easily found online, they had to read and research to comprehend the images. They also remained engaged in the first unit because, although they had heard about Martin Luther King Jr., Civil Rights, and Rosa Parks, they had never heard of the Freedom Riders and what an impact they made on the Civil Rights process. They were intrigued that black and white citizens would unite for a common goal. A group struggling against an unjust system inspired them. One student remarked, "Malala is special. She had a good mom and dad and stuff. She isn't normal." Students were less interested in Malala because she was so unique and so unlike them. These findings propelled deep research for historical radical images and for topics that would not only interest my students but also teach them about resistance and unity from a less unique standpoint than Malala's experience.

What I found not only supported the demanded rigorous curricula for secondary students, but also increased students' visual literacy skills while providing them with opportunities to study history that is not found in textbooks today.

As I researched visual literacy for my students, the value of historical images began to become clear. Students could track an event through visual images of that event from inception through completion, being able to draw out models of social change through written historical records. It was this search for unique historical images promoting social justice and a study on Modernist radical magazines that led me to discover a unique opportunity for visual literacy curricula. What I found not only supported the demanded rigorous curricula for secondary students, but also increased students' visual literacy skills while providing them with opportunities to study history that is not found in textbooks today. Using photos and images from *Labor Defender* (1926-1937) and *New Pioneer* (1931-1938), radical periodicals with critical content, would allow me to teach students about social change and the importance of education, while promoting the essential components of responsible citizenship and democracy.

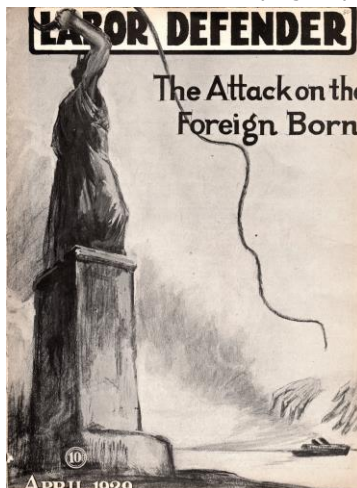
Labor Defender and New Pioneer

During the Modernist movement of the early 20th century, magazines held an important place in American culture. By the 1920s, magazines were a central method of communication. Nearly 100 years later, these rare artifacts contain vignettes of American society, often ignored in the secondary classroom. Images from these magazines have cultural and historical significance beyond the art form. While most magazines from the same time period are worthy of consideration, radical magazines such as *Labor Defender* and *New Pioneer* are especially valuable. Both publications offer a historical component along with

concepts relating not only to government, but also to social action and reform, which promote a healthy sense of citizenship in secondary students.

Labor Defender was published by the International Labor Defense from 1926 to 1937 as part of the propaganda for the Communist party in Chicago. Their call for subscribers states that *Labor Defender* is “the shield of the workers who have become casualties in the class war. It is the voice of all victims of capitalism....” (O’Flaherty 31). *Labor Defender* was surprisingly diverse for that period in history, concerned with issues of inequality, such as the incarcerations of working class people and political prisoners, the rising tensions in 1930s Europe, Chinese politics, and union strikes against corporations (including coal mining companies and textile companies). As a result, the periodical contains quality photos and illustrations of highly debated events and court cases, featuring multinational historical events throughout that eleven-year period. Most of the images contain representations or realities of the human struggle, like the cover (Figure 4) of the first issue in January of 1926 (Cover). The sketch of a muscular man striving to open a prisoner’s cell is starkly arresting. Students could easily draw conclusions about *Labor Defender’s* purpose as a publication based on this image. There is a determination in the bleak drawing. The rough quality of the image mirrors the mission of *Labor Defender* to represent minority causes and help lower classes against unfair majorities—themes that remained consistent within the periodical throughout its publication.

Labor Defender’s features on incarcerated individuals and the various court cases and actions in America and internationally provide unique insight to issues that are rarely spoken about in the classroom. For instance, in 1927 *Labor Defender* covered the infamous trial of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, both anarchists accused of murder, whose convictions and executions were widely disputed due to the circumstantial evidence against them (Berbusse 83). *Labor Defender* also featured photos of and articles about other radical concerns and events: the brutality of the Chicago police, the children of the incarcerated, lack of career opportunities, timelines of African American injustices (hangings, slavery facts, murders), and the sacrifice of soldiers fighting in the name of democracy. Articles were often paired with black and white photos of victims and fighters, many at meetings or peaceful protests attempting to change their situation. In March 1930, a time when many magazines would not dare to argue for racial equality, *Labor Defender* published photos of a white working woman and another of an African American woman and child (Damon 49). The article, titled “Women Fighters” (Figure 5), compares the struggles of Soviet



women to Black women in America, in the political arena and outside of it (49). Even without the article itself, the images standing alone depict a radical historical viewpoint that is not typically discussed in the secondary classroom setting. Before the Civil Rights movement, articles and pictures such as this were rare. The white woman in the picture is not lovely and poised. Instead, she is obviously a workingwoman of the lower classes. The smaller picture in the left corner of the African American woman shows her in her home rural setting. There is a type of equality to these images uncharacteristic of the time period. Students today could easily use images like these to clarify lifestyles of the time period and to track equality issues, such as Labor Laws and Woman’s Rights over the past century.

Like *Labor Defender*, *New Pioneer* is also a left-wing publication, but was written for young party members from 1931 to 1938. In addition, *New Pioneer* is also fairly diverse, focusing on inequality and struggles around America and internationally. *New Pioneer* is smaller, shorter, and more simplified than *Labor Defender*, to appeal to their intended audience. Despite these facts, *New Pioneer* also has valuable visuals that can be utilized today in the secondary classroom. *New Pioneer’s* visuals contain a monthly comic called “Comrades Kids” illustrated by Jack Herman. Of the four children in the comic, one is a girl, one is African American, and two are white males. The four youth are often seen frustrating or mocking the goals of Caucasian men. One of Herman’s pieces, titled “The Xmas Spirit” (Figure 6) was included in the December 1935 issue (Back Cover). In part of the comic, two Santas are seen taking gifts to “Ritz Town” and “Hunger Ville.” Ritz Town’s Santa is overweight and carrying toys. Hunger Ville’s Santa is skeletal, carrying signs that say “High Prices,” “Unemployment,” and “Closed Schools.” The four main characters are all sitting together on the back of a reindeer, in the middle of the image, holding signs that say “Build Schools Not Battleships.” Herman’s illustration represents *New Pioneer’s* goals: to focus energy on an anti-war, pro-community mindset. Herman’s illustrations can be used to promote a critique of current community disparities in America.

New Pioneer also features poetry, letters to the editor, stories, and news articles in each issue. As with *Labor Defender*, the pieces are accompanied by visuals that are thought-provoking and even argumentative in nature. English teacher Kiran Subhani used photos as a foundation for student-centered research. In *English Journal*, she stated, “Students research a historical overview of the topic, important terminology, contributing factors, relevant facts/statistics, key people and events, what has been done so far to address the conflict, and the current debate surrounding

the conflict" (37). In classroom projects like Subhani's, both *Labor Defender* and *New Pioneer* would be optimal locations to discover topics of conflict in history that are not a part of the average curriculum. The magazines point to alternative viewpoints and could create lively Socratic seminars and debates, among other uses. Obviously, lessons of visual literacy can be created using *Labor Defender* and *New Pioneer*. Teachers could easily defend their choices of images and text, but the true benefit to such sources is to create socially motivated, intelligent citizens with a knowledge base that can change a democratic society for the better.

Some educators might claim that using images in current magazines could benefit students in the same way as *Labor Defender* and *New Pioneer*. Current visuals do have a great wealth of information and can be used to help propel students towards social action. Yet, current images do not, as I found with my unit on Malala, contain historical information that has been forgotten and ignored in current textbooks. Students cannot look at a current image and track events through to their completion or analyze the way those actions have affected society today. In such a volatile time, students cannot remain objective in seeing the viewpoints in current issues, but they are able to see the whole picture through the use of historical images, especially images that focus on subjects and situations as intense as those they are facing today. Using older visuals will compel students to deconstruct historical events by researching unknown topics in a deeper way. They will have to create hypotheses about society by searching other forms of media and texts to gain the information they need to form opinions. They will comprehend American culture in a rich way, by examining events, attitudes, and political standing. Finally, they will have opportunities to consider questions about equality, government, and social justice, and will be able to answer those very questions by examining culture today, which will not only strengthen all literacy domains, but gift students with tools to begin changing themselves and their current societies.

Furthermore, the diverse needs of students will be met using *Labor Defender* and *New Pioneer*. Historical texts offered in public schools do not present an image that mirrors the current society. Narratives that contain minorities are often heroic or tragic, but primarily contained in Civil Rights, the Civil War, and the Slave Narrative. Rarely do minority students receive the opportunity to view the American struggle as a field for reform, as they will in both *New Pioneer* and *Labor Defender*. For example, in 1928 *Labor Defender* discusses the Obregon Murder in Mexico (Plaza 183). The same issue also contains an article about trade strikes in China (Nearing 189). *Labor Defender* continually followed the Scottsboro Boys trial in 1934. The images in the magazine are much like the one shown here (Figure 7), which is the cover of the April 1934 issue (Black). According to *The Encyclopedia of Alabama*, the Scottsboro trial started after nine black men were indicted for raping two white females in Alabama. Eight of the nine men were given the death penalty within two months of being indicted, although the following year one of the victims took to the stand, claiming that no rape had ever taken place (Scottsboro).

The cover of *Labor Defender* shows a white and black handshake in front of the nine accused young men, claiming racial unity as the International Labor Defense fought to free the youth.

In a similar vein, *New Pioneer* published stories and articles about minorities as well. In April 1936, *New Pioneer* published "The Pet Mule" by Alberta Moore, which was a story (with illustrations) about Ethiopia (14). In December 1935, *New Pioneer's* issue contained an article titled "The Sound of Three Voices" by Angelo Herndon, an African American young man arrested during an unemployment rally (17). Herndon's story is accompanied by pictures of him in prison garb and another standing in front of a podium (Figure 8). Some visuals like that of Herndon will inspire research because *New Pioneer* contains a wealth of information about society for young readers. For example, in July 1935 they published a picture of Jesse Owens, calling him "sensational" a year before he went to Berlin in August of 1936 and returned an American champion (14). In 1937, *New Pioneer* also printed Langston Hughes's poem "Sharecroppers" with a very detailed illustration by Fred Ellis. Ellis's drawing provided a vivid picture of the hopelessness that Hughes discussed.

Undoubtedly, New Pioneer and Labor Defender both have strong ties to the experience of minorities and other oppressed populations, which is a refreshing outlook for secondary students, whose academic literature experience is still dominated by a white male majority.

Undoubtedly, *New Pioneer* and *Labor Defender* both have strong ties to the experience of minorities and other oppressed populations, which is a refreshing outlook for secondary students, whose academic literature experience is still dominated by a white male majority. In *Radical Teacher*, in an article promoting Human Rights and Social Justice Education, Melissa Canlas, Amy Argenal, and Monisha Bajaj practiced "self- reflection (for students and educators), critical dialogue, and 'reading the world' (Freire 1970), which meant examining the social, economic, and political conditions that shaped the experiences of students and their communities" (40). In order to help students participate in self-reflection and a wider analysis of their communities, it is essential that students have access to visuals and literature that discuss social justice and social action. Yet curriculums do not often focus on these themes. In the *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, Barbara Comer stated, "Literacy becomes complicit in false promises and deflects attention away from the fundamental injustices" (363). Diverse students today will recognize the value of social action, which is the soul of both *Labor Defender* and *New Pioneer*.

Leading to a Response of Social Justice

After my lengthy research on *Labor Defender* and *New Pioneer*, I brought some of the images to the classroom. I was particularly motivated by *Labor Defender's* images on incarceration, like the drawn image of a prisoner pointing at the viewer, attached to an article entitled, "The Cause That Passes Through a Prison" (Sept. 1926) and Figure 1, the cover of the first issue included earlier. Students studied the images as part of a unit discussing juvenile incarceration, during which students also read articles and researched juvenile statistics for their areas. Questions were asked during discussions, such as "What are crimes that juveniles should go to prison for?"; "How long should juveniles be kept in detention centers?"; and "What options should a juvenile have upon release?" During the two-week unit, students were also taught about the death penalty and argued the pros and cons of death penalty cases, including cases in which defendants were eventually proven innocent. I used the *Labor Defender* images as a jumping off point, which was highly successful. The students briefly looked the magazine layout of the Scottsboro case and one part of the *Labor Defender* article that accompanied it, which cited the steps that those involved in the Scottsboro case were taking to further their cause. Students were riveted on the topic of incarceration and surprised by the steps that citizens took to advance their cause. For example, the article advocated, "Protests in the form of post cards, telegrams, letters..." and "Leaflets, calling for immediate and mass action" (Damon, 1934, 19, figure 10). The list caused one student to remark, "They could have done better if they had social media!" Another comment included, "Oh. So people are serious about letters to important people."¹ Obviously, a simple review of a one-page article was taken seriously enough by the students to allow them to revise their worldview of what social action might look like.

The next week was project-based, during which partners were asked to research units of interest from a topic list and create presentations for the class. Each presentation would have to include drawn visuals, information about people currently involved with their Social Justice issue, and present day facts. Then, based on the student's reading of the steps taken from the Scottsboro case, students were to list several steps the public could take to help their cause. This Social Justice project, which began with several visual images weeks before, was highly successful. Students were surprised with the facts they found. They created compelling posters that advocated for their causes, based on the historical format that they found in *Labor Defender*. One of the projects included a poster advocating against child labor (Figure 11). The students wrote a poem for children that suffered from the effects of child labor. They also created a crossword puzzle with vocabulary terms to allow their classmates to familiarize themselves with the terms that often accompany child labor laws and concerns. They included a fact list and a comic strip they had created as well. Another pair of students created their presentation on the war in Syria (Figure 12). They created an advertisement to promote buying bracelets from a non-profit organization they had found that sent aid to Syrian

refugees with every bracelet purchased. This group also had a list of websites that students could use to get more information and they created a greeting card to encourage refugees living away from home. Some students struggled to find correct information, wanting to research on "easy" access sites, such as Wikipedia. Others took days to map out a good presentation. The unit needed tweaking, but using *Labor Defender* to begin the discussion and the project was listed as a success. One can see from the included pictures that students took their project assignments seriously and were committed to educating their classmates. Following the presentations, posters were hung in the classroom for a week, allowing students to "visit" issues of social justice, copying website addresses, and engaging in research for their own interests. At the end of the year, students still discussed their projects and continued to believe that they could cause change.

Final Thoughts

Some educators, focusing on requirements alone, might claim that realizing the value of social action is not a formal necessity for students. One might be "College and Career Ready" without comprehending social justice or its purpose. However, being able to recognize the need for involvement in community and country will lead to critical thought in a meaningful context. Social justice is still being pursued around the world and inequalities affect most students each day. Because of this truth, students need to develop a voice for themselves that will lend to critical thought patterns and problem solving. This type of critical process is found within the literacy domains in real texts that can alter the way students view the world and themselves. "This is an increasingly visual world. Without the tools to understand images, society is likely to be less literate and images are more likely to fall on eyes that look but do not see" (Emanuel, Challons-Lipton & Baker). Literacy and all of its domains are the essential component for success. Citizens need to be able to comprehend texts, images, and other multimedia components to flourish in society. Introducing students to a wide range of images and texts will give them some of the tools needed to make sense of their society. *Labor Defender* and *New Pioneer* are two different sources that will provide students with opportunities to develop questions and find possible solutions to current issues.

Through a discussion of the visuals within *Labor Defender* and *New Pioneer*, secondary students will see the struggles faced by the average person and will be able to identify themes of injustice. Students will also see the action required of citizens to create change within society. Instead of examining images containing only political information or current information, these visuals will inspire discussion in a way others cannot. Students will also be able use researching skills to develop hypotheses about social actions and the effectiveness of various methods, which is not only engaging but also connecting to the level of rigor educators must seek for students today. Promoting topics of social action through the use of visual artifacts found in *Labor Defender* and *New Pioneer* will increase literacy and engagement in the secondary English

and Language Arts classroom, creating citizens who are not only able to learn, but want to do so.

Notes

¹ Student observations were from Rachel Jean's second period class, in November 2015.

² Student observation is from Rachel Jean's second period class, in February 2016.

³ Student observation is from Rachel Jean's second period class in April 2016

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RADICAL TEACHER

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

Structural Racism and the Will to Act

by Tehama Lopez Bunyasi



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 color¹ 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.



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;

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

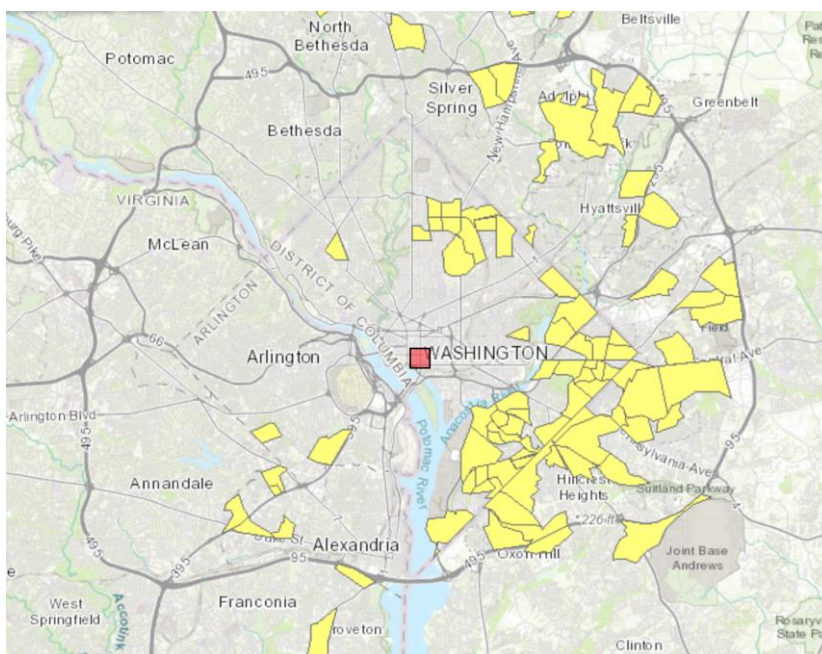
"environmental racism," "food desert," and "food justice." Together, we looked at interactive USDA maps that identified a region's proximity to grocery stores, followed by a series of Census-derived maps that colorfully illustrate racial segregation. Certain students were visibly stunned, not necessarily 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.² 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*³—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.



If only Daddy would have known about the power of #Pepsi.



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.



Hey Jeff Sessions, this #IslandinthePacific has been the 50th state for going on 58 years. And we won't succumb to your dog whistle politics

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

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

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

³The 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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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

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.
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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.

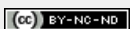
"Black and Brown Coalition Building During the 'Post-Racial' Obama Era" by Karla Mari McKanders, pp. 473-499

"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

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When I first envisioned and designed my fall 2016 graduate seminar, *The Literature of Lynching*, I did not imagine that it would take place during one of the most negative campaign seasons in U.S. history, nor that a candidate whose policies oppose the course's foundational principles would be elected during the eleventh week of the semester. Initially, I had been motivated to teach this course by both the literary representations of lynching published since the Civil War and the ongoing, everyday racist violence perpetrated against people of color in America. I had been struck in particular by the upswell of activism and protest that followed Trayvon Martin's 2012 murder. This type of widespread social engagement was first articulated through the dynamic legacies of such movements as Civil Rights and Black Power, and it continues in the work of current groups like Black Lives Matter and Say Her Name, which react today against civil and criminal injustice. My colleagues and I often discussed the social and political similarities between the 2010s and the 1960s; I hoped to capture some of that impetus toward change in a course that had only recently been added to our English master's program, *Literature and Social Justice*. Other members of my department had previously covered topics such as Black British literature, magical realism, and the American Indian Movement in this course; I planned to draw upon my own background in African-American studies in creating a class that would identify the literature's activist potential while engaging seriously with its forms and its critical contexts.

Over the past few years, my students at both the undergraduate and the graduate levels had become increasingly interested in studying the points at which our classroom conversations resonate with real-world issues, or even translate into tangible action. I set out, therefore, to design a course in which the literature we were studying not only emerged in reaction to recurring racial injustice but also motivated its readers to participate in protest and resistance. I knew that I needed to prepare carefully for those moments in class when students wanted to discuss their own positions as potential victims or targets of violence. In spite of the three majors and four minor programs that we offer, our English Department attracts a fairly homogeneous population. My class ultimately contained twelve graduate students, including four students of color, but that kind of diversity is a relatively rare occurrence in our department, particularly at the graduate level. As a white, heterosexual professional woman, I occupy a subject-position that contrasted directly with many of the students in this class. Several of the students in this graduate seminar were the first members of their families to attend college, let alone graduate school; in addition to racial and ethnic differences, we held some dissimilar religious views and possessed a range of different professional backgrounds. I planned, therefore, to frame our course goals and discussions using the vocabulary and communication strategies central to anti-racist pedagogy that speak to people occupying a variety of subject-positions.

I hoped that pursuing anti-racist pedagogy would help me to moderate productive discussions and to promote an

atmosphere of progressive, unbiased thinking in both classroom conversations and students' written work. As Kyoko Kishimoto understands this approach, it constitutes "an organizing effort for institutional and social change that is much broader than teaching in the classroom," including "(1) incorporating the topics of race and inequality into course content, (2) teaching from an anti-racist pedagogical approach, and (3) anti-racist organizing within the campus and linking our efforts to the surrounding community" (1-2). Anti-racist scholars are often influenced by the tenets of critical race theory, which not only examines the ways in which racist beliefs are integral to national and social power structures but also fosters critical analyses of racism in every aspect of society. In other words, critical race theory asks us to rethink socially conditioned beliefs and the unfounded assumptions about race that our educational background has established (Kishimoto 2-3). Both Kishimoto and Priya Kandaswamy emphasize that self-reflection is a key element of such pedagogy; analysis of one's strategies and motivations while teaching is an ongoing process to which one must return again and again in order to work effectively (Kishimoto 4-5; Kandaswamy 11). Kandaswamy also warns of the dangers of relying upon discourses of colorblindness and multiculturalism, which in academic contexts seek to demonstrate that racism no longer exists, that there is no need for critical conversations about race—or, by extension, for courses on racial identities and ethnic literatures (7). Like Kishimoto, Kandaswamy calls for analyses of existing power structures with the goal of challenging so-called liberal concepts like individualism and tolerance, in addition to calling into question the more obviously racist elements of society (11). Anne E. Wagner also suggests that practitioners of anti-racist pedagogy develop proficiency in "conflict resolution" and that they pay close attention to the processes of teaching, rather than focusing on the course's end result (263). Maintaining an openness about the course's content and encouraging students to challenge normative belief systems are pedagogical strategies in line with standpoint theory, another useful approach to critical analysis in the anti-racist classroom (Wagner 264).

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In developing class lectures and activities, therefore, I drew on the tenets of both critical race theory and standpoint theory. I chose lynching as the topic around which to organize our readings and discussions because it is an act of violence that, although it occurs in several countries and may have originated as early as the seventeenth century (Brundage 3), reflects the persistence of historical inequities in the United States and continues to occur because of institutionalized prejudices. Several of my

students in earlier courses had already made connections in casual conversation between recent instances of public aggression and the American history of violence against ethnic minorities. After considering the many hostile acts against innocent citizens that had taken place just in the past two years, I decided that my course would conceptualize lynching as both a historical phenomenon and an immediate danger. Though it is most notoriously associated with the postbellum United States, the persistence of lynching underlines the basic social inequalities that remain in spite of neoliberal practices associated with keywords like “multiculturalism” and “diversity.” As W. Fitzhugh Brundage points out, a combination of factors produced the social conditions that fostered lynching, including the end of the Civil War, the full emancipation of formerly enslaved African Americans, the persistence of white supremacist beliefs, and the gradual withdrawal of federal troops and legislative oversight from the South in the 1870s (6-7). These factors have continued to influence American social attitudes in significant ways; I wanted my course to identify and analyze the roots of modern prejudices before turning to the possibilities of social resistance.

The Literature of Lynching

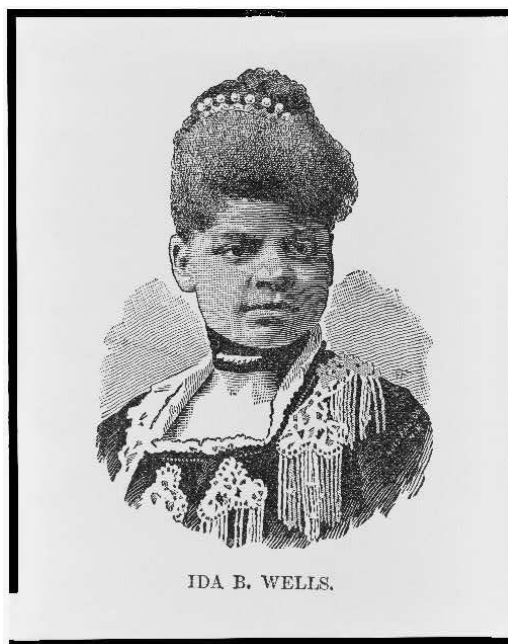
American literature, whether consciously or not, registers and reacts to these kinds of social tensions in its attempts to describe the real contours of everyday life. All national literatures are shaped by their citizens’ beliefs and actions; in the United States, as in many other countries, our literature is “complicit in the fabrication of racism” but also reflects countless instances in which “literature exploded and undermined” such beliefs (Morrison 16). However, American literature is distinguished from other Western and non-Western literatures more specifically by what Toni Morrison has called “an American Africanism—a fabricated brew of darkness, otherness, alarm, and desire that is uniquely American,” which is produced by the omnipresent fact of slavery and constitutes a key element of the country’s strategies for representing itself in writing (38-39). Instances of lynching, it seemed to me as I planned this course, recur throughout postbellum American literature because they are motivated by a racism that originated during slavery and, although these instances are clearly criminal acts, they often manage to evade legal justice. Like the appearance of the Ku Klux Klan in 1866, lynchings represent an identifiable social phenomenon that reacts to Emancipation, experiences regular peaks and declines in activity, and flourishes through white-supremacist values. Linda D. Chavers defines lynching as “the use of terror and threat” in the course of “a mortally violent act” (1383); Frankie Bailey notes that such acts constitute “extralegal violence carried out by a mob,” and they generally involve

both vigilante activity and ritualistic behavior (1049). Lynching thus comprises physical, psychological, economic, and even geographical dimensions. The peculiarly high concentration of lynchings on American soil may be due in part to the country’s size, its diverse landscapes, its relative youth, the number of territorial battles fought here before its founding, and a population first composed of Native inhabitants, immigrants, colonial settlers, and slaves. However, the country’s participation in the transatlantic slave trade, beginning from the establishment of the first New England colonies in the seventeenth century, directly determined the laws and social attitudes that have continued to enable racist violence. The country’s unequal distribution of resources and political power, coupled with a government that refused to condemn slavery in its constitutive documents, stimulated a racist subculture that produced and continues to produce acts of lynching. After considering these factors, which are often subsumed into other concerns in general national histories,

I decided that my class would address the broad social and historical contexts that fostered lynching as well as the literature that attempted to condemn and oppose it.

As I worked on designing my course over the summer, three key questions that would undergird our class investigations emerged: Why have writers of the literature of lynching tended to work within certain specific literary genres? Why have women consistently acted at the forefront of anti-lynching campaigns? How can we translate our analyses of this literature and its contexts into concrete social action? Part of the answer to all three questions lay in the semester’s first readings: a selection of essays from Ida B. Wells, an

anti-lynching activist and journalist whose work bridged the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Though Wells became a teacher at a young age and had to earn her education piecemeal while she was caring for her younger siblings, she remained optimistic about her career in public service in Memphis; she began writing for two weekly church newspapers while she was teaching high school and, in 1889, became editor and co-owner of the *Memphis Free Speech and Headlight*, a black newspaper (Bay xxiii). It was not until 1892, when three successful black grocers, one of whom was a close friend, were lynched in Memphis that Wells found her belief in the country’s progress toward social improvement shaken. She wrote an editorial denouncing the lynchers’ actions, received threats against her life and her newspaper business, and ended up moving to Chicago, where she lived for the rest of her life (Bay xxv-xxvi).



IDA B. WELLS.

PORTRAIT OF IDA B. WELLS, 1891

As a result of her experiences in 1892, Wells became the most important activist against lynching and voice for the victims of racist violence that our country has ever known. She wrote seven major pamphlets arguing against lynching, including the famous *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases* (1892) and *A Red Record* (1895), as well as many newspaper columns, editorials, and essays, and she regularly spoke at political gatherings and meetings of various social organizations. Wells set the stage for the writers and activists who would come after her by challenging the conventional boundaries of gender and race and by establishing nonfiction essays, newspaper articles, and editorial columns as vehicles for social justice. After spending three weeks reading her essays, my students and I used Wells's work as a touchstone for our conversations over the rest of the semester; we returned again and again to the confluence of form, message, and social position in her writings as a means of understanding the motivations that underlay the class's other texts. These conversations set the tone for the course overall and helped me to understand the goals that the students themselves came to define: to gain as comprehensive a sense as possible of both the history of lynching and the nature of anti-lynching activism in the United States since the Civil War, and to identify some material ways in which our studies could prepare us to participate in such activism. As we worked toward these goals, I encouraged the class to reflect on our methods of analysis and to reexamine our motivations for seeking not only knowledge but also social justice.

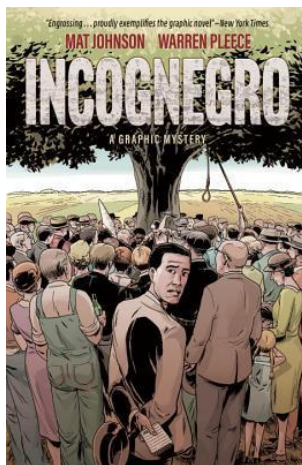
Identifying the Message: *Incognegro*

Before I could reach a point of true social engagement with my students, however, I had to define the course's academic goals. As a graduate literature seminar, the class needed to offer an intensive grounding in my chosen subject along with opportunities for students to survey the field as a whole and to add their own scholarly interventions. At the same time, I wanted to make our studies socially meaningful and responsive to our immediate political context. I decided, therefore, to combine a chronologically organized survey of literature about lynching with critical readings on contemporary incidents and social-justice organizations. Our readings began with Wells and ended with poetry written in the 2010s; we discussed Wells's and Charles Chesnutt's contributions to the NAACP, Civil-Rights responses to Emmett Till's murder, and today's activist movements, among many others. In an effort to tie our work in the classroom to other disciplines' concerns and to American social attitudes, I gave my students some creative assignments, beyond the usual response and research papers, and encouraged them to seek out evidence of both publicly unacknowledged racial violence and anti-racist activism. These nonstandard assignments included visiting a campus art exhibition on the Scottsboro Nine,

online investigations into relevant current events, and an exercise in "talking back" to Mat Johnson and Warren Pleece's graphic novel *Incognegro* (2009), which tells a fictionalized version of NAACP executive secretary Walter White's attempts to publish the names of people who attended lynchings in the South while passing as a white journalist.

My students' responses to *Incognegro* included a piece of book art that depicted two witnesses reacting to a hanged man, a podcast, two poems, a blog post, an opinion column, a letter to the editor, and a word collage, among others. In part because this book was among our last readings in the course, they felt more empowered to analyze its message and translate it into a meaningful real-world context. By this point, they had studied the literature of lynching through essays, plays, poetry, novels for both younger and adult readers, and website posts; each of their responses to Johnson and Pleece's work took a form to which they felt a personal connection, whether it grew out of jobs they had held or followed from more private experiences. Each piece of work engaged with visual and thematic aspects of the novel—such as passing, colorism, white-supremacist politics, black-and-white images, and facial similarities among characters—in order to highlight the contradictions inherent to a society whose official institutions enable the lynching of its citizens. This assignment worked well at the end of the semester because the class had read several texts documenting the statistical history of lynching in the United States and had considered how this history's literary representation changes with its transformation through several different genres and narratives. One student, an African-American woman in her early fifties, noted that the graphic novel, on which she had written a more traditional response paper, allowed her to consider several definitions of individual identity, including mistaken identities, the experience of belonging to more than one geographical region at once, identities shared by two or more people, concealed racial identities, secret identities, and reaffirmed public identities.

One of my white female students, who identifies first as a mom and a social activist, wrote a blog post that draws parallels between the 1920s context of Johnson and Pleece's novel and the political conservatism of the 2010s. Another of my white students, a man in his early thirties, wrote an opinion column in the style of Ida B. Wells that analyzed a public statement of white supremacy that a Buffalo resident had recently made. He offered a reading of *Incognegro* as a possible corrective to the popular attitudes that support acts like this one. Finally, one of the course's quietest students, a black woman in her early twenties, observed that the process of writing a poem, in which the speaker is "searching for a melanin deep enough to cry in / Yet shallow enough to stand in," empowered her to explore her anxieties about her own dark skin and racial heritage. Overall, though I believe my students appreciated this opportunity to approach their studies in a more creative manner than usual, they admitted the difficulty of both



MAT JOHNSON AND WARREN PLEECE'S GRAPHIC NOVEL *INCOGNEGRO* (2009)

sharing their private views and seeing the vulnerability that this exercise exposed in others.

In part because I anticipated the challenges that looking at lynching would pose, this text was the only visual representation that we studied. I had made the decision while planning the course not to include photographs, art exhibits, or films about lynching victims or the crimes' perpetrators. I wanted to make race and inequality our central topics, as Kishimoto advocates, but I did not want to replicate the power structures that support inequality—that make it a spectacle rather than working to end it. Thus, I spent some time before we read *Incognegro* preparing the class to encounter a lynching face-to-face, not "in the flesh" per se, but as a series of pictures in which mute bodies confront the viewer-reader directly.

Our discussion of the novel's visual elements, and the time we spent considering whether we would be complicit in the voyeurism that has accompanied acts of lynching, helped me to understand something else that the course had accomplished—something that I had not anticipated while designing the curriculum. My students and I learned that we prioritized voice and text over body and picture in our analyses of the literature of lynching. This realization does not diminish the importance of the bodily suffering that motivates and defines lynching, nor does it assume that people's physical bodies play less than a central role in their day-to-day experiences of the world. Rather, it points to our focus on the personal and cultural traits that define individual victims of lynching, the social factors that support racist violence, and the varied arguments that anti-lynching activists have constructed. We wanted to concentrate on texts that put forward analyzable, measurable content rather than speculating about the symbolic resonance of a photograph whose subject was preserved in part because he or she could no longer speak. Several of my students mentioned lynching scenes that appear in popular films or TV shows, suggesting that these moments are meant to signal a particular set of social circumstances to viewers, rather than functioning as a more substantial critique of racist attitudes or a failed justice system. They also noted that the history of lynching photographs, which were often circulated as souvenirs or reproduced as postcards that "record the race-color-caste solidarity and lethal 'superiority' of the white community" (Apel 47), renders the appearance of lynching pictures in aesthetic or scholarly contexts always already suspect. Viewing such photographs might put both the author/artist and the viewer in danger of acting from the same vantage-point as the original mob. After some conversation, we decided as a group that we wanted to continue to limit our visual texts to the reproductions of lynching scenes that Warren Pleece drew for *Incognegro*. We also agreed consciously to maintain an awareness of the voices that lynching silenced, to seek them out even as we could not avoid seeing their violated bodies in the pages of the graphic novel.

Our class discussion of *Incognegro* helped to consolidate in many ways the concerns about racial identity and social representation that we had been pursuing throughout the semester. Though the novel's story is set in the 1920s, Johnson and Pleece make reference to today's

fears about interracial conflict through both the book's cover design and the biographical notes that bookend the main story. The cover resembles the front page of a newspaper, with the book's title serving as the newspaper's masthead and quotes from three reviewers providing the typeset text. This page is dominated by a large photograph of a light-skinned black man wearing a fedora and gazing to his left, as though his attention has been drawn by something far outside the frame. Half of his face is shadowed, reflecting the themes of deception and revelation that motivate the narrative. Johnson also includes an "Author's Note" before Part I of the novel, where he describes growing up as "a black boy who looked white." As a result, he sometimes "fantasiz[ed] . . . about living in another time, another situation, where my ethnic appearance would be an asset instead of a burden" (4). This introduction thus prepares readers to approach the novel with modern social conflicts and prejudices in mind; its early-twentieth-century setting comments on the types of situations that we still face today.

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Our conversations about *Incognegro* also allowed us to consider three themes we had been studying all semester in light of both their historical and their more immediate implications: the burdens (and advantages) of accurate representation, the illogical persistence of racist violence, and witnesses' responsibility to act on social injustice. While we had examined these issues during our discussions of all of the other texts, this visual medium encouraged us to confront in new ways our own anxieties about how lynching shapes literature. Representation is a concern, for instance, that motivates discussion in any course whose literature centers on personal identity traits and social issues. My students noted that every author we read, from Ida B. Wells to Louise Erdrich, was careful to describe lynching in accurate terms that not only captured its physically traumatic elements but also underscored the human decisions that made the crime possible. At the same time, however, the fact that these descriptions appeared in text only, with no accompanying illustrations, meant that understanding the true extent of the damage that lynching victims suffered and their identities as individual human beings was limited by the scope of readers' own imaginations. Before we read *Incognegro*, my students discussed whether or not to view some of the thousands of lynching photographs that are available online and through exhibitions like antiques dealer James Allen's *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in*

America, which has been available in museums across the country but can also be seen on Allen's dedicated website and in a book published by Twin Palms Publishers (withoutsanctuary.org). Would we risk effacing the victims' individual identities and reinforcing the institutional structures that had condemned them if we looked at these kinds of representations? I explained that I had decided not to show such images in class or include them on our course website to preserve victims' privacy and personhood, but also to avoid any potential trauma that might occur for members of the class when confronted with evidence of painful death. However, I emphasized, students should feel free to make their own decisions about what to view when not in class. After we had had this conversation, I wanted to make sure that students were prepared to view the images in *Incognegro*, which are drawn by hand but inspired by real-life scenes. We also had to consider what the potential advantages would be of looking at the faces and bodies of these victims—whether there would be a way to honor lives that had been lost to this specific brand of social violence by letting go of our own inhibitions and seeking out evidence of their lives' impact. My students argued that while we had been careful to approach our subject with respect throughout the semester, we needed to acknowledge the subjects of lynching as people and to look at them that way, not turn away from their visual representations as though they were really objects created by lynchers themselves.

The title page of *Incognegro*, actually a splash page that spans two facing pages, introduces readers to the ambivalent nature of representation. The title itself appears on the bottom of the left page, while the right-hand page features a group of spectators turned toward an as-yet unseen spectacle. They are all light-skinned; one holds a bottle of liquor and is chatting animatedly with his neighbor. The only person turned away from the object of their gazes is the man we soon recognize as Zane Pinchback, the main character, a black man who is passing as white in order to record the names of the people participating in this lynching. The book's next image, printed on a right-hand page with the left-hand page a solid black, is the lynching itself: a young man clad only in pants torn off at the knees stands on a crate, the noose already secured around his neck, while several white men point at him, brandish clubs, gesture angrily, and drink from various bottles. Though the figure of the victim almost disappears among all the other men drawn on the page, the enormous tree from which he is about to be hanged and the lynching rope, drawn tightly at an acute angle by a man in the picture's background, guide our eyes to his face. Zane's narration of the scene appears in four text bubbles at the top; he notes that "Between 1889 and 1918, 2,522 negroes were murdered by lynch mobs in America. That we know of. Now, since the beginning of the '30s, most of the white papers don't even consider it news. To them, another nigger dead is not a story. So my job is to make it one. That's all" (Johnson 7). This text points to several dimensions of representational accuracy that we had already considered in class. Zane cites statistics that demonstrate not only the unspeakable scope of lynching activity but also individuals' and organizations' persistent efforts to record and stop it. He notes the normalization of

lynchings within the conservative atmosphere of Jim Crow America and the press's role in preserving the status quo. Finally, the racist epithet that he includes reflects the casual hatred that in this period functioned to dehumanize African Americans. The book thus confronts its readers with the material experience of lynching as well as the social contexts that have enabled it.

Our discussions about these issues of visual representation again led my students to question why such incidents continue to occur today. They asked repeatedly what we can do to work against the social attitudes and legal loopholes that allow this type of crime to go, at times, unpunished. Even with the passage of the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act in 2009, violent vigilante crimes that target individuals based on perceived racial, ethnic, gender, sexual, religious, or other identity take place regularly. Most states have anti-hate crime statutes; 45 of those address race, religion, and ethnicity, while only 32 address sexual orientation, 29 address gender, and 11 address transgender identity. Only 13 state anti-hate crime laws are considered "comprehensive" ("[#50States](http://www.50states.com)"). As a group, we found this information, and its representation in both textual and graphic forms, a significant motivation to act outside of the classroom.

The Literature of Lynching as Social Impetus

My students interpreted their new knowledge about lynching as a historical and a current phenomenon as the reason they now need to take public action. Both creative assignments like the ones that *Incognegro* inspired and our everyday discussions of more conventional texts like Charles Chesnut's *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901), Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1923), Annie Nathan Meyer's *Black Souls* (1932), Endesha Ida Mae Holland's *Miss Ida B. Wells* (1983), Lewis Nordan's *Wolf Whistle* (1994), and Louise Erdrich's *The Plague of Doves* (2009), among others, guided our class toward more meaningful insight into the American histories that have been shaped by acts of lynching. As a result of our classroom focus on these histories, my students insisted upon discussing every week the regular violence and discriminatory practices that define American social relations, interpreting these events in most cases as a register of the kinds of reactionary attitudes that permeate the country's political climate. During the 2016 election season, for instance, two local colleges were vandalized with spray-painted racial slurs; a Buffalo resident erected a noose in his yard as an expression of support for the Republican presidential candidate (Besecker). My students spoke openly about the kinds of racism that they felt the campaign had empowered, condemning these and other violent acts across the country. They cited the increasing presence of protests among both affected groups and allies as evidence that the majority of Americans do not share racist views. They found the many public expressions of outrage and dissension that had been voiced since the election to be a source of optimism, as we discussed several times, and both white and black students shared their plans to

participate in upcoming protest marches and rallies. However, several of my students of color also felt in a very real sense that their ways of life were in danger. Because they were statistically more likely to be stopped by the police while driving or walking down the street, they felt vulnerable in public spaces. One student, a black man in his late twenties, expressed his belief that he was likely to be targeted for reasons similar to those that Trayvon Martin, Freddie Gray, Sandra Bland, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Philando Castile, and many other recent victims of racially driven violence had faced. Merely being aware that these problems existed was not enough, as the authors of our literature had also argued, to offer a solution. Instead, this student and his peers asserted that we needed to read much more, outside of the immediate purview of the course, and to talk to people in all areas of our lives about the crimes committed against people of color and the actions we can take to stop them. Essays, poems, plays, stories, and novels help to record and preserve the lives and voices that lynching steals—but live conversations, protests, rallies, meetings, petitions, and classroom sessions do the more important work of reinvigorating those lost existences and pushing those of us who are still here to fight injustice.

My students grappled with difficult questions every week, asking themselves and each other what responsibility we possess to intervene in incidents of racial profiling, racist violence, bullying, and cultural prejudice.

Overall, I learned a great deal from both the reading and research that I did to prepare for each session and the interpretive work that we did in class together. My students grappled with difficult questions every week, asking themselves and each other what responsibility we possess to intervene in incidents of racial profiling, racist violence, bullying, and cultural prejudice. Their many questions included: What substantial political or social effects can a written document—whether fiction or nonfiction—produce? Where and how should we circulate such documents? Are there particular demographics—age, cultural or racial group, gender, religious affiliation, level of education, professional status, etc.—that would benefit most from reading and discussing this literature? How, too, they asked, do we understand what the material definition of lynching is? What cases of targeted violence qualify as lynching, and why is that qualification important? While we discussed questions like this in every class period, we generally uncovered more questions than answers, and many of our investigations could not be satisfactorily resolved. It was the process of inquiry itself that was useful, as Anne Wagner has also pointed out; through these questions, we ventured beyond our usual comfort zones in order to investigate the groups accountable for these acts of violence and the ways in which we are also complicit in them

Many of the questions we returned to over and over again as a class centered on the definition of lynching itself and the situations in which the term can or should be applied. Complicity turns out to be a major determinant in identifying a case of lynching: as Brundage notes, a host of interrelated social and economic factors have contributed to widespread incidences of lynching, including “Reconstruction, segregation, sharecropping, [and] white political hegemony” (14). Though he is discussing the immediate postbellum period in the South here, Brundage’s list translates in today’s national context to abandoned governmental attempts to address regional economic inequalities, persistent segregation within cities’ institutional and geographic infrastructures, high unemployment and underemployment numbers, and recurring evidence that white-supremacist beliefs continue to shape a significant number of social interactions and public policy decisions. The economic stresses that these factors produce can contribute to outbreaks of violence—but they are not the sole reason why lynching occurs. The social complicity necessary to imagine, condone, carry out, and, in some cases, conceal an act of lynching originates in a group or “mob” mentality that provides ready-made excuses for unconscionable violence. A mob of people who shared the belief that a person or persons had committed a crime against them might use “the pretext of punishing an alleged law-breaker or violator of local customs” by executing “their victims with little if any regard for proof of guilt or evidence of innocence.” Such executions depended upon the mob’s shared intentions to “enforce social conformity and to punish an individual,” but they also involved intentional persecution of African Americans in many cases as well as “a degree of community approval” (Brundage 18). This combination of personal views and public circumstances suggests that lynching is defined by some measure of social approbation and the collusion of at least a small group of people in the act.

Our discussions of complicity did not resolve our investigation into lynching’s social contexts; rather, this concept raised more worries about our own complicity in the circumstances that spur and enable public violence. Though I had hoped that students would finish my course with a solid grounding in at least one dimension of America’s political literature and the inspiration to combat social inequalities, they also ended the semester with a sense that their own presences as witnesses to public injustice made them responsible for ongoing problems. We could not, as a group, dispel this fear. Students discussed openly their plans to participate in future protest gatherings but also expressed worry that they would become inured to the current state of social unrest and would continue to accept the truly unacceptable. I reminded them of the diverse texts we had discussed, the creative responses we had formulated to the literature, and the serious conversations we had conducted on both theoretical terms and real-world conditions. We agreed that maintaining a conscious awareness of social justice must be our priority when moving forward.

However, in spite of our shared commitment to pursuing social justice, I encountered some standpoint issues in teaching the course. My students in many cases

had much more direct experience with racial prejudice and social violence than I did. To compensate for our dissimilar backgrounds, we worked to acknowledge and articulate the differences among us; these dialogues helped us to understand more precisely the social inequalities that produce such violence. Though we did not achieve a perfect sense of identification among all the members of the class, we found empathy for one another. We also had to process a significant influx of negative emotions that accompanied and followed the election season—discouragement, depression, and even apathy. Many people in my class were surprised by the increasingly negative ads and public conversations that filtered through the presidential campaigns. As a result, they tended to associate each new example of public violence against people of color with the political conservatism that surfaced in the course of the campaign. They also suggested during some of our class discussions that social conditions had improved so little since the time of Ida B. Wells’s own anti-lynching crusade that we could hardly expect the complete overhaul of public institutions—the government, the police, the educational system, and so on—that a real shift in social attitudes demands.

To try to counter these pessimistic assessments of our national character, I asked them to look closely at the documents published by some of the activist organizations that had emerged in the past five years, including Black Lives Matter and Say Her Name. I admitted that our citizens are experiencing a nadir in political receptivity to social change but noted as well that this low point has been accompanied by a tremendous outpouring of public activism and anti-racist organizing. As the opening statement on the Black Lives Matter site asserts, such activism can be “a unique contribution that goes beyond extrajudicial killings of Black people by police and vigilantes” in order to “affirm . . . the lives of Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, Black-undocumented folks, folks with records, women, and all Black lives along the gender spectrum.” In short, BLM functions as “a tactic to (re)build the Black liberation movement” (*Black Lives Matter*). In discussing the foundational beliefs and guiding principles of this movement, we observed that—as we had also seen in our studies of Ida B. Wells’s work and in the many plays we had read in Kathy A. Perkins’s and Judith L. Stephens’s anthology *Strange Fruit: Plays on Lynching by African Women* (1998)—the group had first been formed by women: Patrisse Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi. Their call to action, which was sparked initially by Trayvon Martin’s murder in February 2012, refuses silence and complacency, urging us instead to locate African-American lives and experiences at the center of public discourse. Thus, we concluded as a class, though incidents of targeted violence condoned by entire groups of people continue to occur, writers, activists, and community members can draw on a long history of strategies for resistance in order to make arguments on behalf of social transformation. The African American Policy Forum, which created the Say Her Name movement and writes its supporting documents, argues that a “gender-inclusive approach to racial justice that centers all Black lives equally” is an essential part of the “resurgent racial justice movement” (Crenshaw and Ritchie 2). Women’s voices are and have been essential to

resisting lynching, in both its postbellum and more recent forms. This fact, I argued, gives us a historical standpoint from which to advance our own radical claims in favor of social change and renders us a key part of today’s activist movements.

The course’s twelve students advanced sometimes radically dissimilar perspectives on the course’s subjects and readings; I attempted in discussions and in my responses to their written work to advocate for receptivity toward others’ viewpoints and to urge them to take cultural contexts as well as writers’ personal experiences and subject-positions into account. We did work through some conflicts in class, though everyone maintained respectful attitudes; the most memorable conflicts occurred during our discussions on both *The Marrow of Tradition* and *Incognegro*, when students argued about the motivations behind an African-American person’s decision to pass as white. Some participants took the position that passing constitutes a cowardly act, a betrayal of one’s culture and family, while others pointed out that factors such as personal choice, professional and social opportunities, and safety have impelled individuals to pass. In both discussions, we considered the importance of an insider perspective, acknowledging the fact that although every person can be an ally on behalf of social justice, only a person who lives as a member of a specific race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, or other identity category can understand the ways in which that identity brings with it specific social and personal experiences. While we covered other topics in class that also generated debate, passing ended up being the subject that most noticeably divided the students, perhaps because it evokes intracultural divisions and choices that favor individuals over the community. Again, we did not manage to reconcile all of our differences by the end of the course, but I pointed out to the class that contrasting experiences of intersectionality are an essential dimension of social justice. I argued that we should emphasize these differences, rather than trying to ignore them, as we continue to figure out how citizens subject to injustice and their allies can best work together.

The horrific recurrence of lynchings across now three centuries of American social history points to our ongoing need to put true civil rights practices in place, while the increasing visibility of these events in literature, art, the news, and social media illustrates the new wave of protesters and activists who are working to make the world better.

Conclusion

At the end of the semester, I asked myself two questions: Was the class a success? Is any educational endeavor a success that cannot locate an endpoint for these crimes and that finds new evidence of such crimes almost every day? Increased individual and social

awareness of the history of lynching and its present-day forms is one obvious result of taking a course like this one, even when it does not offer universally effective solutions. I encouraged my students to continue seeking out the topics we had covered in class, to introduce these materials to their friends and colleagues, and to participate in local social-justice movements. I also continued to work through the pedagogical strategies based in anti-racist thought with which I had begun the semester. One of my students, who serves as a nurses' aide at a local hospital but describes herself as a "working artist," created a gorgeous book sculpture as one of means of coming to terms with our course subjects (see Figure 1). Of the piece, she says, "The whimsical beauty intertwined with the graphic content of lynching as a performance is meant to represent the juxtaposition of romanticism and mob violence depicted in much of our reading this semester" (Email, 28 Nov. 2016). Other students continue to email me regularly to share articles about recent instances of social violence, to ask for book recommendations, and to offer more thoughts about the often painful subjects we considered in class. I believe that the course affected many of my students' lives and that our conversations still resonate with them today.

Several concluding activities and conversations near the end of the course have helped me to shape my evolving approach to anti-racist pedagogy. As a result in part of our work within the contexts that scholars like Kyoko Kishimoto, Priya Kandaswamy, and Anne Wagner have defined, my students and I sought to increase our consciousness of our own positions relative to the topics that we studied, examining our motivations in making statements about race and racism, social justice, and movements toward public change. We confronted the moments of conflict that arose in discussion and in the texts we studied, rather than turning away from them. Conflict, we found, is a necessary precursor to change, even—or especially—when it is painful and unpleasant to work through. One of the most difficult things that I had to do over the course of the semester was to come to terms with the fact that we could not solve the problems that we perceived in our readings and in the world around us. Lynching, we concluded, continues to be a phenomenon that in some ways, as Koritha Mitchell put it, we have to "live with." Recently our country witnessed Mississippi Republican representative Karl Oliver stating that lynching would be an appropriate "punishment" for Louisiana lawmakers who chose to remove Confederate monuments; on May 20, 2017, black Bowie State College student Richard Collins III was stabbed in the chest by a white University of Maryland student while standing at a bus stop. Living with brutal incidents like these does not constitute acceptance, however, nor does it preclude the social-justice work that is so fundamental to the United States of today: a country that is divided between extreme conservatism and a fervent desire for racial, sexual, and

economic equalities. The horrific recurrence of lynchings across now three centuries of American social history points to our ongoing need to put true civil rights practices in place, while the increasing visibility of these events in literature, art, the news, and social media illustrates the new wave of protesters and activists who are working to make the world better.

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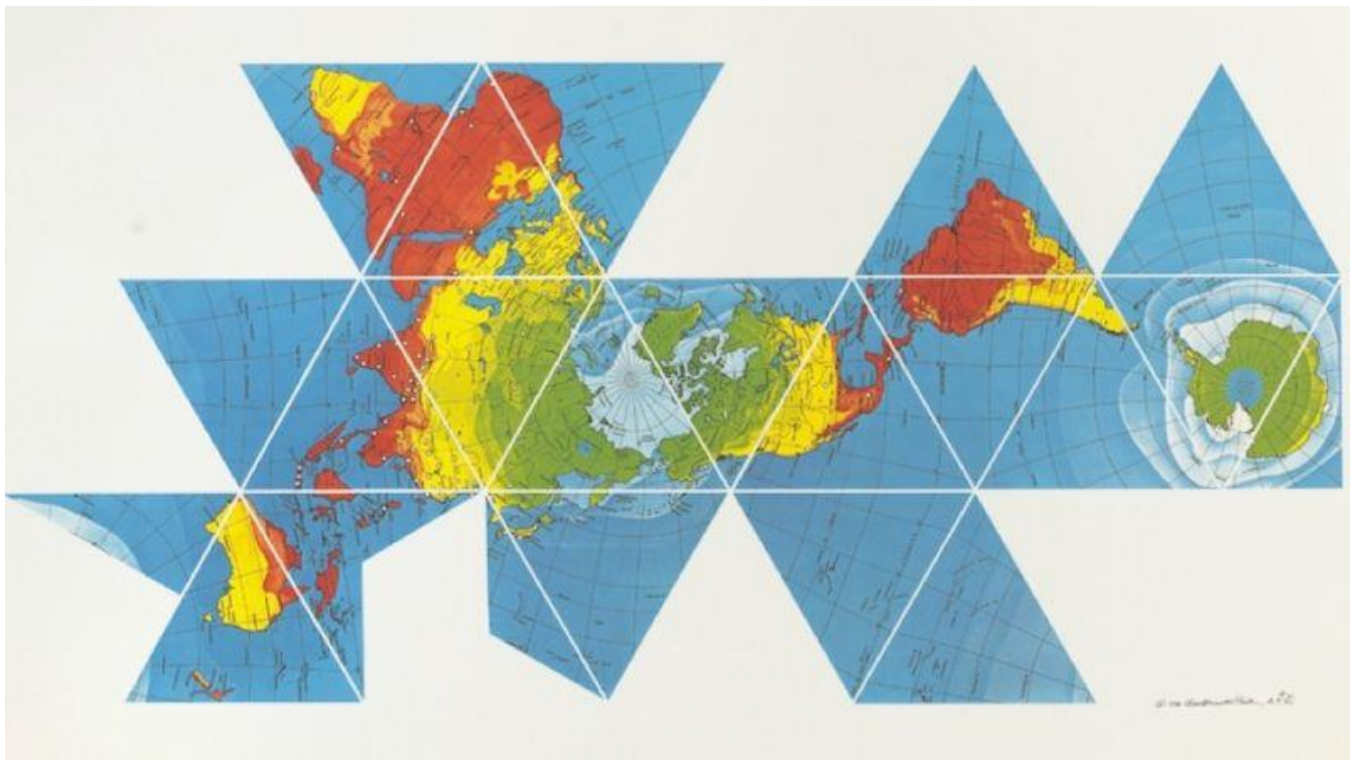
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RADICAL TEACHER

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

Decolonizing the Classroom: Embracing Radical Internationalism

by Chris Steele



DYMAXION AIR-OCEAN WORLD MAP, BY ERIC GABA, 1954

What first enthralled me about historian Gerald Horne was reading his book *Black and Brown: African Americans and the Mexican Revolution, 1910-1920*, where he tells the story of the boxer Jack Johnson, who was denied food in Mexico City by a U.S. store owner thinking he could uphold Jim Crow laws. Jack left the store and returned later with three or four generals who revoked the store owner's license, made him apologize and told him that Mexico was no "white man's country."

These are histories of resistance seldom heard to which Horne gives a voice. While there should be no illusions about the Obama presidency, the age of Trump is a caravan of injustices. Horne's analysis of the legacy of white supremacy and the refusal of mainstream U.S. history and education to acknowledge colonialism shows us how the age of Trump came about.

While teaching political science in the community college circuit in Colorado, I was faced with preassigned textbooks that presented history from a Eurocentric male perspective, devoid of a critique of capitalism, patriarchy and colonialism.

On my first day of teaching comparative government, a student in the course asked why the textbook didn't cover any of the genocides in Africa, such as Belgian King Leopold II's genocide of an estimated 10 million in the Congo for rubber, or Germany's genocide of the Herero and Nama in 1904. I reflected on my white colonial mind and college education and realized I was never assigned readings that had to do with genocides in Africa.

I decided to rework the course readings with student input to change this pattern of reproducing global white supremacy in the classroom, as well as the cultural, intergenerational and historical trauma that students of color often endure throughout education by not receiving the whole picture of history.

Historian Gerald Horne offers a sober perspective that was indispensable in this endeavor: He seeks to stab through hagiography and dismount from historical mythology, allowing his readers to see the connection to capitalism, slavery, the genocide of Indigenous peoples, Pan-Africanism and liberation struggles with a worldview that is often absent in the classroom and mainstream discussions. Horne holds the John J. and Rebecca Moores Chair of History and African American Studies at the University of Houston.

Known for his stunning use of historical archives, Horne has authored more than 30 books on topics ranging from biographical works on W.E.B. Du Bois and Shirley Graham Du Bois to white supremacy's legacy in Fiji, Hawaii and Australia. His newest book, titled, *The Apocalypse of Settler Colonialism: The Roots of Slavery, White Supremacy, and Capitalism in Seventeenth-Century North America and the Caribbean*, is set to be released in January 2018.

In this interview, Horne discusses radical internationalism and the importance of educators teaching

history in a way that honors how Black and Indigenous resistance have shaped history.

Chris Steele: What is one's role in the classroom as an educator and framer of history?

Gerald Horne: With regards to the United States of America—since the United States of America is a nation that was built on slave labor, particularly of Africans—it's mandatory to have that story embedded in the basic narrative and it's mandatory for the teacher to frame the narrative of the construction of the United States of America through the lens of the African slave trade and the enslavement of Africans.

Can you speak about how teachers can avoid the pitfall of just describing atrocities of colonialism instead of also addressing the perseverance, resistance and complexities of people of color throughout history, such as the 1712 revolt in Manhattan and other slave revolts?

Well, I think even today in 2017, you have historians who even consider themselves to be progressive who tend to downplay the question of resistance, which I think does a disservice to history and certainly it does a disservice to Black people. In some ways, it reminds me of the reaction to Trump in liberal and left circles; there's a lot of denunciation of Trump, which is fine, I can resonate with a denunciation of Trump. But what we really need is an explanation of how this happened and likewise, if you don't have a story of resistance along with the story of enslavement, you really can't provide an explanation of how we got to this point, and therefore you are doing a disservice to history and you're doing a disservice to those who are trying to resist today.

Can you speak about representation and resistance in the classroom, tying in Indigenous history—which is U.S. history—or other issues, such as patriarchy throughout U.S. history?

Well, certainly if you look at the revolt of 1776 that led to the creation of the United States, in my book [*The Counter-Revolution of 1776: Slave Resistance and the Origins of the United States of America*], I stress the question of slavery and only mention the Royal Proclamation of 1763 in passing. The Royal Proclamation, of course, was London's attempt to avoid expending more blood and treasure fighting Native Americans for their land, but the settlers . . . resisted this Royal Proclamation and [it] led directly to kicking London out of what is now the United States.

Certainly, in the state of Colorado where you're sitting, Native American resistance has shaped the history of that state. For example, unfortunately in terms of writing about the U.S. Civil War, many historians do not engage the question of how that led directly to more expropriation of Native American land—I'm thinking of the Sand Creek Massacre in Colorado, for example. Certainly, we need an integrated history of the United States that braids and threads the question of African suffering and African resistance, Native American suffering and Native American

resistance, the question of patriarchy, the question of ethnic cleansing—all of that needs to be incorporated into a grander narrative history of North America.

Two of the principles you routinely talk about are organization and what civil rights leader and Black intellectual Paul Robeson called "radical internationalism." Can you talk about how these can be applied to education?

With regard to radical internationalism, I would say that given the unsavory origins of the United States, which led to the empowerment of powerful white supremacists and right-wing forces . . . in order to overcome that tendency, the victims of capitalism and white supremacy have had to reach across the oceans and reach across the borders. In order to reach across the oceans and reach across the borders for solidarity and assistance, you need organization. I mean, otherwise it doesn't work very well and certainly that's a central lesson that needs to be imparted in the classroom.

Have you researched how this colonizer form of history in the classroom can reproduce cultural or intergenerational trauma?

Oh sure. I haven't researched it, but I have an opinion, which is that if those who are the victims of white supremacy and ethnic cleansing are not told in the classroom about the history that has led us up to the present moment, then there might be a tendency to feel that their present unfortunate circumstance is a personal individual issue as opposed to the result of the tides of history. Obviously, that can lead to a kind of individual trauma, which I would say could be avoided if there was more engagement with an accurate portrayal of history in the classroom.

You are working on a new book about anarchists, communists and Black nationalists and how they have confronted the seat of national power. What is your perception of anarchism and U.S. history?

It's complicated. I haven't begun to research deeply into this project, but I wrote a book a couple years ago on William Patterson, who was a Black communist . . . inducted into the communist movement through his engagement with anarchists, particularly with the Sacco and Vanzetti case of the 1920s in Massachusetts. From my past reading, I also know that in Mexico and in Spain in particular, there's been a strong anarchist movement. Now, of course there have been tensions between and amongst these three forces that I've mentioned— anarchists, Black nationalism and communism— but one of the purposes of my project when I finally get lift off and take off is to try to deal with those differences, because I think if we're going to build a more stable and more productive and more progressive environment, we're going to have to grapple honestly with these differences so that we can build that more productive environment.

With the rise of the right wing, can you speak

about the KKK in Cuba and Fiji?

It's interesting, I guess you're familiar with my book, *The White Pacific*, where I deal with the KKK in Fiji, which of course, was in the context of the attempt to revive Black slavery— this time focusing on Melanesians as opposed to Africans, with the site of the exploitation being Queensland, Australia and Fiji. I'm doing a book on Southern Africa now and, of course, there are many ties between the masters of apartheid in South Africa and the KKK and white supremacist organizations here in the United States. I mean, there's been this sort of "white right international" . . . and it certainly needs more attention, particularly nowadays, because as you know, in the United States, there has been a resurgence of what's euphemistically called the "alt-right" and what could be more accurately called white supremacist, white nationalist organizations. I think now more than ever we need close scrutiny of these organizations and their history so we can better defeat them.

Throughout your research have you studied the so-called Doctrine of Discovery and the implications it had on the Indigenous population?

Yes, it is sort of ridiculous. It's like if I come to where you are staying in Colorado and bust into your apartment and say, "I think I discovered your laptop and under the 'right of discovery' I'm going to claim it." I mean, the arrogance of the ridiculous nature— but obviously it was deadly serious, obviously the Christian church, particularly the Roman Catholic church, has a lot of explaining to do . . . a lot of apologies to craft since we know that that rise of that doctrine has been congruent with the expansion of Catholicism and in particular in the Americas, but of course, this takes place in the context of religious conflict.

I have a book coming out early next year on the 17th century, and of course, the 17th century—that is to say the 1600s— marks the rise of the expropriation of the Indigenous population and enslavement of the Africans, and this is taking place against the backdrop of religious conflict, particularly between Christians and Protestants and the reconciliation ultimately between Christians and Protestants (or an attempted reconciliation, I should say) reaches its zenith in North America, in the trade union movement in the United States.

This used to be called pork chop unity. That is to say, folks would bury their contradictions and intentions in order to get those pork chops— with the pork chops being in this case the land of the Native Americans and the bodies of the Africans and certainly that whole Doctrine of Discovery. The more I think about it, [it] is obviously so utterly ridiculous.

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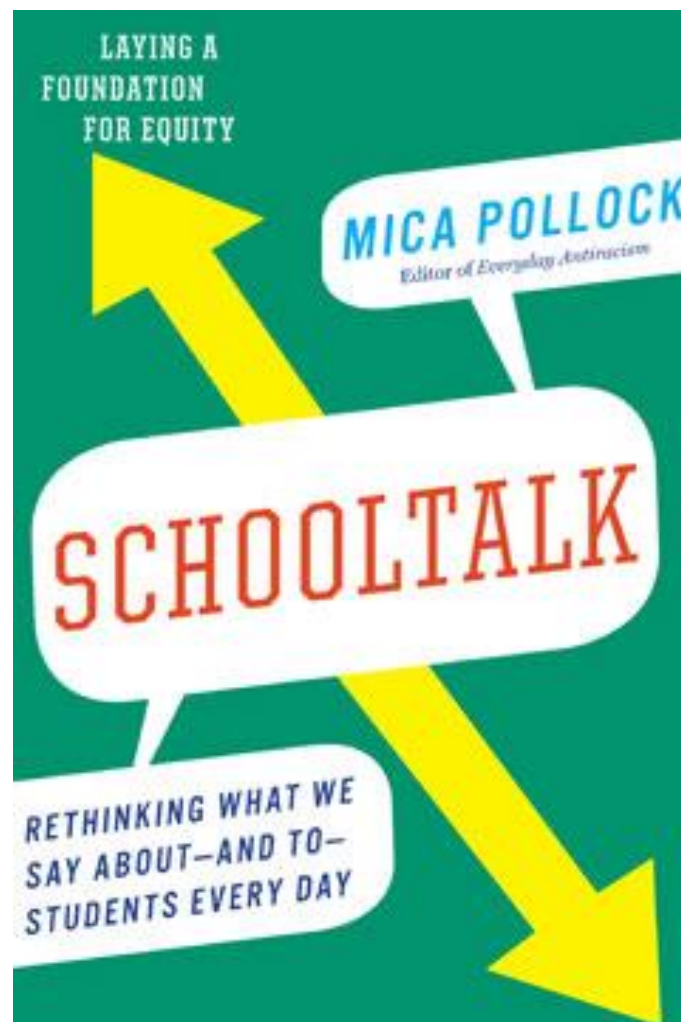
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Review
Schooltalk: Rethinking What We Say About
—and to—Students Every Day
By Mica Pollock

Reviewed by Emily Schnee



Schooltalk: Rethinking What We Say About—and to—Students Every Day By Mica Pollock (The New Press, 2017)

Reviewed by Emily Schnee

Mica Pollock's central premise, that how we talk to and about our students can either help build or disrupt a foundation for equity, is compelling. As an English professor at a community college, I firmly believe that language matters. Language can reinforce or challenge dominant values and reproduce or contest the educational status quo. So, I took Pollock's invitation to scrutinize my own "schooltalk" seriously. I was chastened to reflect on the ways in which, in moments of frustration, bewilderment, or discouragement, I have spoken about students or been complicit in other faculty's venting about students, despite my professed commitment to educational equity. Thus, Pollock's goal of "*design[ing] new ways to talk about and with young people in schools*" is laudable (7 italics in original). Amidst other pressing systemic problems that impede equity in schools, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that our words do indeed matter. Her assertion that "each communication is an action with serious equity considerations" is a call to reconsider the ways in which schools could be (re)designed to foster more and better communication with and about our students (4).

This "pie in the sky" approach to re-designing schooltalk infrastructure is not the book's only flaw.

Schooltalk is divided into two parts, the first dedicated to "Flipping Scripts," an effort to counter misinformation and challenge the ways in which educators habitually talk about young people in schools. Pollock does an excellent job of condensing recent research on educational inequality and presenting it in an easily digestible format, particularly in Chapter 2, "Inequality Talk." She does not shy away from confronting common myths and provides abundant evidence, for example, that racial disparities in academic achievement result from opportunity gaps. Further, she helpfully re-frames controversial questions in order to stimulate more productive talk among educators about the roots of unequal educational opportunities and outcomes. The second part of Pollock's book, "Designing Schooltalk Infrastructure," attempts to consider the structural constraints that impede communication for equity in schools. She offers many suggestions for re-designing school communication to engage a host of family, community, and school partners in effective talk with and about students. Pollock thoughtfully considers the crucial role of "data" and is rightfully wary of its potential misuse, cautioning against data systems that define students by their test scores. Further, she advocates for opening up the borders of what, when, and how we communicate with students in order to bring their "life experiences" into conversations about academic success. While Pollock's

proposals are extensive and interesting, her failure to adequately consider the substantial investments of time and money implementing her suggestions would involve limits their utility.

This "pie in the sky" approach to re-designing schooltalk infrastructure is not the book's only flaw. As I read, I kept wondering who Pollock thought her audience would be. Though she says that she is writing for "school district people," she includes among her potential readership all of "the key people who shape any young person's fate each day through their everyday actions," including politicians, journalists, community and industry people, and "everyone observing schools" (9). Casting such a wide net seems like a misstep. Much of the information she presents feels too basic, and the way in which she presents it too didactic, to effectively reach those in this "outer ring of people . . . whose acts shape young people's lives" (9). The tone and content of the book actually seem more appropriate for undergraduate teacher education students or brand new teachers. I would even consider using the chapter on "Inequality Talk" in an education-themed first year composition course, for example. Though Pollock seems to have designed this book with in-school professional development in mind, with lots of "Think/Discuss" prompts and "Action Assignments" peppered throughout, I'd bet that the schools and educators who'd embrace professional development around "schooltalk for equity" are a lot savvier than she assumes.

I also wondered whether Pollock got some unhelpful editorial advice in her choices around book structure.

I also wondered whether Pollock got some unhelpful editorial advice in her choices around book structure. Her format of interjecting highlighted "Think/Discuss" questions and "Action Assignments" throughout the book, as well as many arrows, charts, and bolded snappy phrases in varying fonts, disrupted my flow as a reader. I found myself wanting to skip over what might be the most important parts of the book, her provocative questions, so that I could follow the narrative flow. Furthermore, while some of the "Think/Discuss" scenarios are complex and multi-faceted and get at what Pollock calls the "core tensions" underlying educational inequity, others feel facile and simplistic. She easily resorts to using clichés ("it takes a network to raise a child!" [339]) and cutesy phrases (such as calling small initial actions "Try Tomorrows" [363]) that do a disservice to the seriousness of her topic. Overall, *Schooltalk* reads more like a professional development training manual than a book. I kept imagining that a much shorter, more concise version that could be made available online for free as a PDF would do a better job of reaching its intended wide audience of the not-already-converted.

It would be easier to overlook these quibbles around the book's tone and structure if I did not also have qualms about her overarching argument. While of course words *do* matter, as most radical educators already know, the ways

in which educators talk in schools is neither the “foundation for equity” nor the primary obstacle to equitable educational outcomes. Pollock assigns talk too much power, conflating communication with action, without adequately addressing the material and structural constraints that produce inequitable outcomes in so many schools. Further, Pollock’s definition of schooltalk is, at times, frustratingly elastic. She lumps important equity concerns, such as school disciplinary policies or the restructuring of schools into smaller organizational units, into the category of talk, ignoring both the ideological and material obstacles to such substantial educational reforms. In the end, Pollock imbues talk with too much power to shape students’ educational aspirations and outcomes. In the process she downplays the role of structural inequalities, such as vast differences in school funding, which do substantially more to determine students’ academic opportunities and outcomes than speech. And by focusing on talk, absent a more thorough consideration of material conditions, Pollock ends up embracing a neoliberal stance, advocating for individual solutions to systemic problems, when she argues that “educators who analyze their own everyday acts’ contributions to student success and well being . . . actually do better by students” (106). While Pollock’s book provides educators many tools to enhance the ways in which we communicate with and about students, improving our schooltalk alone will not be enough to lay a foundation for equity, her stated goal.

It would be easier to overlook these quibbles around the book’s tone and structure if I did not also have qualms about her overarching argument. While of course words do matter, as most radical educators already know, the ways in which educators talk in schools is neither the “foundation for equity” nor the primary obstacle to equitable educational outcomes.



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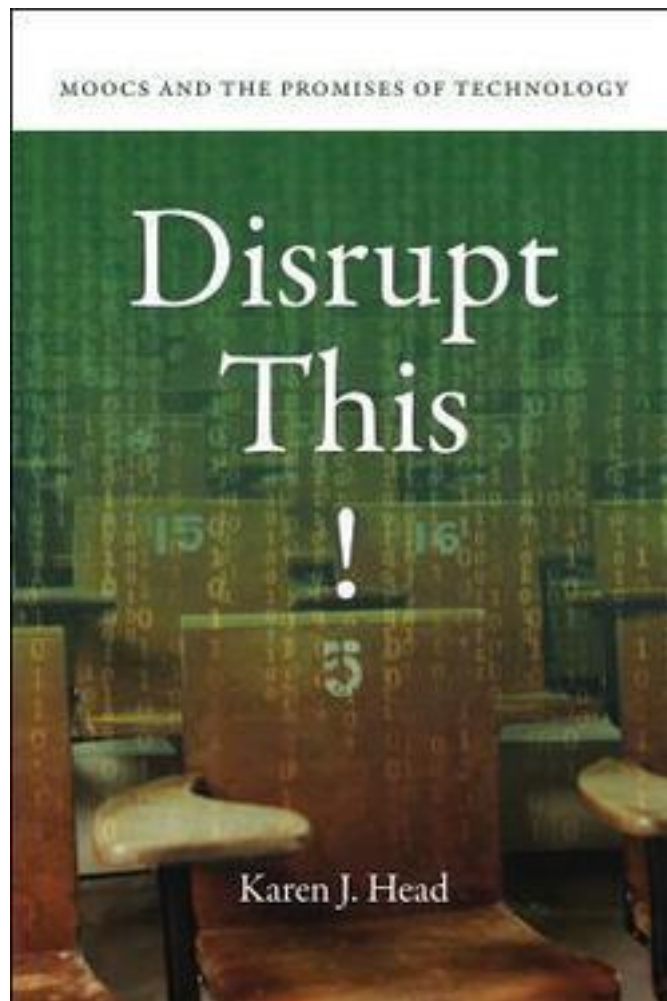
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Review
Disrupt This! MOOCs
and the Promises of Technology
by Karen J. Head

Reviewed By Nick Juravich



Disrupt This! MOOCs and the Promises of Technology by Karen J. Head. (Boston. University Press of New England. 2017)

Reviewed By Nick Juravich

In the fall of 2012, Karen J. Head, then an assistant professor at the Georgia Institute of Technology, signed on to teach a massive open online course, or “MOOC,” in first-year composition. It was the “Year of the MOOC,” and Georgia Tech was eager to position itself at the forefront of this new trend in academia.¹ Head and her team received a sizable grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to re-invent first-year comp—one of the most common university courses, and typically one of the most teaching-intensive—on the Coursera platform. The course went live in the summer of 2013 with nearly 22,000 students enrolled.

Five years later, Head has published *Disrupt This! MOOCs and the Promises of Technology*. The book couples a detailed, instructor-level view of the experience of developing and teaching a MOOC—“a view from the inside”—with a critical analysis of the rhetoric of “disruption” in higher education. The latter is razor-sharp and unstinting; the book’s punchy title sets the tone for similar chapter titles (“Missionary Creep”), section headings (“Beware of Geeks Bearing Gifts”), and topic sentences (“Unrealistic depictions of teaching are culturally ingrained in the American mindset.”). MOOC skeptics will find most of their suspicions about these courses and their boosters confirmed as Head contrasts mushrooming layers of jargon-spouting promotional bureaucracy with depressingly paltry commitments to actual pedagogy and content.

Head is particularly well-positioned to interrogate the MOOC phenomenon.

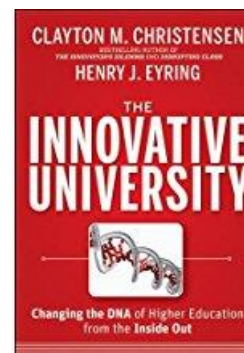
Head’s assessment of her own process, by contrast, is a nuanced meditation on pedagogy in the digital age. In spite of repeated and ridiculous battles with both Georgia Tech and Coursera’s MOOC-masters, Head managed to learn a surprising lot from the experience. Her reflections speak to a world in which online courses, if not MOOCs *per se*, will continue to expand, and in which digital tools more broadly will continue to proliferate in the classroom. In light of this reality, she closes with a call to arms: rather than resisting the invasion of MOOCs, faculty should seize these new means of pedagogical production from the “disrupters.”

Head is particularly well-positioned to interrogate the MOOC phenomenon. She began her postsecondary education as a “nontraditional student,” a twenty-seven-year-old first-year student at a local community college. Nontraditional students—meaning, typically, those who do not complete college between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four—comprise one quarter of American

undergraduates. Their existence features prominently in discussions of MOOCs and “open” access to education, but their actual voices and needs do not. Additionally, Head has taught writing for nearly two decades and was, in this context, an early adopter of more prosaic technological tools, including computer-based classrooms and online videoconferencing.

As Head explains in *Disrupt This!* “The idea of offering open access and free educational services isn’t a new one for those of us who work in writing centers,” but even as universities have embraced MOOCs, “our services have often been marginalized.” This points to a much larger tension in American higher education: teaching writing is simultaneously one of the most important things universities do and one of the least prestigious (and least funded). Teaching writing well requires small classes and constant feedback, work that is done by growing armies of adjuncts overseen by overworked administrators and the small core of committed faculty, like Head, who believe in the mission. Translating this process to “massive” form appears impossible (to anyone who’s done the job) and highly enticing (to administrators looking to keep cutting costs). Head’s decision to take part in Freshman Composition 2.0 was informed, in part, by the realization that the people pitching MOOCs to her department had no knowledge of the craft of teaching writing. What they did have was the promise of “disruption.”

In the book, Head intertwines her analysis of MOOC-speak with her discussion of the process of MOOC-making, but these two threads serve distinct purposes. Head is a scholar of rhetoric, and she is skeptical of “disruption” from the start. For the sake of consistency, she dissects two representative books that were published in 2011 and recommended to her at the start of her own MOOC journey: *The Innovative University: Changing the DNA of Higher Education from the Inside Out*, by Harvard’s Clayton Christensen and BYU-Idaho’s Henry Eyring; and *Abelard to Apple: The Fate of American Colleges and Universities*, by Georgia Tech’s own Richard DeMillo. Her message is clear: this is “the rhetoric of punditry” far removed “from the day-to-day experience of actually teaching many thousands of students.”

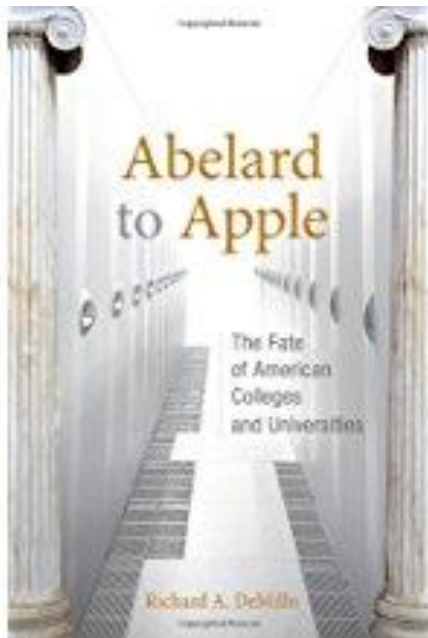


Christensen and Eyring are sunny in their predictions of democratized knowledge, but they offer utterly unrepresentative examples of change in the form of Harvard and BYU-Idaho (a small college reinvented by the enormous volunteer labor commanded by the Church of Latter-Day Saints). By the end, their work “sounds less like a critique of the higher education system and more like a self-help book.” Such optimism, Head notes, is the product of “elite networks” which “allow for a privileged few to take bold measures without personal risk.” Christensen and Eyring urge chaotic reinventions on other universities,

secure in the knowledge that their personal and institutional places in academia are secure.

Head builds on this observation to systematically dismantle the notion that there is anything open or democratizing about MOOCs in their current form. She shows how they have thus far “reinforce[d] the current tier structure” of universities. Platforms like Coursera have primarily promoted MOOCs created at Ivy league institutions, in extreme cases as replacements for the work of faculty at branch state universities.² Head shows, as well, that this reinforcement of the status quo extends to the traditional Western canon, and amounts to “academic colonialism” when exported globally in MOOC form.³ Christensen and Eyring are untroubled by these inequalities; “Disruption is something that happens to other people.”

Richard DeMillo’s work is more critical; he lambasts universities as bastions of hidebound groupthink and positions himself as a Cassandra prophesying their



demise. In service of this, as Head shows, he opens his book with a “bizarrely tasteless reference” that seems to suggest that the castration of Pierre Abelard, the twelfth-century theologian, resulted from his hubris as an “insular academic.” As Head observes, this wildly inaccurate and sexist reading of the source reformulates and genders the old canard that teachers are failed do-ers. Head exposes the irony of setting up such a dichotomy while claiming to know how to improve, of all things, teaching itself. This does not bother DeMillo, who, like Christensen and Eyring, is not primarily a teacher, either traditionally or online. Disruption is not just something that happens to other people; the actual work demanded by these virile “disrupters” is done not by them, either.

So what does that work look like? As Head notes, MOOC providers like Udacity, EdX, and Coursera (with whom she worked at Georgia Tech) are concerned primarily with their platforms, not pedagogy. Head’s work on Freshman Composition 2.0 was monitored by representatives from Georgia Tech, the Gates Foundation,

and Coursera, all of whom focused primarily on maintaining their brands, not producing a high-quality course. When the time came to teach, Head observed that “development staff who lack the necessary perspective are making significant decisions that embed assumptions about the nature of successful teaching and learning,” driven in large part by the need to quantify and measure platform usage. Despite promises about innovation and excoriations of “insular academics” and their hidebound ways, Head “did not see flexibility reciprocated by [her] MOOC technology team.” The infinite promise of the internet, without actual input from pedagogues, Head observes, quickly becomes reduced to a “one-way” stream of taped lectures beaming out to students taking multiple-choice tests. In short, this is no way at all to teach first-year composition, and when Head confronts the question of “success”—one frequently posed by eager spokespeople and skeptical colleagues alike—she is clear that the course she taught was no replacement for first-year comp.

Once the rhetoric is dissected and the platforms exposed for their limits, what remains for MOOCs to offer teachers and their students? A surprising lot, shows Head, and this is an unexpected joy of *Disrupt This!* A skilled pedagogue herself, Head observes early on that anyone teaching a MOOC should first consult distance-learning professors, who know far more than software developers about effectively teaching and evaluating far-flung students. In the age of MOOCs, distance-learning is quickly being repackaged and overtaken by schemes ranging from privatized online education to cash-cow programs for more traditional universities. However, Head’s contacts appear to be from an earlier era, the committed group of state university professors who worked with nontraditional students like her to realize the promise of public education for workers, parents, and others without the time to study on campus. These teachers, who have thought long and hard about how much individual attention students need within the confines of limited-residency study, would be essential resources if MOOC developers actually cared about such things.

Head walks her readers through the huge amount of work that MOOCs actually entail (rarely advertised by their on-campus evangelists). These include writing, shooting and re-shooting lectures; designing new learning activities; and monitoring enormous amounts of student feedback. She also shares lessons from her own experience, everything from the need to create glossaries of idioms for non-native speakers of English to the importance of making videos downloadable as audio for students whose internet connections do not allow streaming.

Head productively expands her conclusions beyond MOOCs and MOOC platforms—which have already “pivoted” away from traditional courses, as those have not proven as profitable as promised back in 2012—to technology in teaching more broadly. Faculty, she notes, typically experience technology as something foisted upon them by administrators, whether online courses, learning management systems, or “smart” classrooms. Head argues that involving teachers from the start would improve these systems immeasurably, and moreover, that becoming involved in this process as a professor has improved her

own teaching. It seems an almost contradictory statement, but Head explains that the process has not only improved her use of technology in more “traditional” settings, but has also taught her how to talk to platform developers to get the most out of the tools they build and sell.

Head walks her readers through the huge amount of work that MOOCs actually entail (rarely advertised by their on-campus evangelists). These include writing, shooting and re-shooting lectures; designing new learning activities; and monitoring enormous amounts of student feedback.

However, at present, there are few rewards and incentives for faculty to get involved in these processes, which take time and energy away from research and traditional teaching (the backbone of tenure reviews). As we learn at the beginning of the book, Head took on the immense task of reinventing first-year comp on a massive scale as an untenured assistant professor. It is a credit to her that she managed to turn the experience into tenure-supporting publications, but she did not, at the start of the project, receive credit or time commensurate with the work involved. This must be changed, and Head argues particularly that departments and universities must give true and extensive release time and credit toward tenure to faculty members who do this work, rather than treating it as experimental or auxiliary. Her closing message is a call for involvement; professors must become participants in the evolution of this technology, both to improve it for their students and to improve their own teaching.

Readers of *Disrupt This!* may long for a broader analysis of the forces of austerity and privatization that have made MOOCs so attractive in higher education in the first place, but this is not a question the book sets out to answer.⁴ What Head does deliver is a highly readable, deeply thoughtful, and pedagogically serious look at the use and abuse of technology in academia. Even as she unmasks the ludicrous rhetoric and limited platforms of MOOCs, Head remains determined to push pedagogues to the center of technological development in higher education. The disrupters, left unchecked, will wreak havoc, not through any of their promised radical changes, but by redirecting resources to ineffective tools and shiny toys, and away from the liberatory processes of teaching and learning.

Notes

¹ Laura Pappano, “The Year of the MOOC,” *The New York Times*, November 2, 2012.

² The most notable example here is the effort, by administrators at San Jose State University, to use a MOOC by Harvard’s Michael Sandel as a replacement for philosophy classes. See Steve Kolowich, “Why Professors at San Jose State Won’t Use a Harvard Professor’s MOOC,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* May 2, 2013. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Why-Professors-at-San-Jose/138941>.

³ Head discusses this issue at greater length in “The Single Canon: MOOCs and Academic Colonization,” a chapter in *MOOCs and Open Education Around the World*, edited by Curtis J. Bonk, Mimi M. Lee, Thomas C. Reeves, and Thomas H. Reynolds (New York: Routledge, 2015).

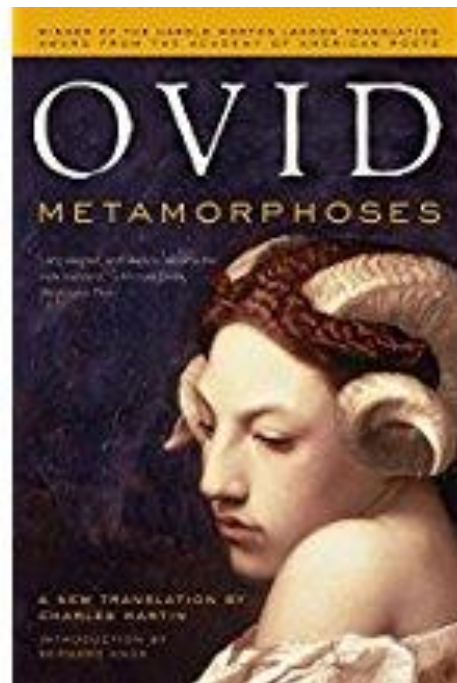
⁴ For such an analysis, see Michael Fabricant and Steven Brier’s *Austerity Blues: Fighting for the Soul of Public Higher Education* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2016), reviewed in *The Radical Teacher* (Vol 128).

RADICAL TEACHER

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

Teaching Note The #MeToo Movement and Ovid's Philomela

By Justin L. Barker



This spring I'll teach Ovid's "Tereus, Procne, and Philomela" in my World Literature survey at Louisiana School for Math, Science, and the Arts, a public residential high school for high-achieving students. To be honest, I selected this text for selfish reasons—Geoffrey Chaucer's "The Legend of Philomela" from his *Legend of Good Women* is one of my favorite texts (I'm a Chaucerian after all). In fact, when I added Ovid's "Philomela," I wasn't thinking (consciously, anyway) of the text's current cultural resonance. But it's hard to overlook. Ovid's "Philomela" is about women's voices and men's need to silence those voices. It's about the literal and metaphorical violence women endure because of a man's bad behavior.

If you aren't familiar with Ovid's tale, it's located in his *Metamorphoses*, originally written in Latin and dating from 8 CE. Here's a brief synopsis: Tereus, married to Procne, rapes Procne's sister Philomela. When Philomela threatens to expose him, he cuts out her tongue and locks her away. She can't speak, but she learns to weave, and so weaves a tapestry detailing her ordeal, which she smuggles out to her sister. The tale doesn't end happily, though. In fact, to exact their revenge, Procne and Philomela murder Procne's only son and feed him to Tereus. The women then flee, and as they flee, they transform into birds.

The violence against Philomela is first against her body, and then against her voice. Philomela's voice poses a most serious threat to Tereus. After Tereus rapes Philomela, she exclaims,

I'll shed my shame
And shout what you have done. If I've the chance,
I'll walk among the crowds: or, if I'm held
Locked in the woods, my voice shall fill the woods
And move the rocks to pit. This bright sky
Shall hear, and any god that dwells on high!¹

There is no mistaking Philomela's power here. Her power is her voice—her refusal to be silenced. Philomela's voice isn't simply the words she strings together, but her capacity to speak up, to speak out, and to expose Tereus for the vile man he is. Her voice will be so powerful that even the gods will hear. She'll use her voice to "shed [her] shame." Shame that Tereus' sexual violence has forced upon her. The same shame that all sexually assaulted and harassed women experience. The shame that many of these women push down, deep down, to that place between the belly and the ribcage where it sits, festers, gnaws. But Philomela will shed that shame because, at that moment, she has her voice. Tereus will not get away with what he's done: he won't shame her. He won't control her.

But Tereus—the Ovidian equivalent of Harvey Weinstein or Donald Trump—can't allow Philomela to hold on to her power, and thereby, her voice. So, he does what all men in his position do: he strips away her power; he silences her. To silence Philomela, Tereus doesn't gag her; he doesn't wall her up behind thick stone. No, Tereus silences Philomela in a brutal act of aggression: he "seized / Her tongue with tongs and, with his brutal sword, Cut it

away."² Tereus literally cuts out Philomela's tongue. This egregious act of violence is a literalized metaphor for the violence done to women's voices over the centuries, and especially, as we're seeing, today. Harvey Weinstein's eighty-four accusers had their tongues cut out. Donald Trump cut out the tongues of his nineteen accusers. So did Charlie Rose, Matt Laurer, Roy Moore, Louis C.K., John Conyers, Trent Franks, and so on and so on. Since October 5, according to *The New York Times*, fifty high profile men have been accused of sexual assault and harassment.³ Fifty men have cut out the tongues of hundreds of women.

These women, though, like Philomela, have begun to reclaim their voices, reclaim their power. In Ovid, Philomela, "wove a clever fabric, working words / In red on a white ground to tell the tale / Of wickedness."⁴ Though, Philomela can't physically speak, she can tell of Tereus' "wickedness." So, she weaves the red words into a narrative—her narrative. Philomela now controls her story—a heartbreaking and violent story—and one that Philomela alone can tell. Through her narrative, Philomela regains her voice. Her power. Her agency.

Like Philomela, the thousands of women who have come forward to recount the shame and violence men have inflicted on them are weaving their own narrative tapestry. This tapestry spans cities, states, and continents. The #MeToo Movement is this tapestry. It's a tapestry woven together from the fabric of women's voices—Tweets, Facebook and blog posts, essays, and interviews. Women's voices are loud, powerful, especially as a collective. Men recognize this power, which accounts for their desire to silence us. But, like Philomela, we will no longer be silent.

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In her essay, "A Short History of Silence," Rebecca Solnit discusses the ways men have silenced women for... well...ever. "Silence," she writes, "is what allowed predators to rampage through the decades, unchecked. It's as though the voices of these prominent public men devoured the voices of others into nothingness, a narrative cannibalism."⁵ Solnit's image of men devouring voices, of "narrative cannibalism," is fitting for the ending of Ovid's "Philomela." To exact their revenge, Procne and Philomela murder Procne's only son and feed him to Tereus. Procne uses Tereus' narrative cannibalism against him by rendering it a literal cannibalism. Elissa Marder claims that "Procne thus uses her own child as a substitute for a tongue."⁶ Procne and Philomela speak through Procne's son; they render his body into language, and they force Tereus to devour this language. The sacrifice and consumption of Procne's son is heartbreaking, but

necessary. It's necessary because violence, rage is the only language that Procne and Philomela have; it's the only language that Tereus understands.

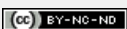
The final lines of the poem are marked by transformation. The sisters transform into birds and escape Tereus and his wrath. But this final image is one that I struggle with the most. I want desperately to view it as the sisters' transcendence of earthly masculine oppression. I want to interpret their language, metamorphosed into birdsong, as undefined by gender, power, oppression. But their transformation is marred by rage—by violence. I don't fault them. I understand. Tereus finally hears them, doesn't he? He finally understands because they speak his language. I'm reminded of a line from the 2015 movie *Suffragette*: "We break windows, we burn things, because war's the only language men listen to."⁷

As I prepare to teach this text in the coming weeks, I've been reflecting on how to approach this timely, though emotionally challenging, text. My students, though highly gifted and intellectually sophisticated, are still high school juniors and seniors. It'll be a delicate balance. I want them to understand the importance of women's voices and the desire (often violent desire) of men to silence and control these voices. I want them to understand power, and the various forms power takes. I want them to be critical and sympathetic readers of this text, but also of culture—Ovid's culture, our culture—and the power dynamics at play. I plan to frame discussion in much the same way I've discussed here, using the #MeToo Movement as a way to engage the interrelationship between masculine violence

and female silence—a relationship that has existed for 2,000 plus years. I intend to ask my students difficult questions that invite them to confront violence and power and how these issues are intertwined with gender and a long history of female silence and oppression. My hope is for my students to engage empathetically with ideas and views different from their own, and maybe undergo their own metamorphosis about how they understand gender, power, violence, and silence.

Notes

- ¹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*. Tr. A.D. Melville. The World's Classics. Oxford: Oxford UP. 134-42 (Book 6, lines 422-674), ll. 542-47.
- ² Ovid, ll. 555-57.
- ³ Sarah Alkukhtar, Michael Gold, and Larry Buchanan, "After Weinstein: 45 Men Accused of Sexual Misconduct and Their Fall from Power," *The New York Times*, 22 Dec. 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/11/10/us/men-accused-sexual-misconduct-weinstein.html>. Accessed on 3 Jan. 2018.
- ⁴ Ovid, ll. 575-77.
- ⁵ Rebecca Solnit, "A Short History of Silence," *The Mother of All Questions* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017), 17-66 (22).
- ⁶ Elissa Marder, "Disarticulated Voices: Feminism and Philomela," *Hypatia* 7.2 (1992) 148-66 (161).
- ⁷ *Suffragette*, directed by Sarah Gavron (2015; Chatham, Kent, England: Ruby Films), DVD.



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RADICAL TEACHER

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

Teaching Note
Reading Immigration with *The Book of Unknown Americans* by Cristina Henríquez

By Emily Schnee



As a professor of developmental English and composition at Kingsborough Community College in New York City, I am always on the hunt for books that my students will find engaging and accessible *and* that lend themselves to critical inquiry and analysis. In any given year, I preview a dozen books and abandon most of them. For the past several years, I have taught immigration themed English courses, so when *The Book of Unknown Americans* by Cristina Henríquez came out in 2014, I read it eagerly, hoping that I could use it in one or more of my classes. At that time, the novel, whose plot centers on a romance between immigrant teens, struck me as facile, saccharin even, and I dismissed it in favor of other texts. Three years later, after the election of Trump and the wholesale demonization of undocumented Mexican immigrants, I decided to give it another look. This time around the novel read differently. I was grateful to find a book that is accessibly written (even for developmental English students, many of whom are novice readers), that portrays Latino/a immigrants in a multi-faceted and sympathetic way, and that confronts white anti-immigrant racism head on. Though I still had reservations about the novel and its lack of literary sophistication, I welcomed its depiction of Latino/a immigrant characters as diverse and full of agency, despite the structural and personal obstacles they face. I decided to use it in both of my courses this fall and was pleasantly surprised to discover that it was enthusiastically embraced by many of the students and that it drew us into critical inquiry on the status of immigrants in the era of Trump.

This past semester my developmental English class was paired with an Introduction to Psychology course as part of the college's learning communities program. One of the main goals of these linked courses is to promote "integrative thinking" through shared assignments that require students to draw on their learning from both classes. The first integrative assignment was a drafted essay that asked students to explore the social psychological concepts of stereotype, prejudice, and discrimination in the lives of the immigrant characters in *The Book of Unknown Americans*. In preparation for this essay, students plunged into the novel from the very first week of class. Right away, I noticed a higher-than-usual level of reading compliance and genuine engagement with the novel, particularly on the part of the immigrant women students who represented a majority of the class. Despite the fact that they came from countries as diverse as Burkina Faso and Uzbekistan, students had no trouble empathizing with the plight of the Mexican immigrant main characters, the Rivera family, and seemed emotionally invested in discovering how their lives in the United States would unfold. The novel consists of relatively short chapters that are written in the first person from the perspective of various immigrant characters, all of whom live in the same apartment complex in rural Delaware. Students were quickly drawn into their lives and struggles, identifying strongly with the two adolescent main characters, Maribel— whose family has come to the United States to get her special education after a traumatic brain injury— and her neighbor, Mayor.

The upcoming essay assignment served as a focal point for students to apply their newly learned annotation skills: identifying moments in the novel in which the characters either experience stereotype, prejudice, and discrimination or traffic in their own stereotypical or prejudiced notions about other immigrants. The novel provides more than sufficient fodder for exploring the multiple ways in which immigrants are victims of stereotype, prejudice, and discrimination. A white American bully, Garrett Miller, sexually assaults Maribel; Alma, her mother, is stymied when she tries to report the incident to the police; a minor character is trailed by white shop owners who assume he is out to steal; two primary breadwinners for their families lose their jobs; and, in an episode that resonated with many students, a character fears racial profiling after purchasing his very first car. Yet, Henríquez also offers readers the opportunity to consider immigrants' own internalization of the dominant narratives about immigration with an interesting plot twist. When the Rivera family loses their visas and they suddenly find themselves living as undocumented immigrants, it represents a moment of reckoning for the characters and students alike. While Alma seems to buy into the good/bad immigrant dichotomy, lamenting that they have "followed the rules" (181) and are "not like the rest of them," her husband quickly asserts, "we are now" (189). This moment exposes the fragility and porosity of immigration status and, in class discussion, created space for students to pointedly critique (lack of) documentation as the basis on which to welcome or exclude groups of immigrants.



In my composition course, students read the transcript of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's 2009 TED talk "The Danger of a Single Story" as a starting point for considering the multiplicity of immigrant stories. Although all of the main characters in *The Book of Unknown Americans* are Latino/a immigrants, the structure of the novel lends itself well to exploring the diversity of immigrants' experiences. I encouraged students to consider the various ways in which factors such as age, gender, nationality, educational level, English language ability, and immigration status shape the experiences of the characters. Several Latina students chose to read the novel through a gender lens, focusing on the female characters and the ways in which the sexism and sexual violence they face, both within their own families and in the outside world, shape their experiences as immigrants. Other students identified heavily with Mayor, a Panamanian born teenager who was raised in the United States and finds himself uncomfortably straddling a

generational and cultural divide. Mayor feels simultaneously estranged from his immigrant parents and excluded by the white American kids who bully him for his immigrant background. He speaks for many students when he poignantly admits that, “the truth was I didn’t know which I was. I wasn’t allowed to claim the thing I felt [American] and I didn’t feel the thing I was supposed to claim [Panamanian]” (78).

Maribel’s disability provides yet another intersecting identity through which some students chose to explore the novel. Though I initially worried that this plot line set the Riveras up as “deserving” immigrants who leave a good life behind in Mexico for the benefit of their injured child, this did not pan out. Instead, students were quick to identify the ways in which Maribel’s parents both sacrifice for their child (as many immigrant parents do, they were quick to add) and compound her disability through overprotection, depriving her even further of her human agency. In class discussions, we explored the symbolism of Maribel’s silence in the novel (none of the chapters are written from her point of view), as a disabled, young, female immigrant. Students read closely, scouring the novel for moments when Maribel’s perspective on events is revealed in subtle ways, and gave her voice through an informal writing assignment that asked them to write a chapter from Maribel’s perspective. These various lenses for analyzing the novel, generated largely by the students themselves, allowed for a multiplicity of perspectives on the immigrant experience and helped us to break apart hegemonic narratives about undocumented Mexican immigrants circulating since Trump’s candidacy.

Despite students’ positive reception of the novel, the jury was still out for me on whether I’d continue to use *The Book of Unknown Americans* right up until our final discussions. The novel’s conclusion (spoiler alert!) shocked and distressed many students who had visceral reactions when a main character is shot and killed in an incident of racist violence. I received an urgent email from an Uzbek student who wrote me the moment she finished the novel: “I feel so bad, even though I know it is novel, fiction. I feel terrible about the end . . . Oh my God, it seems to me a real life that happens with immigrants.” Other students reported sobbing on the bus to school as they finished reading. Still others were angry, at Henríquez and me, that the novel ended the way it did and that I had chosen to assign it. They’d been hoping for Maribel’s full recovery from her brain injury, the consummation of the teen romance, and a happily-ever-after ending that, they later acknowledged in class discussion, belies the experience of most immigrants. Students’ retrospective ability to critique their own desires and expectations for the novel—and for the immigrant experience itself—transformed my own reading of it. Under its simple façade of family struggles and teen romance, *The Book of Unknown Americans* creates deep empathy for its characters and, in so doing, inspired my students to read, fostered multiple interpretations of text, and sparked authentic critique of the current state of U.S. immigration.

Work cited

Henríquez, Cristina. *The Book of Unknown Americans*. Vintage, 2014.



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RADICAL TEACHER

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

News for Educational Workers

By Leonard Vogt

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

Other less time-bound items, such as books, film, journals, articles, and resources will continue to be featured in this newer, abbreviated News for Educational Workers column which will continue to be published with each of our forthcoming online issues.

Films by Bullfrog

DENIAL follows the story of Dave Hallquist, CEO of a Vermont electric utility, seen through the lens of his filmmaker son Derek, to whom he has granted intimate access for nearly 15 years. As a self-described "closet environmentalist" Hallquist is dedicated to addressing the way electricity use in America contributes to climate change. But as Hallquist struggles to build the kind of transparent company whose honest approach can get stakeholders to accept the realities of how we generate and deliver electricity, he realizes he must apply that same transparency to his personal life and reveals to his son a lifelong secret. Dave Hallquist, who presents as a chainsaw-wielding, hardhat-wearing CEO in a male-dominated industry is a woman inside.

DEATH BY DESIGN debunks the notion that electronics is a 'clean' industry by revealing the human and environmental cost of electronic gadgets that are designed to die. From the intensely secretive electronics factories in



DEATH BY DESIGN

China, to the high tech innovation labs of Silicon Valley, **DEATH BY DESIGN** tells a story of environmental degradation, of health tragedies, and of the fast-approaching tipping point between consumerism and sustainability.

FROM STANDING ROCK documents the massive peaceful resistance led by the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe to the Dakota Access Pipeline through their land and underneath the Missouri River.

CELLING YOUR SOUL reveals the effects of "digital socialization" by taking viewers on a personal journey with a group of high school and college students who through a digital cleanse discover the power of authentic human connectivity, and that there is "No App" or piece of technology that can ever replace the benefits of human connection. This film provides empowering strategies for more fulfilling, balanced, and authentic human interaction within the digital landscape.



CELLING YOUR SOUL

TRIBAL JUSTICE is about an effective criminal justice reform movement in America today: the efforts of tribal courts to create alternative justice systems based on their traditions. Abby Abinanti,

Chief Judge of the Yurok Tribe on the northwest coast of California, and Claudette White, Chief Judge of the Quechan Tribe in the southeastern desert, are creating innovative systems that focus on restoring rather than punishing offenders in order to keep tribal members out of prison, prevent children from being taken from their

communities, and stop the school-to-prison pipeline that plagues their young people.

ONE BIG HOME follows one carpenter's journey to understand the trend toward giant houses. When he feels complicit in wrecking the place he calls home, Thomas Bena takes off his tool belt and picks up a camera. Bumping up against angry homeowners and builders who look the other way, he works with his community and attempts to pass a new bylaw to limit house size.

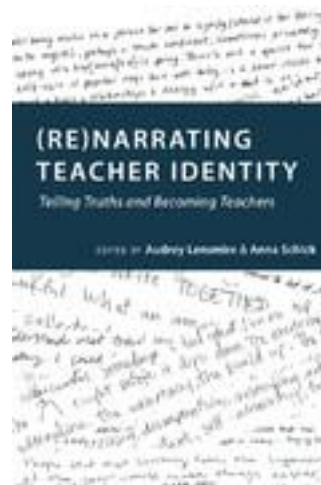
CHESHIRE, OHIO: AN AMERICAN COAL STORY IN 3 ACTS is a new documentary that follows a community devastated by coal, starting with American Electric Power's buyout and bulldozing of this Ohio River town after exposing them to years of harmful emissions.

FOOD FOR CHANGE: THE STORY OF COOPERATION IN AMERICA looks at the current resurgence of food cooperatives in America and their unique historic place in the economic and political landscape.

All are available from Bullfrog Films at <http://www.bullfrogfilms.com/catalog/chesh.html>.

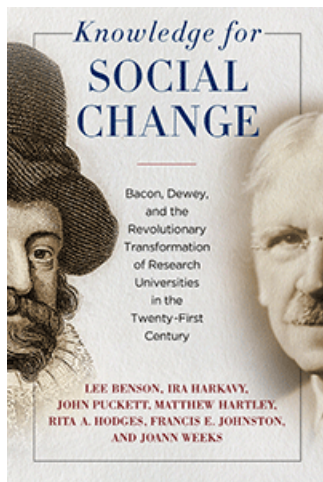
Books

The authors of *(Re)narrating Teacher Identity: Telling Truths and Becoming Teachers* crack open what it means to become and be a teacher in the twenty-first century United States. They believed teaching preyed on their insecurities and hurt their mental health. In an effort to dig deeper into the challenge of teaching, four new teachers engaged in a summer writer's workshop. Drawing from the work of Barbara Kamler (2001), the teachers used artifacts such as school graffiti and text messages to "reposition" and (re)narrate their identities as teachers. Ultimately, they realized they were no longer simply stressed-out teachers, but agents and collaborators with the power and ability to redefine or change their narratives

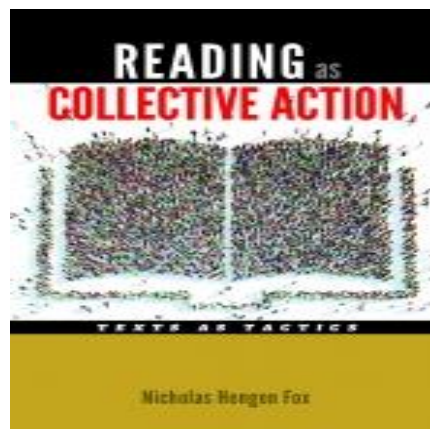


Employing history, social theory, and a detailed contemporary case study, *Knowledge for Social Change: Bacon, Dewey, and the Revolutionary Transformation of Research Universities in the Twenty-First Century* argues for fundamentally reshaping research universities to

function as democratic, civic, and community-engaged institutions dedicated to advancing learning and knowledge for social change. The authors focus on significant contributions to learning made by Francis Bacon, Benjamin Franklin, Seth Low, Jane Addams, William Rainey Harper, and John Dewey—as well as their own work at Penn’s Netter Center for Community Partnerships—to help create and sustain democratically engaged colleges and universities for the public good.



Reading as Collective Action by Nicholas Hengen Fox focuses on another of literature’s powers: the power to reshape our world in very public, very active ways. In this book, you will encounter readers who criticized the Bush administration’s war on terror by republishing poems by writers ranging from Shakespeare to Amiri Baraka everywhere from lampposts to the *New York Times*. You will read about people in Michigan and Tennessee, who leveraged a community reading program on John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* to organize support for those in need during the Great Recession and to engage with their neighbors about immigration. You will meet a pair of students who took to public transit to talk with strangers about working-class literature and a trio who created a literary website that reclaimed the working-class history of the Pacific Northwest. This book challenges dominant academic modes of reading. For adherents of the “civic turn,” it suggests how we can create more politically effective forms of service learning and community engagement grounded in a commitment to tactical, grassroots actions. Whether you’re a social worker or a student, a zine-maker, a librarian, a professor, or just a passionate reader with a desire to better your community, this book shows that when we read texts as tactics, “that book changed my life” can become “that book changed our lives.”



Journals

The editors of this special issue of *American Literature* ask both how scholarly engagement with literature has produced a distinct set of pedagogical practices and how pedagogical practices raise new questions about the relevance and role of American literature, during the pressing educational and political exigencies of our time. This volume presents an opportunity to integrate discipline- and field-specific knowledges more fully into a critical discussion of pedagogy. By leveraging the location of teaching as developing out of specific scholarly concerns, this special issue on “Critical Pedagogies for a Changing World” illustrates the intersection of theory and pedagogical practice while highlighting the diverse disciplinary, institutional, and political contributions of American literature to higher education and community-based teaching and learning.



The cover story for *Rethinking Schools* (Winter 2017-18 Vol. 32, No 2) is entitled "Rethinking Islamophobia." A Muslim educator shows why teaching about Islam must address the historical connections between Islamophobia and anti-Black and anti-immigrant racism.



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RADICAL TEACHER

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

Contributors' Notes

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Michael Bennett is Professor Emeritus of English, Long Island University (Brooklyn). He is the editor and author of four books and numerous articles on American literature, African American studies, and urban culture & ecology. His latest work has been creative, publishing poetry and short fiction. He is on the editorial board of *Radical Teacher*.

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

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Rachel Jean is a 6-8th grade ELA teacher & Co-Chair at a public school in Broward County, Florida. She is also a graduate student at Florida International University majoring in Curriculum & Instruction.

Nick Juravich is the Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow in Women's History at the New-York Historical Society. He earned his Ph.D. in U.S. History from Columbia University in 2017, where he studied social movements, labor organizing, public education, and metropolitan development in the

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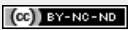
Jennifer Ryan-Bryant is an Associate Professor of English and the coordinator of the English MA program at SUNY - Buffalo State, where she teaches courses in African-American literature, American poetry, the American novel, and gender and women's studies. Some of her recent articles have appeared in *Modern Language Studies*, *African American Review*, *MELUS*, *Hecate*, and *The Oxford Handbook of Critical Improvisation Studies*. Her first book, *Post-Jazz Poetics: A Social History*, was published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2010.

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PHOTOS: LEONARD VOGT



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