Teaching and [Un]Learning "Race" to "Non-Black" Students by a "Black" Professor

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Abstract

The main thrust of this paper is to explore the experiences of a "Black" professor and his mainly "non-Black" students in the construction, teaching and learning "race" and ethnicity. The central premise of the paper is that the differential experiences, socio-cultural backgrounds, and expectations of the instructor and students are important factors in the transmission and learning of a culturally sensitive and politically controversial subject as "Race and Ethnicity" and that these factors must be taken into consideration in the construction and teaching a course in "race" and ethnicity.

The paper will begin with a brief discussion of my pedagogical approach to teaching the Racialization and Ethnicity course, which is a combination of traditional face-to-face classroom instruction and online, web-based delivery methods. It will incorporate my observations at Central Michigan University in the United States from 2003 to 2005 and my experiences during the past two years at Kwantlen University College. The paper will conclude with a discussion of the successes, challenges, and students' overall impressions about this method of teaching. In discussing the successes and challenges of the course to both students and instructor, the paper will seek to address two central questions: In what ways might the anti-racist approach in teaching the course challenge students, particularly White students to re-examine their own racial identity. What transformation, if any, did the "Black" professor go through in the process?

1.   INTRODUCTION

Learning becomes sterile and unproductive unless it can be translated into real life, helping us navigate this complex and sometimes troubled world of ours. Praxis, the marriage of theory and practice or the blending of ideas and action is the philosophical linchpin of good education. As Kwame Nkrumah (1964) so beautifully put it, "thought without practice is blind, and practice without thought is empty." And as Karl Marx (1852) once said, various philosophers have interpreted the world in different ways the point is to change the world.

The cardinal objective of the Racialization and Ethnicity course is to help students to practice praxis, translate what they have learned into action, incorporating the acquired knowledge into their practical everyday lives, in order to make the world a little better than it is today. The course is organized with the sole aim of ensuring that as they move on from the course and the semester, students would constantly challenge themselves to seek to blend what they've learned in the course with their real life practices, actions and attitudes.

The course is informed by the critical constructivist and critical race perspectives as well as the philosophy of engaged pedagogy of Paulo Freire (1981). In addition, the course is informed by the emancipatory or liberative pedagogy of bell hooks (1994). In

our globalizing world, it is crucial that educators instill in their students what Westfield (2004) called "globalized consciousness." Educating for a "more globalized consciousness," Westfield notes, "is teaching with the expectation of transformation of self, community and world." (p.73) Educating for globalized consciousness means teaching for the awakening of students to the connectedness of all peoples on our planet, "where all life affects all other life." (ibid) It is this the need for globalized 'conscientization' of all citizens of our Global Village, particularly students, the future leaders, that prompted Martin Luther King, Jr.(1972) to observe that "We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly." (p.7)

Westfield identifies three basic tenets of teaching for a more globalized consciousness, namely, 1) the notion of 'conscientization,' 2) the notion of power and 3) the philosophy of engaged pedagogy. First, central to a pedagogy for global awareness as Westfield notes, is Paulo Freire's work on 'conscientization.' Freire challenges educators "to move from the 'banking system' approach to one which assumes that people, when educated, can effectively challenge and change the status quo." (74) I summarize the main characteristics of Freiran pedagogy of conscientization: Critical awareness, engagement with, and in one's own context, active participation both inside and beyond systems that oppress; education as a dialogue, action and reflection about ideas, practices and policies germane to the lifeworlds of individuals.

bell hooks has expanded on Freire's pedagogy of conscientization by stressing the emancipatory function of education. Education, she insists is a practice of freedom and can expand consciousness, transforming the learner as well as the educator. "Liberatory praxis can enliven the imagination so as to call persons to new ways of being and believing in the world." (Westfield, 2004:75) Emancipatory education aims to connect the world with the classroom, and asks that the classroom speaks boldly, prophetically to the world. Westfield (2004:75) declares: "A liberative pedagogy globalizes consciousness."

Second, a major plank in teaching for a more globalized consciousness is the notion of power. (Westfield, 2004:75) As MLK, Jr. noted, power when used to exploit, oppress, or conquer, yields colonialism, racism, sexism, imperialism, homophobia -- the ills and diseases that maim, kill and annihilate. Global education must teach to heal these ills caused by the 'isms' MLK, Jr. referred to. A course on "race" more than any other, must set as its cardinal goal to encourage students to examine and rethink the use and misuse of power in all strata of society. Racism is insidious, embedded in and perpetuated by many social institutions and structures leaving the most well-intentioned members of the mainstream society believing there is fairness and equality in the system. These institutions and structures work to normalize and naturalize "White" domination, hence it is rarely questioned.

Keenly aware of the naturalization and normalization of "race" discourse by the mainstream knowledge industry and the various socialization agents, I begin the course with a thorough introduction to critical thinking. The first two weeks are devoted to introducing students to critical thinking tool kits as "bracketing," "debunking," "critique," "dialectical logic" versus "formal logic," "obvious," " the sociological imagination," and the "global sociological imagination." Using insights and quotations from diverse

scholars as Parker Palmer (1973: 19), who said "Education would not be necessary if things were as they seem," Peter Berger (1963) who insisted that things are not what they always seem and that the obvious is only the first step to deeper analysis and understanding, I impress upon my students not to take whatever they learned at home, in the media or high school for granted but go beyond the obvious, the surface realities of social phenomena.

2.   Teaching and Learning "Race": The "Black" Professor and "Non-Black" Students

Teaching about "race" and racism as ideas of other social structure is perhaps one the most difficult undertakings for many instructors. Canadian and U. S. societies have extremely individualistic cultures, where people tend to think race problems are reducible to individual choices, either blaming poor people for poverty and the consequences of poverty, or blaming prejudiced individuals for not being accepting of difference. Getting students to go past this entrenched individualistic mindset and understand why they are in structures that shape these behaviours and attitudes is a formidable task for the "race" and racism instructor. (Oliver, 2007) What is more, addressing the past and present of race relations in North American societies in a serious way in the classroom as in the larger society is potentially explosive, as it challenges students' perceptions "about who deserves what in society." (Oliver, p.1)

Teaching a course on "race" and racism becomes even trickier when the instructor is a racialized minority and his students come from the dominant Euro-American group. Both instructor and students come to the class with their own baggage of preconceived notions, untested assumptions and prejudices. As Westfield (2004) notes, "White power and White values are challenged…in the classroom simply by the presence of Black professors.

Consequently, when the agenda of White dominance is engaged and questioned in the classroom, under the leadership of Black professors, students grow fearful." (p.75)

Westfield observes that the classroom is not a safe place for the Black professor. The academic credentials and years of teaching experience, she insists, offer no protection for the Black professor in the classroom, because White students is seen as by the wider society as his or her superior. "The White students, by their cultural training demand, overtly and subtly that I prove myself in each class session of my courses." (p.82) Westfield goes on to aver that: "I would be foolish and ill-prepared to ever forget that in my multicultural classes I am a Black scholar and a Black thinker, thus embedded by White norms that label me inferior or inadequate." (Ibid)

Keenly conscious of the power dynamics and the different and even contradictory ethno-racial and cultural baggage and potential and real cognitive and psychological "colour-coding-decoding" barriers between instructors of "colour" and their students, I have devised a three-pronged methodology to teach my race and ethnicity classes which are made up of predominantly White first and second-year students in the USA and Canada[i] to make teaching and learning less intimidating and accommodating to me an African-descended instructor and my students. The first involves an effective first day of class "social assurance" introductory remarks aimed at confidence building. The

second pertains to hands-on exercises and assignments aimed at creating empathic understanding of racism from both the victim's and victimizer's perspectives and the third is a final debriefing lecture. What follows is a brief description of the methodology.

3.   First Day of Class: The Pedagogy of Mutual Assurance and Confidence-Building

On the first day of class, I spend what feels like an ordinate amount of time to let my students feel as comfortable as possible by attempting to break down whatever racial-psychological barriers between me and the students and to allay their fears and anxieties. My aim is right at the outset to disabuse their minds of regarding me as a self-righteous holier-than-thou 'race moralist' ready to preach down onto them, the 'race sinners' Before we tell others to get out of their boxes, we must be prepared to get out of our boxes first. And so, I start by letting them know that I do harbor prejudice in various forms and that I am constantly battling them. For, example, as a man, I have biases and prejudices in favor of men and against women. But I have learned not to act out my prejudices. To ease them into the discussion, I would tell them several personal stories about my own prejudices about Whites when I was growing up in the village in Ghana. One of these stories was my surprise on seeing a "white" baby for the first time. Prior to that fateful day, the few White people I had set eyes on were all grownups. Thus, when I saw the European baby, my reaction was: "Oh, so they also have babies!" My other surprise was when I first saw a "White" woman wearing ear rings. Incidentally, the few Hollywood movies that I saw as a child did not include White women wearing earrings or perhaps, I did not see any wearing them. So, imagine my surprise when I saw a White woman wearing ear rings for the first time: "Look, they also wear earrings"!

Then I would tell them a less benign story about my own racial prejudice and how I acquired them. As a child I was told that if I dreamed about having seen a White person, it meant I had seen a ghost. Of course, the last thing one would like to dream of is an encounter with a ghost! I would go to bed praying that I never dreamed about seeing a White person.

I stress the difference between racial prejudice and racism, and let them understand that all "racial" groups harbor prejudice about and stereotype other groups. Prejudice and stereotyping, I explain, are symptoms, not the root causes of inter-racial conflicts. Race prejudice and stereotyping are manifestations of ongoing tug-of-war between groups over economic, political and social resources. While all people habour prejudices about other human groups and stereotype out-groups, not all people are in a position to discriminate on a systematic basis.

I further explain that it is a universal human impulse to use stereotypes to rationalize primitive fears and suspicions. (Berger, 1999) People, irrespective of race or ethnicity, use stereotypes as rules of thumb or mental templates as they try to navigate the complex, information rich world. Thus, stereotypes and prejudice, while universal and cut across 'racial' and ethnic lines, are not the real problems. The real issue is the ability to translate prejudices and stereotypes into acts of discrimination at the personal, the state, and the systemic levels.

I explain to my students that racism exists in North America not because it is run by mean-spirited, evil-minded White bigots. It is not the nature of Whites, but the logic of the system, the rules of the game, if you will, that produces racism. In other words, "it goes with the territory", and if the tables were turned and African Americans were the dominant ethnic/racial group in the USA, for example, they would probably act in the same way many Whites are acting now.

Teaching from the critical race and post-colonialist perspectives allow me to use history as a tool to teach the course. I explain to students that the social structures of the present are the legacies of the actions and indeed inactions of the past. As Oliver (2007) notes, "…the past is less threatening than the present." (p.1) Understanding historical backgrounds does not make people abandon their own perspectives and interests, but it does re-frame current debates in less simplistic terms than students are accustomed to hearing in the popular media. (Oliver, 2007)

4.   Teaching and Learning with a Smile

I am guided by a teaching philosophy which I term "teaching and learning with a smile," a philosophy aimed at making teaching and learning fun and light-hearted, without sacrificing rigor. Teaching and learning with a smile aims to show that teaching and learning difficult subjects such as the sociology of race relations can be done effectively not by forcing students to change their opinions or by making White students to feel guilty about white privilege, for instance. To influence students, it is crucial to have and demonstrate respect their own backgrounds and experiences and give them space to think. Empathy on the part of the instructor is as important as that of his/her students in the teaching and learning of the sociology of race relations. Rather than scolding students for being "racist" when they, for example, trivialize the consequences of racial discrimination or the slave trade, I try to understand "where they are coming from" and I assure them that I would perhaps behave no differently "if I were you."

I have found this approach to be especially effective as students immediately loosen up and freely share their experiences and thoughts. The next thing I introduce is the "The Race Game." One of the goals of cross-cultural education is to create experiences of cognitive dissonance where previously formed ideas of identity are challenged. (Westfield, 2004) Together with a group ethnographic research project, the Race Game exercise removes students past their 'comfort zones' in order that they might re-think some of their presuppositions about "race" and allow students to engage in empathic understanding of the "Other."

5.   The Race Game and Ethnographic Research

The Race Game: I ask students to play the "Race Game" developed by Thandeka, an African American religious philosopher and educator. Players use the qualifiers or descriptors "white", "black", "yellow", or "red" in their conversations with friends and family and record their observations and feelings, e.g. "My white father bought me a gift on Mother's Day." The aim is to show the absurdity of using the meaningless qualifiers to describe people based on their perceived skin pigmentation and to enable them to empathize with victims of race and ethnic discrimination.

6.   Ethnographic Research/Field (Community) Report

I assign students to groups of three members to choose a racial and/or ethnic group different from their own to do an ethnographic research. To complete this assignment, I ask students to do the following:

1) Before going to or interacting with the group:

- Write down your impressions of the group and note where you obtained these impressions.

- Complete library research and note significant things about the group.

- Reading should include some sociological work or research about the group.

- Also look at what has been written in local and national newspapers about the group.

2) The visit:

- Visit the community in which members of the racial and/or ethnic group reside or participate in an activity in which members of the racial and/or ethnic group are in a majority (or in which they are dominant).

- Converse with members of the group. Find out about their experiences with regard to:

  - Immigration and/or migration (where applicable)

  - Employment opportunities

  - Religion (where applicable)

  - Religious beliefs and practices:

  - Educational access, opportunities and achievements:

  - Residence:

  - Attitudes of other Canadians towards the group, and of the group towards other Canadians

  - Discrimination

  - Assimilation

  - Multiculturalism:

  - The future outlook of the group

  - Going back home (where applicable)

7.   Encouraging Students to publish research

To encourage students to write good term papers, I promise to publish the best papers in my news magazine, the *Sankofa News*. I have, since 1995 been publishing the *Sankofa News*, a community-oriented quarterly. The publication was produced with the help of my Communication Studies students at the University of Windsor, where I cut my teaching teeth. I created a rubric in the publication, "Young Scholars' Forum"

where I published the best students' term papers. Although I am no more in Windsor, the magazine continues to be published in Windsor. Thanks to the "Information Superhighway" I am able to co-manage and co-edit the publication with friends in Windsor.

8.   Final Debriefing Lecture

The last lecture is devoted to not only tying up the loose ends of the lectures and assignments, but to stress the importance of students practising what they have learned. I was prompted to introduce the final debriefing lecture about four years ago, when I was teaching race-related courses, namely, Race and Ethnicity and Media and Diversity courses at Central Michigan University. I noticed that while the majority of the students seemed to have taken the course in strides and appeared satisfied with what they learned, a significant minority displayed a range of feelings ranging from guilt to cognitive dissonance and post-decisional dissonance. I detected these feelings from the tone of the final, summing up essays I asked them to write. As part of the course assignments, I asked students to write a 500-word reflective essay summing up their learning experience during the semester, stating what new things they learned about race relations and what preconceived notions they have now decided to discard. Here is a brief description of the assignment:

> ***THE FINAL SUM UP POSTING!*** *This is the last posting for the semester. It is in the form of a summation of all the previous discussions and indeed the entire course. I instruct that it's time for the students to revisit the opening lectures on "bracketing," "formal logic", "dialectical logic," "obvious," "sociological imagination" and "debunking," after which they are to write a 500 word-essay, titled "What I have learned about racial-ethnic relations in this course" using insights gained from the concepts they learned from the introductory lecture. In the essay, students must answer the following questions:*
>
> 1. *What new things did you learn in the course?*
>
> 2. *What presumptions/preconceived notions you had prior to taking this course and how these preconceived notions have now been shattered, or reinforced.*
>
> 3. *Have your views on race and racism changed? How? Suggest two ways to eliminate or minimize racism. Or if you are not convinced there is racism or racism is a problem in this country, feel free to say so as well.*

As I have explained below, many of the students were defensive, while others were apologetic for the existence of racism in their country. After reading these somber accounts, I felt my job as an instructor not complete. I thus decided on the final debriefing lecture, which I also posted on line for students who missed that lecture.

9.   The Educated Must Be Educated: Lessons Learned

As I stated above, I ask students to write a final essay about their overall impressions about racial and ethnic relations in their country. The essays in general constitute a veritable lesson in the complexity and sensitive nature of teaching race and ethnicity. During the past four years I have read and graded over 2,000 students' essays about what they learned and unlearned in my courses in race and ethnic

relations in the USA and Canada. Overall, the students embraced this assignment enthusiastically, and wrote high quality essays. Many wrote riveting accounts about their personal upbringings and primary socialization experiences and how these affected their view of members of 'visible' minority groups and their resolve to help end the system of racism in their country.

Many suggested that courses such as mine should be taught in grade schools, and many wondered why this has not been done all this while. Almost invariably, I was also intrigued, but not surprised, by the similarities of their experiences. The majority had only fleeting encounters with 'visible' minorities. This was more so with my students at Central Michigan University. Many of the students said they were from explicitly racist homes or communities where the use of racial epithets was the norm. Others were from all-white liberal backgrounds where equality and diversity were taught and their parents or guardians discouraged or negatively sanctioned racial hostility. The majority took pains to point out almost apologetically that either they or their parents were not racist. In addition, there were other students who came from biracial or multiracial families and had had an extensive interracial experiences growing up. Many blamed racism on skinheads, Neo-Nazis, and simply on 'bad' people. Few saw themselves as part of the problem. A few reasoned that racism was a sin of the past, no longer a serious problem in the 21st century. To such students, I wrote elaborate responses to their essays, hoping to clear whatever confusion or doubt still remained in their minds.

After moving back to Canada in 2005, I gave the same assignment to my Canadian students, and, not surprisingly, their responses were no different from those of their US counterparts.

Some of my students were desperately defensive and ashamed about racism in their country and their unwitting participation in it. In fact, the responses of the students reflect the culture of denial and neglect in North America. For sure, to be branded a racist these days does not generate pleasant feelings, to say the least. So it is understandable that most North Americans go to great lengths to deny they are racist or 'part of the problem.' A few complained of "reverse discrimination." For example, one student claimed in his reflective essay on Peggy McIntosh's article, "Unpacking the Knapsack of White Privilege" that his being White "almost kept" him from getting his current job at the Soaring Eagle Casino and Resort in Mount Pleasant, Michigan.

As I mentioned above, it is these feelings and sentiments among my students that prompted me to organize a final "debriefing lecture" at the end of each semester at which I explained to them that the problem is not of their making. They are not responsible for the existence of racism in their country and they are not responsible for harboring race prejudice. They were socialized, brought up, that way. However, that does not absolve them from responsibility if their actions and inactions perpetuate racism.

I explained that the socio-economic and political system works in their country to sustain, service, support, and promote the inequitable race relations. Racism exists in North America not because it is run by mean-spirited, evil-minded White bigots. (Johnson, 2000) It is not the nature of Whites, but the logic of the system, the rules of the game, if you will, that produce racism. In other words, "it goes with the territory"; if

the tables were turned and African Americans were the dominant ethnic/racial group in the USA, for example, they would probably act in the same way Whites are acting now.

Many people know that racism is bad, yet they do nothing to end it. In fact, their inaction contributes to, and reinforces racism. Racism persists not just because people are powerless to challenge and end it, but because it seen as legitimate in the eyes of many.

Racism persists because of real or imagined threats to dominants' material standing, through competition for jobs, housing, schools, etc. Thus, racism is hegemonic, in that it so much part of the fabric of people's past and present lives that it is often invisible or appears to be inevitable. The hegemony of racism makes it difficult to recognize, discuss, and challenge it. I remind my students that no one is born a racist bigot. In other words, racial bigotry or racial prejudice is not genetically or biologically determined. People learn racial bigotry through the various agents of socialization -- the family, peers, the educational system, the mass media and so on. People are products of the socio-cultural systems into which they are born. Thus, racism is learned in the social context; it is a social construct; it is not innate or biologically predetermined.

However, that does make people slaves to the system either. People posses and many frequently exercise agency or free will. While we may be victims of circumstances, we are, at the same time, captains of the ships of our destinies. While we are products of the systems into which we are born, we are not entirely powerless. While we may be "victims" of our parents' upbringing, we do not remain "puppets" in our adult lives; we are capable of "unlearning" the unhealthy lessons of childhood.

I quote Allan Johnson (2000) liberally. In his book, *Privilege, Power and Difference,* Johnson used the game of Monopoly to illustrate this point very poignantly. Monopoly is a game of ruthless competition, a zero-sum game in which the winner takes all. According to Johnson, the point of the game is to ruin everyone else and be the only one left in the end of the game. A player does not even have to be a greedy person to wish to ruin his opponents in a game of Monopoly. The rules of the game, the logic of Monopoly, make players ruthless. Even an angel can be turned into the devil incarnate by playing Monopoly. But Monopoly players also have agency. They can stop simply playing Monopoly.

Thus, Johnson (2000:90-95) urges us to think of Monopoly as a social system -- as something larger than ourselves that we participate in. The game of Monopoly demonstrates how "systems and people come together in a dynamic relationship that produce oppression power, and privilege." "People", he explains, "make social systems happen by virtue of their participation in it." If no one plays Monopoly, "it is just a box full of stuff with writing inside the cover." The problem is that "when people open it up and identify themselves as players, however, Monopoly starts to *happen."* In such a system, it is the actions, and indeed the inactions, of the individuals which perpetuate the system.

How do people make the systems of social injustice and inequality, such as sexism, racism, and privilege, happen? People perpetuate systems of social injustice by adopting what Johnson calls 'paths of least resistance,' one of which is silence. To perpetuate a system of oppression and privilege, we do not have to do something

consciously to support it. Just our silence is crucial enough to ensure its future; the simple fact is that no system of social oppression can continue to exist without most people choosing to remain silent about it. "If most whites spoke out about racism, it would be the first step toward a revolutionary change," Johnson declares. "Sadly," though, "the vast majority of 'good' people simply chooses the paths of least resistance and remains silent on racism, and it is easy for 'ethnic/racial minorities to read their silence as support for the system," Johnson concludes. (2000:94)

Silence, as the saying goes is golden. However, in matters of social injustice, silence is as deadly as the sayings of these individuals, whose reactions to man's inhumanity to man in different circumstances attest:

> *Throughout history, it has been the inaction of those who could have acted, the indifference of those who should have known better, the silence of the voice of justice when it mattered most that has made it possible for evil to triumph.*
> *-Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia.[ii]*

> *In Germany they came first for the Communists and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist,*
> *Then they came for the Jews and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew,*
> *Then they came for the trade unionists and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist,*
> *Then they came for the Catholics and I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant, Then, they came for me -- and by that time no one was left to speak up*
> *-Martin Niemöller 1892-1984 (Nazi concentration camp survivor).[iii]*

10.   The Last Word

The concluding segment of my debriefing lecture is titled "The Last Word," which is aimed at driving home the importance of praxis, and encouraging students to put into practice what they learned in the course. It is prefaced with the following quotation by the late widow of Martin Luther King Jr., Coretta Scott King."

> *"It doesn't matter how strong your opinions are. If*
> *you don't use your power for positive change, you*
> *are indeed part of the problem, helping to keep*
> *things the way they are."[iv]*

See Appendix A for a summary of my "Last Word".

11.   CONCLUSION

> *"[People] as uncompleted beings, must be conscious of their incompletion and attempt to be more fully human." Paulo Freire.*

Along with my students, I constantly learn and re-learn the complexities and the enormity of anti-racism education. As I read riveting accounts of my students' socialization and inter-racial experiences, I found myself face to face new challenges and new prospects, exacting emotional and intellectual contradictions and tensions, but also excitement and optimism. I reminded myself of the need to constantly upgrade my

knowledge about the subject I teach, in order not only to be able to answer students' questions better in the future, but also to be a better teacher. As I introduced concepts such as "debunking," "bracketing," "the sociological imagination," and encouraged my students to incorporate them into their lived experiences, I found myself encouraged to do the same. While the overwhelming majority of students taking my race and ethnicity cause found the course worthwhile, a small minority expressed misgivings, disappointment, and disagreement with certain articles or concepts. The most recurrent complaints and disagreements were with the concepts "white privilege" and "reverse discrimination." Overall, the complaints were about certain aspects of the course (there were also scattered complaints my "exotic accent" or course load -- some of these students did not like the weekly online essays) rather than content or pedagogy.

Each semester and each course, I never tired to remind myself and my students the importance of the following pieces of advice by Peter Berger: "What you see in the real world is not always what you get"; and "The first wisdom in Sociology is that the obvious is but the first step to deeper understanding and knowledge." But for me as an instructor, Marx's timeless admonishment that the educator must be educated is my prized mantra. In other words, self-actualization is a goal for me as a teacher as it is for my students.

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APPENDIX A

THE LAST WORD

So as you end this semester and this course, I want you to keep pondering the following points:

If you're biblically or religiously inclined, try to see the wisdom in these scriptures:

"How will it profit a man [woman] if [s]he wins the whole world but loses his[her] soul?" and "Man[woman] must not live by bread alone, but by every word that cometh out of the mouth of God." Those of you, who are more empirically inclined or secular in your orientation, attempt to see the wisdom in the reverse of the above cited scriptures: "How will it profit a man[woman], if he[she] saves his[her] soul, but loses the whole world?" Or "man [woman] must not live by the word of God alone, but also by bread." And to both the biblically inclined and empirically inclined, ask yourself: What did Jesus mean when he said: "Give unto Caesar what's Caesar's and give unto God what's God's?"

Learning becomes sterile and unproductive unless it can be translated into real life, helping us navigate this complex and sometimes troubled world of ours. Praxis, the marriage of theory and practice or the blending of ideas and action is the philosophical linchpin of good education. As one philosopher so beautifully put it, ***"theory without practice is blind, and practice without theory is empty."*** And as another social philosopher once said, various philosophers have merely interpreted the world in different ways, the point is to change the world.

Now is the time to practice praxis, translate what you have learned into action, incorporating it into your practical everyday life, in order to make the world a little better than it is today. Thus, as you move on from this course and this semester, I want you to constantly challenge yourself not only to seek to blend what you've learned in this course with your real life practices, actions and attitudes, but also remember that what you see is not always what you get, that the first wisdom in sociology is that the obvious is but the first step to deeper knowledge.

What I am driving at here is our most favorite term of the semester (judging from your electronic postings and group discussions), "**debunking**".

Now here are some tips[v] for you:

- Be aware of myths and stereotypes perpetuated in the media about different racial/ethnic groups, as well as the sexes, sexual minorities, the aged, etc

- Acknowledge that racism, sexism, ageism, heightism, classism, and, homophobia exist.

- You cannot be blamed for the misinformation you have learned, but you will be

- held responsible for repeating misinformation after you have learned otherwise.

- You must not blame victims for their oppression.

- You must assume that people are always doing their best.

- Research how communities have been actively made conscious of and responsible for their stereotypic portrayals of all these groups.

- Support multicultural projects and programs

- Engage in open and honest dialogue with friends and peers in different racial/ethnic groups and other minorities about racial/ethnic representation in the media, in politics, in the economy, etc.

- Be open to films, newspapers, music, and so on, targeted to racial/ethnic groups other than your own. EX: *The Sankofa News* ☺

- Rethink the types of stereotypes you have about racial/ethnic groups as well as other underprivileged groups

- Rethink how you perceive racial/ethnic groups as well as other underprivileged groups based on messages and images communicated in the media

- Become more acquainted with magazines, films, and television programs targeted to certain racial/ethnic groups as well as other underprivileged groups.

- Acknowledge that we all harbor prejudices, and we manifest them from time to time, and that prejudice whether backed by power (racism) or not (race prejudice) is destructive. It hurts, takes away bread from someone's mouth, it offends, it destroys and it kills! In other words, all of us, whether dominant/majority or minority are capable and do hurt people through our prejudices. So before we tell others to get out of their boxes, we must be prepared to get out of our boxes first.

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[i] The student population at Kwantlen University College (KUC) is more ethnically mixed than that of Central Michigan University (CMU). The KUC student population consisted of roughly 50 per cent Euro-Canadians, 30 per cent Indo-Canadian, 10 per cent Chinese-Canadians. The remaining 10 per cent comprises students from other ethnicities, including African-Canadians, Hispanics, and Muslim Canadians. African Canadians are the least represented in my classes at KUC. I have not had more than four students per semester in my classes since I started teaching at Kwantlen.

[ii] This quotation was taken from his speech at the opening a special session of the General Assembly in Addis Ababa, thus becoming the first ruler to address both the League of Nations and the UN, 4 Oct 1963.

[iii] The actual date and sequence of the quotation is in dispute. See http://www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/niem.htm

[iv] Coretta Scott King made this statement in her address at the Antioch Reunion 2004 See http://www.antioch-college.edu/Antiochian/archive/Antiochian_2004fall/reunion/king/

[v] These tips are adaptations from Mark Orbe and Tina *Harris's Interracial Communication, Theory and Practice*, Wardsworth and Lynn Weber's Ground Rules, Center for Research on Women, Memphis State University, Memphis, TN 38152.