Brave Community: Teaching and Learning Race in College in the 21st Century

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Brave Community: Teaching and Learning Race in College in the 21st Century

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Acknowledgments

I dedicate this dissertation to my son, Jalen Kai, whose adolescence overlapped with my doctoral studies. While Jalen had every right to resent the sacrifices that my life imposed on such a formative time in his own life, he never complained. On the contrary, Jalen was an example of strength and maturity, as well as an undying source of joy. Along the way, through Jalen's example, I learned about the power of self-possession, the multiplicity of intelligence, and the real meaning of education. Jalen Kai, this is for you.

My large and loving family resides across the word. My loved ones make their living in Cabo Verde, Angola, Brazil, Belgium, New York City, and Portugal. In generational travels and migrations, we have descended from the forced uprootings of slavery and forged paths of aspiration towards ever more full lives. I am humbled by the opportunity to dedicate this dissertation to my family. I am deeply grateful to my mother, Xanda de Novais, for the strength and sacrifice it took to raise me, while also raising herself. My mother remains my first and best teacher. I thank my maternal grandparents—Manuela Fonseca and Alexandre Pacheco de Novais, for making the loving home, bustling with ideas and windows into the great wide world, that first welcomed me. I thank my paternal grandparents, Teresa Pinto and Paulo Santos Monteiro who, with modest means but exuberant love, also welcomed me. Last but not least, I thank my father, José Carlos Santos Monteiro, who gifted me a sense of ease and humor to navigate a complicated life.

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Table of Contents

Abstract

Sociological evidence consistently demonstrates that racial progress coexists with persistent racial inequality in American society. Recently, increased evidence of police brutality against black citizens, as well as the 2016 presidential election, clearly confirms that, even in the wake of the Obama era, racial conflict plagues American democracy. There is a widely held consensus that college is an optimal time to engage American undergraduates with the challenges and possibilities of the country's racial diversity. With that in mind, I explored whether college classrooms, in particular, might be optimal spaces for this engagement. I investigated the experience of undergraduates at a private, selective university, to ask how classroom experiences in courses on race might influence students' understanding of race, if at all. I found that, drawing from the academic grounding that the classroom provided, students displayed increased capacity to engage with one another in intellectually courageous and empathetic ways. Further, I found that students' understandings of race became more complex and more self-authored. I call this process—linking classroom dynamics to learning about race—brave community.

Introduction

On the night of President Obama's farewell address from Chicago, my son sat next to me and watched it in its entirety. I was surprised because, while a bright and engaged young man, my son is also a typical teenager who usually has little time for "regular" news or "old people shows," preferring to consume his millennial brand of media: short and powerful bites of information that flow through his phone and to him almost continuously. Yet, he sat next to me, fully engrossed and seeming suddenly very young. "I grew up with him," he said quietly. "I can't believe he's going to be gone." Jokingly, he added, "You should have me up on your shoulders right now." He was referencing election night, 2008.

On the night of Obama's election, my son was 8. We lived in Harlem, and Harlem lit up like the Fourth of July the very moment the election results were finally announced. I took my son to watch the acceptance speech live, and we headed east on 125th Street, to where the jumbotron had been set-up. The ground beneath our feet seemed to bounce, as hundreds of people, mostly black people, walked, ran, screamed, and honked, headed in the same direction. One after another, adults who passed us by made sure to smile, and wave at, or even high five my son. At one point, a man bent over and gently grabbed him by his shoulders: "Little man, do you realize what just happened?" My son said nodded vehemently: yes, he did know. Earlier that morning, he had gone to vote with me, entered the booth and pulled the lever himself. Before we reached the intersection of Adam Clayton Powell Blvd., we ran into folks playing African drums, and around them, a large crowd had gathered. They were dancing to an impromptu Ob-a-ma chant. 125th

Street, Harlem, was in a spell, my son sat atop my shoulders, and the new President was black.

Even those who did not expect to see the end of racism in America following that joyful night had cause for cautious optimism in the concrete fact of a black family living in the White House. In terms of the racial climate, however, even such cautious optimism was short-lived. Almost immediately, Obama became the target of those, in government and in the broader public, who were not ready for the cultural shifts that produced his presidency. Tea Party figures and their followers rose loudly at the fringes of American politics. Soon, however, they were undistinguishable from mainstream Republicans. It did not seem to matter that their protests often featured posters with caricatures of the President and First Lady as monkeys, or that one of their elected representatives called President Obama a liar during a State of the Union Address. Nor did it seem to matter that Donald Trump, then mogul and reality TV star, insisted that the president had falsified his birth certificate. In the past few years in particular, increased video evidence of police brutality against unarmed black citizens across the nation and the resulting Black Lives Matter movement traumatized us. The tense racial climate seemed all the more painful because it coincided with the presidency of Obama. When large segments of the public were offended by the President's remarks that "Trayvon Martin could have been me 35 years ago," it did not matter that the president was simply telling the truth. Obama's presidency was characterized by his failed attempts to reason with America on race: never too confrontationally, ever so conciliatorily. All of it mattered little. It mattered so little that, by 2017, those who rejected his multicultural coalition or even his legitimacy as president had overtaken the public sphere. Far from fringe ideas, their

voices were now those of the Trump voters—and those voices were now the most

prominent subject of social scientific and journalistic inquiries. And Donald Trump had

become President.

Du Bois prophesied that the color line would define the 20th century. It did, and

now it is poised to define the 21st as well. As I have tried to grapple with this reality, my

mind has often turned to young people like my son who came of age at the dawn of a

kind of improbable hope, only to come to consciousness amidst a kind of a racial

nightmare. Throughout these tumultuous years, unrest on college campuses specifically

exposed the ways in which the racial dynamics in the wider society are present, if not

exacerbated, in college. Not only were many campuses involved in the Black Lives

Matter movement between 2014 and 2016, college campuses also erupted in the wake of

Trump's election. A great portion of the initial surge in reported hate crimes in the week

immediately following the election of Donald Trump took place on campuses. It is

understandable that college campuses are racially charged environments. In part, they are

often spaces where students encounter more diversity than they have seen throughout

their lives. In part, college-age, both developmentally and socially speaking, is a time for

questioning the status quo. College students experience what Erikson called the

psychosocial moratorium and are primed to challenge received knowledge with new

knowledge and to trade their elders' worldviews for their emergent perspectives (Gurin,

Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002). College students are learning and being asked to

investigate, explore, and question the world around them. It makes perfect sense that

under such conditions, "the color line" should come into focus.

American colleges have in fact developed through cycles of contestation and protest in which students of color have demanded greater inclusion and equality (Lucas, 2006). Following the movements for civil rights in the sixties, most colleges were confronted by student activist demands for increased representation of people of color in their student and faculty bodies and more representation of non-European peoples and cultures in their curricula. This pioneering work of black student activists founded the first Black Studies departments and eventually led to the founding of Ethnic Studies departments as well (Berrey, 2011; Biondi, 2012). Affirmative action policies in college admissions also evolved as a result of these transformations (Stulberg & Weinberg, 2011). Despite this robust history, policies of affirmative action, especially at the level of the Supreme Court, evolved to become less explicit about racial justice (Chang & Ledesma, 2011).

Since the 1978 case of the *University of California Regents v. Bakke*, the Supreme Court has adjudicated challenges to the constitutionality of affirmative action in a series of high profile cases. In *Bakke*, Justice Powell famously advanced an opinion that became known as the diversity rationale. Borrowing from the amicus brief submitted by Columbia, Harvard, Stanford and the University of Pennsylvania, Powell wrote in part that affirmative action in admissions was appropriate because "the atmosphere of 'speculation, experiment and creation' — so essential to the quality of higher education — is widely believed to be promoted by a diverse student body," and "the nation's future depends upon leaders trained through wide exposure to the ideas and mores of students as diverse as this Nation of many peoples" (Berrey, 2011; Stulberg & Weinberg, 2011). Powell's compromise, viewed by some as savvy and by others as short-sighted, defended

a university's consideration of race in admissions on the grounds that it produced

educational benefits, not because such a policy sought to redress racial inequality

(Berrey, 2011).

In the years since *Bakke*, educational research has proven the benefits and, in

some cases, the challenges of the diversity rationale. Multiple studies showed that

learning on racially diverse campuses and classrooms indeed correlates with cognitive

gains (Bowman, 2010; Chang, Astin, & Kim, 2004; Hurtado, Dey, Gurin, & Gurin, 2003)

as well as increases in the democratic and pluralist orientations of students (Engberg,

2007; Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004; Jayakumar, 2008). Scholars also demonstrated that

while learning in racially diverse classrooms benefitted students, such learning could also

be fraught with challenges (Sorensen, Nagda, Gurin, & Maxwell, 2009; Goff, Steele, &

Davies, 2008; Richeson & Shelton, 2007; Shelton & Richeson, 2006). However, this

research, which was focused on measuring outcome effects, did not offer insights into

how this learning amidst racial diversity became influential for students (for an important

exception see Gurin et al., 2013, discussed in chapter 2).

When I encountered this vast field of research as part of my graduate studies, this

lack of emphasis on classrooms or learning seemed at complete odds with my intuition

and experience. Not only had I been an undergraduate at Columbia University during

racially tense times, but having also worked there for many years as an administrator I

had seen recurring waves of racial unrest and contestation on campus. In both roles, my

experience was that engagement with race in the classroom was highly charged and

highly formative for many college students. It seemed to me that "issues of race and

higher education" were mostly to do with learning about race.   Further, I believed that learning about race was important above and beyond the confines of college.

It was, in part, learning about race—and racism—that spurred citizens in African colonies like my native Cabo Verde to seek and secure independence from Europe between the 1950s and the 1970s. It was learning about race that allowed my parents to navigate the racism they encountered in Belgium while they attended university there, during my early elementary school years. It was learning about race that, in 1991, inspired my mother to hand me a copy of Cornel West's "Race Matters" and bell hooks' "Talking Back", as soon as I moved to the United States to join her in our second and final immigration experience. It was learning about race that allowed me to make sense of my racially segregated Honors and Advanced Placement classes in high school, where I sat isolated, as if there really weren't more "academically gifted" black teenagers in that urban high school of 4,000 students. It was learning about race that explained the deep familiarity I felt when I first set foot on 125th St., Harlem, three years later, as a college first-year. It was also learning about race that fueled my intellectual tussle with Columbia University's famously Eurocentric core curriculum. It was that same learning that pushed me to join student protests demanding, in 1996, that an Ethnic Studies department be founded at Columbia to challenge that curriculum. It seemed to me that while learning might not be the only relevant aspect of the intersection of race and higher education, it certainly was a powerfully relevant one.

This study emerged as much from this personal history as it did from my sense of the gap in existing research and theory. I wanted to explore what happens in courses on race where students have positive learning experiences. It seemed to me that college

students were often affected by engaging with race in the classroom—at times, inspired or angered, at times, comforted or hurt. Given the stakes of our larger, persistent challenges around race and racism, I was curious to explore that terrain. Obviously, college students engage with issues of race beyond the classroom—in their dorms and cafeterias with peers and in their social lives, both in person and through social media. But my curiosity was about whether the academic setting of the classroom influenced how students learned and came to think and talk about race in distinctive ways. My research question was simple and open-ended: what was the relationship between classroom experience and students' understanding of race?

In first formulating my research question, I was heavily influenced and inspired by Ann Morning's work on racial conceptualization (Morning, 2009). Morning defines racial conceptualization as "the web of beliefs that an individual may hold about what race is." It comprises more than specific "abstract definitions" to include our "wide range of notions" about what race is, how it works in society, and when or why it matters (Morning, 2009). In *The Nature of Race*, Morning (2011) explored how two disciplinary discourses on race—from Anthropology and Biology professors—influenced how undergraduates defined race. Drawing from that study, the existing research, as well as my own extensive experiences in universities, I hypothesized that other academic courses on race would also influence students' race conceptualizations in broader ways, beyond structuring their definitions of race. While Morning had focused on the definitional discourses in Biology and Anthropology, or what those disciplines argued, "race is," I decided to consider the influence of ideas about race that were not simply or explicitly definitional. I wanted to explore the influence on students of those wider ranging,

interdisciplinary notions of race that emerge in courses in the humanities and the social sciences, such as courses in African American Studies.

"Brave community" is part of what I found. It is my name for the process by which a certain type of classroom culture can support students in building resilient and empathetic learning relationships that, in turn, allow them to deepen their understanding of race. It was a process I observed in one of the courses I studied—Prof. Thomas's seminar. Some of its dimensions were also found in Prof. Stone's course, albeit to a lesser extent. I feel that the phrase brave community, inspired by one of the students' reflection, has a useful clarity. I also find it useful that brave community speaks of the possibilities of teaching and learning about race in college, instead of the perils. As I will show, the processes were never linear or predictable. The experiences differed as students and professors differed. Yet, in broad strokes, I found that the combination of academic content and academic culture that defined each classroom—what I call academic grounding—provided students with a space in which they could push themselves and their peers to confront difficult questions and realities about race. Additionally, students' understanding of race became more sophisticated. This was, according to the students who shared their learning experiences with me, both rare and transformative.. What is most relevant about this study is that it reminds us of what is already possible and already happening in hundreds of college classrooms. Every day, in those classrooms, students and their professors show up for the complicated but necessary work of teaching and learning about race in 21st century America.

I begin, in chapter 1, by introducing Gable University, the site of the study, as well as the students and professors who generously allowed me to watch them work and

learn. The literature review and the methods constitute chapter 2. Chapter 3 is the first of

the two empirical chapters that answer the research question about the relationship

between classroom experience and students' understanding of race. The chapter takes up

classroom experience and introduces the concept of academic grounding and its

connection to intellectual bravery, empathy and the sense of community. Chapter 4 turns

to students' understanding of race and how students drew from their learning in the

courses to develop more sophisticated and autonomous understandings. Chapter 5

describes how *brave community* can be viewed as both an account of the classroom

experience in Thomas's course and a teaching practice.

Chapter 1: Gable University

In December 2013, a group of Gable University[1] black students created a campaign to raise awareness about what they described as racist and hostile conditions at Gable. The campaign, named "The Manifesto", included posters and a video installation featuring dozens of student testimonials. In the testimonials, black Gable undergraduate and graduate students expressed feelings of rejection and alluded to various instances of overt and covert racial discrimination: being singled out in classes to opine on a text by a black author, being repeatedly asked to show ID going in and out of university buildings, and being asked "from where" or "what" they were. Students also highlighted opinion articles that had appeared in *The Gable Dispatch*, the campus newspaper, over the course of recent years, in which white students denounced affirmative action. A year later, when students at the Gable Business School awoke to find posters featuring four faculty of color under the heading "affirmative action baby," many students evoked the Manifesto in their expressions of outrage and sadness. It seemed that neither students nor renowned academics were exempt from racial exclusion at Gable University.

In the urgency and eloquence of the students' voices, the Manifesto felt powerful and timely. Yet, put in the context of the history of Gable University itself, the campaign felt depressingly familiar. For students whose time at Gable bridged these events, these were undoubtedly jarring and exceptional moments. But for many of Gable's faculty and administrators, as well as scholars of higher education, they were not. The tale of racial confrontation, accommodation, and transformation is a tale as old as Gable University itself. In this, Gable is illustrative of the national history regarding how institutions of

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[1] A pseudonym for the university. Details of its history have been masked to preserve anonymity.

higher learning, particularly private elite institutions, have contended with issues of racial justice and racial diversity (Bowen & Bok, 1998; Lucas, 2006). As historians have detailed, the same impetus that pushed black student activists and their allies in the Sixties to advocate for the end of racial discrimination in housing, employment, daily and political life, led them to turn their attention to higher education (Biondi, 2012). Activists demanded that schools increase the number of students of color in their classes and faculty of color in their ranks. They also called for the establishment of departments of Black and, eventually, Ethnic Studies. For students of color to feel like they belonged, institutions like Gable University had to be transformed in multiple ways.

In the decades between the 1960s and the late 1980s, black student activists sought the establishment of an Afro-American Studies department as well as of a center dedicated specifically to black student life at Gable. In a move reminiscent of students at similar institutions at the time, student activists called for a center, which they dubbed the *Africana Center*, that could act as "a home base" and a gathering space for students who felt routinely singled out in a predominantly white campus. In 1987, an institute for Afro-American Studies was founded—but not a department. Gable administrators announced that, in addition to focusing on research, the institute would be a hub for the kind of resources and activities that "all Gable students" could enjoy. The administration voted against the students' *Africana Center* proposal, deeming it contrary to Gable's vision of integration.

In their justification of this decision, Gable administrators drew heavily from the writings of various scholars, including prominent president of Harvard University, Derek Bok. In much-publicized comments, in articles and commencement speeches, Bok

elaborated the position that would later influence Powell's diversity rationale: "The opportunities for minority students to contribute to the understanding of their fellow students and to the welfare of society as a whole seem sufficiently important to us as to justify an effort to enroll a significant number of [minority applicants]. This policy leads us to admit some minority students with prior grades and test scores somewhat below those of other applicants." The argument was that black students, and students of color generally, belonged in the university insofar as their presence contributed to the welfare of society as a whole and of their white peers in particular, to whom these students would bring much needed diverse perspectives.

A long history ran beneath the latest racial controversies at Gable. In addition to the Manifesto, the Business School incident, and an almost incessant flow of controversial articles in *The Gable Dispatch*, Gable undergraduates, like their peers across the nation, became involved in, or at least exposed to, the Black Lives Matter protests. The *Dispatch* reported in the fall of 2014, that Gable was, "like many campuses, caught in the ripple effect from the racial protests sweeping the nation." According to the students who spoke with me, campus life at Gable University from 2014 to 2015 swayed between tense and angry moments, and often pit students against students, on campus and on social media.

Faculty organized many teach-ins and colloquia particularly addressing issues of racial injustice on campus and beyond. An arts festival featured an unusual high number of musical and theatre performances exploring racial themes in confrontational manner that some, like first-year student Kenneth, felt were "kind of difficult for white students." In late 2015, a particularly vocal group of students of color, including some veterans of

the Manifesto campaign, founded a newsletter with the expressed aim of being a strong and adversarial voice for students of color. Circulated amongst students, *Margins Magazine* also became a vehicle for controversy, dubbed by some as a much-needed outlet for righteous anger and by others as overtly confrontational. While there were these opportunities for dialogue, students reflected that the kind of empathy and communication they experienced in the two classrooms I observed was not common around campus.

As I stepped on to the campus, I understood Gable University to be, like many elite universities, an institution that had matured through many cycles of contestation and accommodation of the demands of its students of color. In a manner reminiscent of my own alma mater Columbia University, Gable University seemed to have emerged out of the tumult of the sixties and the culture wars of the eighties into an early millennial calm. This calm proved tenuous however, as racial tensions broke the surface often enough. Still, racial progress was visible. The level of campus wide engagement with issues of racism, if difficult to navigate at times, was representative of progress. The university offered a variety of majors, concentrations, and courses that addressed race in various disciplinary and cross-disciplinary ways. Gable's commitment to racial diversity on its campus and in its curriculum was not borne out in the demographic data concerning faculty or administrative leadership: minority faculty accounted for less than 10 % of the total faculty, and 90 % of senior-level administrators were white. This issue would come up often in student protests at Gable and similar institutions. The undergraduate student population at Gable was roughly 8,000 students. Enrollment data (2012) showed it to be typical of selective universities: roughly 51% of students were women, and a majority

identified as white. Students of color identified as 18% Asian/Asian American, 10% black, 12% Latinx and 1% Native.

While Gable championed its reputation as an extraordinarily diverse and international university (roughly 25% of its students are foreign students) with a proud history of supporting affirmative action, in practice it was typical of universities of its kind. Gable students of color routinely entered classrooms where they were part of a small minority, experiencing higher learning in a kind of conspicuous manner that remains typical for many Americans of color. Students in my study informed me that the number of students of color in African American Studies courses, included the two I studied, was higher than in average classes at Gable. They felt this was a clear advantage. The opportunity to interact meaningfully with racially diverse peers and to learn from faculty of color was something that they also often felt Gable had promised but mostly failed to deliver.

Professor Charles Thomas

In the fall of 2014, many students walked onto the campus of Gable University reeling from the image of a young man left dead on the street in his neighborhood in Ferguson, MO, after having been shot while evading police, in the summer before he was scheduled to start college. Michael Brown brought to mind Eric Garner, choked to death just a month earlier in New York by an officer who took issue with his illegal selling of cigarettes. These two deaths re-energized the Black Lives Matter protests that had first erupted two years earlier, when the killer of unarmed teen Trayvon Martin had been acquitted. Before the end of that semester, both officers responsible for those deaths would go unpunished because grand juries refused to indict them.

As Professor Thomas's "Slavery Stories" class was coming to a close, I thought it was inevitable that these events had greatly contributed to the intensity and high caliber of the classroom discussions I had witnessed. And yet, these events were not the first thing all the students mentioned when asked about what had made the class work well, or what had made it, in their words, "excellent" and "transformative." The precise question asked, "If you had to list the ingredients that made the class work well, what would you list?" The first two things that students said were "my peers" and "Professor Thomas." I met Charles M. Thomas when he was a graduate student and I was getting my bachelor's degree. He was the kind of graduate student that students idolize—brilliant, passionate, and way more accessible than the famous professors he assisted. While I did not know him well, some of my friends were his students. Undergraduate student activists actively seek out and cultivate the support of faculty and graduate students who can lend legitimacy to their claims, often easily dismissed without such support. Charles Thomas was known on our campus as a reliable support, likely to be there whether we were protesting our Eurocentric curriculum, asking our administration to divest from fossil fuels, or standing on the picket line during a support staff strike. The students who had him in class spoke of him as a compelling and competent teacher and I knew, from hearing indirectly over the years from friends we had in common, that this reputation persisted into his professional career. When I decided that I would base my study at Gable University, he was my first call.

At first, he was reluctant to allow me to study his class and told me he had never allowed auditors or observers. After a few conversations where I outlined the necessity of classroom observation for what I intended to study, and my assurances that I could limit

disruption to a minimum, he agreed to introduce me to the students in class, so that we

might ask them for permission. On that day in early Fall 2014, he introduced me in his

typically compelling and, to me, somewhat grandiose way. As an anxious, novice

researcher, I didn't quite see myself as the "brilliant scholar" he described. Thomas also

told students that I shared his commitment for "the kind of work" the seminar was about.

It was for these reasons, he explained, that he was willing to allow me to observe the

class, something he "never did before." When he was done, I stood up and pitched my

study to what already seemed like a receptive group of students. Although eventually

only 12 out of 22 students agreed to be interviewed, all agreed to let me be in their

classroom.

It is fair to say that Charles Thomas is the kind of professor who might elicit

intense experiences from his students every semester. For him, it is imperative that

students balance academic rigor with a kind of gut-level or heart-rending confrontation

with injustice. "I don't let them leave without confronting their own responsibilities

regarding racial justice as citizens in this country." While this betrays a possible heavy-

handedness in his teaching, I observed that Thomas did not push his students politically.

Beyond identifying himself to them as a "scholar-activist"—which most students

understood already given the reality of social media—his was a very restrained voice in

the discussion, intervening only to clarify or redirect the academic discussion, as needed.

In their reflections, students confirmed my impression. They were aware that Thomas

guided the class discussions but, given his light touch, they couldn't really say how he

did it. For his part, at the end of the semester, Thomas stated unequivocally to me and to

the students that he had never had students in the "Slavery Stories" course show such a

high level of academic "and emotional commitment to the work and to one another."

While I speculated early on that this was likely just a sign of the times, I came to

understand that it was very much a matter of classroom experience.

Professor Isaac Stone

My first observation of Isaac Stone's "Black Political Thought," a course that was

cross-listed in both Philosophy and African American studies, was delayed by two weeks

because of massive snowstorms that shut down Gable University. The course is a

tradition of sorts for black philosophers at Gable, and Stone began teaching it after

inheriting it from a predecessor. "Because it's an important tradition that is unfortunately

marginalized within philosophy and political theory," Stone felt strongly that as many

students as possible should be exposed to the ideas in the course and this was the reason

why the course enrollment—running usually 40 to 50 students—was never limited.

Additionally, Stone felt that the lecture format presented an important advantage:

> Students in every university, even this one, often know very little American
> history. It's easy for them to kind of fake it and pretend they fully understand
> what I mean when I reference, for instance, 'what happened during
> Reconstruction.' With a bit of lecture, I am able to prevent that, I can take some
> time and sketch out what the context is and that really helps them understand
> what's really at issue."

On the first day of class, I looked around at what was, in many ways, a "classic"

classroom, located in one of the oldest lecture halls of the main campus. The classroom

had that mix of dark wood paneling, high ceiling and giant windows that Hollywood

studios favor when filming college scenes. Despite this imposing, classic appearance, the

classroom didn't feel impersonal or off-putting—it just felt dignified. In this, the space

suited Isaac Stone. As he walked up, I noticed that he was dressed more casually than I remembered from meeting him years earlier. In lieu of a suit, his standard attire back then, Stone wore jeans and a black corduroy blazer. The lecture hall did not have tiered seating and instead the professor stood on a stage, about three feet off the ground. The overall effect mirrored our roles: he was the professor, professing up there, and we were the students, learning down here.

With the snowstorms, it took me a couple of weeks to finally settle into my regular observations of the three discussion sections that complemented Isaac Stone's lecture class. I selected to focus on one in which initially everyone (11 students) had agreed to be interviewed. However, I soon found out that about half of those students had changed their minds. First, students rescheduled the first interview a couple of times. Then, after a couple of weeks of unsuccessful meetings, they would e-mail to politely pull out of the study. It seemed they came to realize that maybe my unpaid study would not be the best use of their time. In the first few weeks of the spring I was therefore I bit discouraged. The lecture class, of a little over forty people, stood in stark contrast to Thomas's close-knit seminar and students did not seem as invested in interacting deeply with one another during the shorter weekly discussion sections. I was concerned that the interviews would not prove probing enough, or that building rapport would be more difficult. But things started to look up the day I met Will, my first interviewee. He, and his colleagues after him, turned out to be every bit as engaged and eager to talk as Thomas's students had been.

The Students

The students who agreed to be interviewed shared their experience and reflections with me generously and thoughtfully. Below they are each introduced alphabetically, and by way of brief portraits—sketches--meant to capture the deeper and lasting impression they made on me.

<u>Professor Thomas's Students, "Slavery Stories" Course (Fall)</u>

Adina had many names for the town where she grew up in San Diego—"boonies," "boondocks," and "the middle of nowhere." She identified as black because being raised by her white mother and white stepdad did not prevent kids at school to call her "a frizzy haired bucktooth nigger." She laughed about it whenever she said it, still in disbelief: "To my face, they said it. To my face!" She had come to Gable like the average citizen of her hometown, a staunch Republican, but class-by-class everything had changed. "You come to college to be transformed." In a class where everyone was engaged, Adina seemed to be enthralled; her love for learning appeared as kind of real joy.

Deyanira remembered fourth grade well, when she called to find out the information about joining the Girls' Scout even though all her neighborhood friends— kids from the working class, Latino enclave of East Glaser, near Gable University, told her it was "super white." When she excitedly showed up, "the white lady" in charge said, "Oh. You're Spanish." Deyanira's mother turned them both around and Deyanira was disappointed. Recounting the story, she was angry for her young self and, ever precise, resents the inaccuracy: "Dominicans are black people. We are not Spanish. We s*peak* Spanish, there is a difference. The Spaniards, they hate us, ok? My dad told me that from day one." This kind of thing—racial tension, discrimination, was present at Gable and made her "exhausted" but she felt it was "productive." She enrolled in classes on race

because she wanted to learn about what was always "in the gut but I did not have a vocabulary for it."

Evans was a self-professed theory nerd so we had much to talk about right away. Evans was born into a racial and ethnic diversity that challenged rigid notions of identity. He liked to be provocative. Another wave of insensitive Halloween costumes was sweeping Facebook, and the hashtag "my culture is not a costume" was trending in response. Of course he agreed that he costumes were offensive, but "isn't culture kind of a costume? I mean isn't this one?" he asked, pointed at his own clearly put together urban-sophisticated-young-scholar look. "I certainly don't dress the same to go to my white grandma's house as I do to go see my Pakistani grandma." Quite critically and seriously, however, he wanted to intervene on race thinking and push it. By the end of class, he told me he was moving "towards" postcolonial studies.

Jessica presided over the seminar table where others sat. She did not mean to do that. She was a humble and forthright young woman, respectful of her professor and her peers. But she just came off as eminent: perfectly formed sentences, sketching highly complex, at times treacherously personal ideas about slavery and race, delivered calmly. When I observed her, I believed what she told me: "You're black so you need to kill it in class because people are going to try to hold you back. And so I just wasn't raised to seek comfort; I was raised to be excellent. I think *be confident*. I don't really think about being comfortable." She was one of the first ones to put her whole heart on the line in the class, perhaps even over-indulging in personal narrative when she saw fit. She thought the separation between "intellectual Jessica" and her real life was fake and, ultimately, useless.

Keli'i surprised me with his reaction when I asked him quickly to please pick his pseudonym for the interview. "In my culture that is a big deal a name. I would have to think about that a little longer and get back to you." In his stories about home and coming to Gable, he redirected my gaze geographically and intellectually: here was the mainland, from where the colonizers and settlers left to settle Hawaii, where "being white is what's weird, even if whites control all the power." Demonstrating a true solidarity and openness that he often struggled to see reciprocated from his peers of color, Keli'i took classes that purported to be on race but generally were about "white people and black people" and worked to draw the "powerful connections" between those themes and the Native and Indigenous themes he wanted to study but often could not.

Kevin was the person his peers most often brought up early on when I asked, "about dynamics that stood out" in the course. And came up the most when, at the end, I asked about things that had worked well in the course. In the end, he was hoping "they didn't think I was an asshole, because it's easy to think that I am." He felt cautiously optimistic, though, because he and his peers had "bonded intellectually" and, therefore, he felt they understood him. He grew up outspoken, in a house of educators, a principal and a social studies teacher, who expected him and his sister to be vocal about politics and social justice—and even race. His Philadelphia suburban home was "very Jewish, affluent" but playing basketball landed him with "mostly African American friends." The racially segregated social life at Gabel troubled and disappointed him.

Lyor watched the class almost better than I did and though he was a senior, he had maturity beyond his years. He noticed that people's "kneejerk" reactions to Kevin weren't always warranted but rather stemmed from expectations that a white man

shouldn't be comfortable in conversations on race. He noticed how Jessica, Deyanira and even Adina, the black women in the class, had a silent conversation going on that appeared almost "telepathic" sometimes. This deep attention was turned to himself as well: he spent all semester wrestling with issues of white allies and cross-racial solidarity and how these played out in the texts and in campus debates over Black Lives Matter. "It's hard for a white person to know where to fit in, to want to help without being paternalistic." As he did in class, he pushed his thinking and followed it through and was okay with the unresolved. "I know I am still thinking about it," was a favorite way he ended sentences.

Warner said Prof. Thomas was an inspiration that made it legitimate for him, a white gay man, to be interested in and committed to black emancipation. His research on black women and cinema earned him some judgment from black peers at Gable early on.

> Freshman year, I remember sitting next to a kid who as I was giving my presentation, texted to her friend, if Warner says the word black one more time I think I'm going to kill myself. Eventually the teacher made me write an acknowledgement of my privilege where it was three pages explaining why I wanted to study African American culture, just to appease someone in my class.

In his Newark, NJ, public high school, all his close friends were women of color and their company taught him to recognize the tacit racism in his own family and community. His interest in the intersectionality between race, gender and class—and the arts—was a passion and it propelled him to do great work. Critics would have to be damned. Prof. Thomas told him his paper for the class was one the best papers "by an undergraduate" he had "ever" read. Warner said he cried when he read those comments. I asked him how he felt, and he said "very proud."

<u>Professor Stone's Students, "Black Political Thought" Course (Spring)</u>

Ellie, one of two first-year students in Stone's class, had a comfort in her own skin that was contagious. She was most comfortable talking about the ways she was not comfortable or confident, in fact. She needed time to process the lecture, both during and after it: "I take a lot of notes and I like to read them and think about everything more, after class." In section, she sometimes got "lost if they start on too much theoretical stuff." The class was changing everything and the hardest thing was to think differently about people she grew up with. Her family was Korean American and moved around a lot. Her elementary years were spent in a very "white, blue-eyed" part of Sioux Falls. Being the only Korean American in kindergarten landed her in speech therapy. High school in Buffalo, NY, was a relief because "at least 15% of the kids were minority and a lot of Asians. It's good to not be the odd one out."

Isabelle had a disarming smile, in that it was almost ever-present and actually meant to disarm. She told me that as a woman—and only a sophomore in Philosophy courses dominated by men—she was often unsure of herself. A professor had taken her aside and pointed this out, and suggested she push herself to be more forceful and maybe even smile less. The smiling less didn't take, but in discussion she pushed herself, interjecting when Will and Jake hoarded too much airtime. She honestly admitted that on some issues it was hard disagreeing even with black peers. If they were "less strangers" and a bit closer, then robust intellectual sparring would feel less "tense."

Jake wanted to tell me right away how much he loved and missed his native New York and also meant Manhattan when he said "New York." In these ways, he is typical and I wholly agreed with him. He went to an elite high school in the city and praised

parents who insisted that he make friends "from all walks of life, different than me, from all over the city." Jake didn't appreciate how "white kids from New York" like him often ran in a clique at Gable. He found it distasteful and "not like the New York I was raised to know." He was passionate about education, studying it at Gable and paying particular attention to the pedagogical details of Stone's class.

Kenneth's eyes lit up when he described the relief of finding, as a first-year, that the black community at Gable was as wide-ranging in origins, interests and possibilities as he had imagined was possible but had not known. The relief and happiness Kenneth felt being in a diverse and "woke" black community at Gable spoke to how painful his experiences growing up had been. As he said, he always knew he was black coming, as he did, from a "very black" upper middle class family from the outside of Detroit. But the high school experience, "where they said you're not what I think of when I think black" or told him he was "the whitest black person" they knew, alienated him from himself. Especially when, upon his acceptance to Gable, everyone flipped and told him he got in "because" he was black. He beamed when he said, "Here everyone who is black is smart. You get to explore your identity beyond that. That people want to know you because of who you really are and not because you're black but smart and nobody else looks like you in the class? That's very refreshing."

Tessa felt she was shy but given her poise when she did speak up, she came off more regal than shy. At first, Gable had been isolating like her predominantly white high school had been, but once she joined the Black Women's Union, she found a community defined by a "diverse blackness"—comprising African Americans, international students from Africa and first generation African Americans like her—her were from Ghana and

Jamaica respectively. In her interviews Tessa spoke of big ideas, like double

consciousness and emancipation, as every day things. She thought that they were every

day things, as they anchored a "continuity" in black experience that she was finally happy

to be learning about in Stone's class. "Discovering that shared continuous experience of

struggle, struggling to love yourself, struggling to do all these things--like, to exist in this

place that is America-that is validating."

Will was the only senior and when I joked that he sounded "like a senior" during

section, he laughed and said, "Well, that's certainly a relief to know I did learn *something*

over the years!" He grew up in Missouri in "a very Christian, very white" city. Tall,

blond and very polite, he looked the part. Although his public high school was the most

diverse, the academically gifted program of which he was part was not. "It was one of

those high school within a high school and by the time you were a junior we all, these

same 30 or so AP white kids, had spent all our time together, separated from everyone

else. " Over the summer, he had been reading Ta-nehisi Coates's work ("a constant"),

then Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow*, which he found "astonishing and very

convincing." Race, he felt, "remains the core question in this country," and that's why he

was in Stone's class.

Table 1. The Students

Thomas's Students	Year	Hometown	High School	Race
Adina	3	Santee, CA	PWI[2]	Black
Amy	2	New Haven, CT	PWI	Asian
Deyanira	3	East Glaser[3]	PWI	Black
Evans	2	Miami, FL	Diverse	Biracial[4]

[2] Predominantly White Institution (PWI)
[3] Working class near Gable University (pseudonym)
[4] White/S. Asian

Eva	2	NY, NY	PWI	White
Jessica	3	Glaser[5]	PWI	Black
Kate	2	L.A., CA	PWI	White
Laura	2	Providence, RI	Diverse	White
Keli'i	2	Honolulu, HI	Diverse	Native
Kevin	2	Chicago, IL	Diverse	White
Lyor	4	Long Is., NY	PWI	White
Warner	4	Bridgeport, CT	Diverse	White
Stone's Students				
Ellie	1	Buffalo, NY[6]	Diverse	Asian
Isabelle	2	Washington, DC	PWI	White
Jake	2	New York, NY	PWI	White
Kenneth	1	Canton, MI	PWI	Black
Tessa	3	Washington, DC	PWI	Black
Will	2	Springfield, MO	PWI	White

Leaving Gable University

A year after I observed his class, I spoke to Professor Thomas on the phone. He wanted to check on my progress with the study. We quickly turned to a discussion of his most recent experience teaching "Slavery Stories." He reported that, again, he had an amazing experience. Specifically, he wanted to tell me about the last class that semester. He told me that he had asked his students why they thought the class had been such a transformative one. Multiple students, he said, had told him that the discussions in the class had made them feel "brave." The students had drawn "a kind of courage," he told me, from learning about the history of enslavement and resistance in the engaged, discussion-intensive environment of the class. I was pleased and stunned by this coincidence. Thomas and I had not discussed my findings, and I had not discussed my emerging "brave community" theory with him. And yet, here he was telling me that an entirely different group of students taking the class in a different semester—a semester

[5] Affluent suburb near Gable University (pseudonym)
[6] Suburb

where a researcher was not present--had expressed to him that the classroom experience

had somehow made them feel brave. This was an affirmation of my analysis that I did not

expect.

Later that semester, I visited Gable again, and took the opportunity to update Prof.

Stone now that the analysis was complete. In person, I told him succinctly about the

main findings and how I thought that his pedagogy, classroom dynamics and students'

learning were connected. As I spoke, he nodded—a good sign. He confirmed that I had

it right about him, that he indeed was committed to not having his class be perceived by

students as "activist training camp." He listened carefully to my thoughts on the impact

of his lecture format, in contrast to Thomas's more close-knit seminar, and we discussed

whether more could be gained from his teaching "Black Political Thought" as a seminar.

Stone conceded that, "It would probably be better to teach it in a small seminar, it would

allow for longer discussions and I could bring the students out a bit more." Yet, he

maintained his earlier position: it was more important to offer the content to as many

students as possible.

> Students should know this material. It's not important that students learn this
> material because it will help this or that cause though, of course, political causes
> and social justice are important. But this material matters because it's true! It
> matters because it is an important intellectual tradition, it is part of what an
> educated person, someone who cares about political theory or philosophy, should
> know.

While I did not intend these conversations to be member checks, these interactions with

the both professors did have that effect for me. Member checking is the practice of

discussing one's findings with participants to ensure that they agree with the overall

analysis. Given their complicated schedules, I could not do member checks with the

students. After three extensive interviews over more than twelve months, all for no

compensation, I did not feel it was appropriate to impose on them any further. While

neither a requirement nor a promise I had made, not checking with the students did weigh

on me in the end. Given that I was granted such intimate access to students' classroom

experiences and their very personal thoughts, I worried about dishonoring that gift by

misrepresenting something inadvertently. One moment, after Jessica's last interview,

captured in my field notes, reduced some of that worry.

> The interview is over and I turn off the recorder. We are both happy to catch up
> and so much has happened since I last saw her. She is on her way out of Gable
> University, taking up a job at a NGO in New York City for a couple of years
> before considering graduate school plans. Perhaps law, perhaps something very
> different, maybe a PhD. At her request, I pull up a power point of a talk I had just
> given at the annual American Educational Research Association (AERA). It was
> a talk about the study. I flick through the slides, containing sparse words and a
> few illustrative graphics, and tell her about the argument I am making, the story I
> am telling about what I witnessed over the course of that semester with her and
> her colleagues. This sounds clichéd but her eyes really do light up as I speak. It is
> as if someone is finally describing something she has known but couldn't fully
> describe. I show her, as I wrap up, the slide containing a quote from her, where
> she says the word that comes to mind is brave.(is this a quote?) I explain, and I'm
> excited too, that she helped me name the concept. She thinks it's awesome. She
> clicks through the slides, reading the quotes one more time. As she gets up and
> gets ready to leave, she speaks more seriously. She wishes I could talk to the
> people "at Gable." She says that when the students rave about Thomas's class or
> classes like it, they are not able to really explain how it worked or why it was so
> transformative. "So we just gush that it was life changing and people just eye
> roll." Then she looked at and gestured towards the slides on my computer. "But
> you have the language to really explain what happened."

It is a privilege to be allowed to observe people when they are learning anything.

Learners are vulnerable and exposed, as they construct their understanding in real time,

some times to great effect and sometimes not. It makes complete sense to me that most

teachers—including many that I asked to participate in this study—prefer not to allow

anyone to intrude into such private matters as take place in the average classroom. In the

case of learning about race, especially through discussion, the stakes are even higher and being present in such classrooms is an even greater privilege. Students are often probing questions that get at the core of who they are and disturb longstanding beliefs. Therefore, they are often deeply engaged, not only on an intellectual level, but also emotionally. What happened each week, over the course of both semesters was, to my eyes, as well as according to the students, enormously important, valuable and even transformative. But it was also fleeting, subtle, and complex. While Professors Thomas and Stone and their students opened up their learning journeys to me, I knew that inevitably there would be much that I would not capture fully. Jessica's words, therefore, were a particular kind of grace for me, because to have "the language to really explain what happened," was the most and the best that I could hope for.

Chapter 2: The Study

The literature I review in the first part of this chapter traces my path from a broad interest in the social construction of race—the creation of our ideas of race—in educational spaces, to the research question and the design of this study. I begin with the seminal work of Du Bois and consider how sociologists have conceived of race in ways that differently emphasize its socially constructed character. Within this terrain, the work of Ann Morning in particular considers the connection between higher education courses and students' racial conceptualizations. Next, I review the body of research that, in part spurred on by affirmative action litigation in the Supreme Court, has focused on the benefits—and the challenges—of racial diversity for higher learning. In this vast and diverse body of research, the study by Patricia Gurin and her colleagues is important for its focus on the classroom context within a research landscape that often overlooks it. As I will show, the "diversity rationale" research is mostly concerned with outcomes and effects, and not particularly focused on the classroom processes that might produce those effects. Following Gurin, I review literature on two dimensions of classroom learning that, beyond content, researchers and theorists deem to be influential to students' understandings of race: pedagogy and discussion. Each section concludes with a brief summary of the key insights and persistent questions the literature provided me. I then outline the theoretical framework that I employed to approach my questions empirically—Lamont, Beljean and Clair's notion of cultural process (Lamont, Beljean, & Clair, 2014). I show that I arrived at my research question by connecting the threads and gaps in the research literature with that theoretical framework. The second part of the chapter then engages the methodological details of the study.

Literature Review

The Social Construction of Race in Educational Spaces

In his essay "Reclaiming a Du Boisian Perspective on Racial Attitudes," Bobo (2000) calls for a sociology that re-engages the Du Boisian project of studying race by merging historic and structural concerns about racial inequality with analysis "of the constituent and mediating effect" of the attitudes and beliefs that individuals hold. He reminds us that in attending to both structural and cultural dimensions of race, Du Bois foreshadowed most contemporary efforts to analyze and explain the workings of race in society. Therefore, I begin this review of sociological conceptions of race with Du Bois, then move to subsequently important conceptions that in most ways echo and complement his original ideas.

Du Bois sees Black people as both "conditioned by the concept" they have of whites and "treated in accordance with the concept [whites] have" of them (Du Bois, 1996). In this he conceives of race as constructed in part in social interaction. In writing his two autobiographical texts—*Dusk of Dawn* and *Autobiography*--Du Bois stresses the constructed aspect as well as the instability of the idea of "race." More than any theorist at the turn of the last century, Du Bois moves away from the rigid scientific racism that dominates his time towards a conception of race as "principally a cultural and political concept;" in other words, a socially constructed[7] phenomenon. As early as 1897, in "The

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[7] The philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah (1985) has famously challenged the notion Du Bois' conception of race is a truly constructivist one and other scholars (Taylor, 2000; Gooding-Williams, 1997).

Conservation of the Races," Du Bois calls for rising above the immediate, contingent questions regarding race—the "pressing but smaller questions," such as segregation—in order to interrogate our underlying notions of what race is (Du Bois, 1996). The constructed nature of race is still a central theme in "The Concept of Race," written in 1940, where Du Bois examines the changing meaning scholars have attributed to race over the course of his lifetime. He concludes that the concept of race has been so socially constructed and mutable, so full of "illogical trends and irreconcilable tendencies," that it should not be called a concept, but a "group of contradictory forces, facts and tendencies" (Du Bois, 1996).

Throughout Du Bois's work, educational and intellectual spheres are crucial sites for the social construction of race. The young Du Bois is a student whose academic excellence seems to, at least partially, allow him to trump his racial identity. He describes this idealized state as "floating above the veil," suggesting that race is something that can be transcended intellectually (Du Bois, 1996). Yet these moments are juxtaposed with biographical incidents that convey a contrary meaning: the moment where a fellow student in elementary school shuns him socially, or a woman on(in?) the street refuses to acknowledge his polite greeting, or, perhaps most shockingly, when as a professor at Wilberforce, he is confronted with a lynching in the community (Du Bois, 1961). In these moments, race appears as structurally robust and unchanging. By the time Du Bois writes, "Does the Negro Need Separate Schools?" in 1950, he confronts the potential of education to either liberate students from racial inequality or to perpetuate it.

For a good overview of these debates, see: Bell, B. W., Grosholz, E. R., & Stewart, J. B. (2014). *WEB Du Bois on race and culture*.

Thus, in Du Bois, we find a conception of race as socially constructed and, importantly, as subject to change within the educational environment.

Ironically, it is racism itself that causes early American sociologists to ignore and marginalize Du Bois' prescient and comprehensive insights about the social construction of race (Winant, 2007). In the absence of this Du Boisian influence, sociological conceptions of race take a "sign of the times" character—that is, they come to focus mostly on the most salient racial preoccupations of a given era (Winant, 2007). This attention to what is most salient translates into a focus on structural manifestations of racism per se, at the cost of attention to ideas of race, at least through the Civil Rights era. In that time, sociologists focus primarily on structural racism[i]. The research on racial attitudes and beliefs emerges out of the paradox of persistent racial inequality despite racial progress that defines the contemporary era. Here, scholars begin to turn towards racial meaning-making once again. Proponents of symbolic racism suggest that people submerge their racism by claiming that they object to policies that seek to redress racial discrimination only insofar as those policies counter "American" values of self-reliance and individualism (Sears & Henry, 2005). Colorblindness is prominent among similar theories that connect racial beliefs and attitudes to ideology. Scholars demonstrate that colorblindness may utilize palatable ideas of fairness to obscure racist animus (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). Proponents of averse racism sound a similar note to describe it as the more ambivalent and less blatant racism of "well-meaning" people (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004). Together, these theories all describe how a subtler, newer racism emerges out of the necessity to justify white supremacy in a context where such a sentiment is no longer socially acceptable.

Bobo, Kluegel & Smith (1997) put forth a more structurally grounded perspective that draws from Blumer's group positioning theory and directly connects contemporary conceptions of race to structural racial group advantage. Their conception of laissez-faire racism describes the legitimation of racial inequality through the practices and discourses of free market, post-industrial capitalism. Laissez-faire racism is at work in discourses that blame people of color themselves—their faulty skills, or faulty character, for instance--for the pervasive disadvantages that they face. While much research and theory on racial attitudes and beliefs is extensively ideological, theorists of laissez-faire racism stress the structural link; for them, it is precisely the end of Jim Crow and the emergence of post-industrial, free market capitalism that allow for a racial inequality to thrive without the need to be enforced by the explicit racist ideas and policies (Bobo, Kluegel & Smith, 1997).

Morning (2009), argues that, despite providing great insights into the interconnection between race relations, racial stratification, and racial prejudice, the sociology of race has not probed deeply enough what people think race is "in the first place" (Morning, 2009). In pursuit of what she calls the "underpinnings" of race, Morning (2009) offers her concept of "racial conceptualization," which she defines as the complex set of meanings we each ascribe to race, and which orients us as we navigate our lives. Like Du Bois, Morning argues that education influences students' racial conceptualization. Her study examines how conceptions of race held by anthropology and biology professors come to influence college students' racial conceptualizations (Morning, 2011).

This portion of the review of the literature reinforces the centrality of social construction to sociologists' understanding and study of race, beginning with early Du Boisian ideas and continuing through to Ann Morning's concept of racial conceptualization. Morning's study offers one lens into how students draw from academic discourses to construct their own ideas of what race is. While her study confirms the importance of higher education as a site for development of students' ideas of race, questions remain regarding the influence of courses on race beyond providing students with definitions of what race is. Next, I turn to the existing research on the broader impact of race on higher learning.

The "Diversity Rationale" Research

Given my emerging focus, Morning's study, and my own intellectual and experiential exploration of the role of race in college, I am surprised to find a lack of emphasis on classroom learning in much of the research I review. For the most part, I find that issues of race in higher education are subsumed into the discourse of diversity. The "diversity rationale" describes Justice Lewis Powell's comment in the landmark *University of California Regents v. Bakke* (1978) case, where he writes in part that "the atmosphere of 'speculation, experiment and creation' — so essential to the quality of higher education — is widely believed to be promoted by a diverse student body," and adds that "the nation's future depends upon leaders trained through wide exposure to the ideas and mores of students as diverse as this Nation of many peoples"(Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004). Writing the majority opinion in *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003) twenty-five years later, Justice O'Connor ensures the dominance of the rationale, stating that

universities have "a compelling interest" in achieving "the educational benefits that flow from a diverse student body" (Berrey, 2011).

In the wake of movements for social justice of the sixties, universities began to consider the better integration of students of color, faculty of color, as well as the diversification of their curricula a core part of their mission. This drove institutions to develop racial diversity into a core metric in their admissions processes, through affirmative action. In fact, in his *Bakke* comment, Justice Powell drew from the amicus brief submitted by Columbia, Harvard, Stanford and the University of Pennsylvania. Today, the diversity rationale—while contested legally—has attained the level of orthodoxy in higher education (Berrey, 2011; Stulberg & Weinberg, 2011). The theoretical grounding for evaluating whether racial diversity provides educational benefits has two broad bases. From a developmental standpoint, it rests on theories about the benefits of discontinuity and discrepancy in support of learning. Developmental theorists agree that young adulthood—what we consider "college age"—is opportune for worldview development because students experience what Erikson called the "psycho-social moratorium" (Gurin, 1999). This developmental stage, integral to healthy identity development, is a time where young adults can entertain multiple worldviews and perspectives. Erikson maintains that this time is best served by exposure to diverse and wide-ranging perspectives, especially perspectives that challenge those that dominated students' childhoods and home cultures. Erikson proposes that the more discontinuous and discrepant the college experience can be relative to earlier experiences, the better suited it is for healthy social identity and cognitive development. In this, he echoes cognitive theorists' notion of the benefits of discontinuity and discrepancy for cognitive

development. Piaget coined the term "disequilibrium" to describe the state where a productive discontinuity in cognition is introduced and where an individual's previously held ideas are challenged by new information. Piaget believed that productive learning arises from the work to integrate the new information and to re-establish equilibrium.

From a sociological standpoint, it grounds itself in theories that explain how social contact across racial difference can be beneficial. While some scholars critique overly positive claims about the benefits of racial diversity in higher education, the overwhelming effect of this research has been to build a consensus that those benefits do exist. The most prominent theoretical models for how the diversity rationale might work in real college contexts rely on an application of Allport's intergroup contact theory for reducing prejudice. Allport (1954) argued that in order for cross-racial interaction to produce positive effects, three conditions should exist: people should share equal status, they should cooperate towards accomplishing a common goal, and their cross-racial interaction should be legitimized and supported by those in positions of authority (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). Scholars also identify the conditions of college life as particularly conducive for social movement—and the shifts in worldview that they spark. MacAdam (2010) discusses how college students are open to social movement given their "biographical availability"—in other words, college students can take the leap to new worldviews and even social movement action because they are, at least momentarily, unencumbered by responsibilities, such as employment or family, that often prevent people from mobilizing. Munson (2010) builds on MacAdam, and specifies that the exposure to a more diverse peer group, combined with a change in every day routines, produce "transition points" for college students--opportunities for changing their minds.

The diversity rationale hypothesis is that a racially diverse college experience combines all of the necessary conditions--developmental and social--for educational and personal growth.

A series of initial studies focus primarily on establishing the impact of racial diversity on cognitive outcomes (Astin, 1993; Mitchell James Chang, 1996; Hurtado, 2001). This research comprises mostly correlational studies that do not specify the kinds of racial diversity experiences that students report. Antonio (2001) considers this dimension— whether cross-racial relationships that students report are close or casual, for instance--as well as the additional outcome of "cultural competence." He finds that even casual racial interaction has positive effects on both the leadership skills and the cultural awareness of students who grew up in racially homogeneous environments. In a subsequent study, he and colleagues introduce an experimental design and randomly assign students to two conditions of racial diversity, to measure the effects of classroom racial diversity on the complexity of thinking: "perceived novelty of colleagues' contributions" and "integrative complexity," or the degree to which one is able to take another's point-of-view into account (Antonio et al, 2004). Results show that racial minority discussants were perceived to contribute novelty and had positive effects on integrative complexity. In a meta-analysis of studies addressing the relationship between racial diversity and cognitive outcomes, Bowman (2010) finds that while the magnitude of the relationship is influenced by the types of cognitive outcomes measured, by the type of racial diversity experience considered, and by the study design, the relationship between racial diversity and cognitive growth is significant across studies. Importantly, he finds that racial diversity is more conducive to cognitive growth than other types of diversity.

Studies also explore the influence of racial diversity on civic and democratic orientations of students. Gurin et al. (2004) explore the impact of curricular and co-curricular experiences with racial diversity on students' democratic values across two field studies: a quasi-experimental study of the university's intergroup relations course and a longitudinal survey of students exposed to other racial diversity oriented campus activities. The authors find consistent positive effects of racial diversity on the "democratic sentiments" of students in both studies, across different racial groups. In a meta-analysis of studies linking racial diversity in educational settings with democratic orientation, Bowman (2011) finds consistent effects that he describes as "remarkable": the relationship between racial diversity and democratic outcomes is consistent across studies, irrespective of the type of racial diversity experience that students report. He finds the effect to be stronger with interpersonal interactions than with simply curricular or co-curricular experiences.

Engberg (2007) shows that even across different disciplinary contexts, positive cross-racial interaction in classrooms produced a greater pluralistic orientation among students. The study also highlights the importance of learning about people different than one's self ("intergroup learning") in developing this orientation. Building on work by Gurin and colleagues (2002), Jayakumar (2008) investigates whether gains in pluralistic orientation, leadership and other "diversity capital," are consistent in the post college years. Using structural equation modeling, she finds that whites from racially homogeneous neighborhoods that attend colleges that foster a positive racial climate are more likely to choose racially integrated neighborhoods after college. In a more recent study, the "pluralistic orientation" theoretical model is tested across four different racial

groups, to gage the impact of racial diversity specifically in the first two years of college (Engberg & Hurtado, 2011). The authors find that while all groups show increases in pluralistic orientation as related to college racial diversity, Asians show the smallest effects. Additionally, they find that for whites and Asians having negative cross-racial interactions in college correlates with lower pluralistic orientations after two years.

Studies put cross-racial interaction in context as well, to consider the impact of the wider campus racial climate on the relationship between classroom racial diversity and cognitive outcomes. Chang, Astin, and Kim (2004) examine both the educational effects of cross-racial interaction and the conditions that affect it. Using a hierarchical linear model, they find that racial diversity experiences have positive effects on students' intellectual, social and civic development, and that this effect is especially consistent for whites. They also find that among the different types of cross-racial interaction, "the most generic interaction in the classroom had the most robust positive effect across all three outcomes." Chang, Denson, Saenz, and Misa (2006) investigate the impact of campus racial climate--measured as institutional average of cross-racial interaction for students--and find that in colleges where the average cross-racial interaction among students is high, even individual students who do not report high levels of cross-racial interaction still experience gains in cognitive development and openness to diversity.

Importantly, research also complicates this picture to show many challenges that can arise in cross-racial interactions in every day classrooms (Sorensen, Nagda, Gurin, & Maxwell, 2009). For instance, students often "self-segregate" or self-censor their views in racially diverse classrooms (Richeson & Shelton, 2007; Shelton & Richeson, 2006). Goff, Steele, and Davies (2008) show that whites experience a lot of anxiety about

appearing racist and that this effect is lessened only when they can perceive the interaction as a safe, learning opportunity. Tatum and others explain this resistance by white students as arising from the difficulty of integrating new and dissonant information about racism, inequality, and their own privilege (Lensmire, 2010; Tatum, 1992). Researchers also document how low levels of social trust affect the engagement of students of color (Solorzano, Allen, & Caroll, 2002). Steele's seminal work on stereotype threat, while focused primarily on academic performance, confirms the challenges of racial diversity in educational contexts (Steele, 2010). Researchers also document the impact of a lack of common goals as a challenge, with whites being intent on "getting along" and students of color being more interested in breaking down oppressive structures (Joss & Jenkins, 2010).

This important body of research on the effects of racial diversity on learning in college seeks primarily to identify and measure outcomes and effects, in great part to provide strong evidence in support of the diversity rationale. Most studies do not focus on the classroom processes that likely produced those effects. In this landscape, the work of Patricia Gurin and colleagues provides a crucial intervention. The *critical-dialogic model of intergroup dialogue* presented by Gurin, Nagda, and Zúñiga (2013) blends aspects of social psychology, social identity theory and learning theory into an explanatory model for how aspects of the classroom experience—the student interactions, the content, the influence of the facilitator—lead to cognitive changes in students (Gurin et al., 2013). Their multi-university field experiment shows that students' involvement in Intergroup Dialogues (IGDs) correlated to increases in their "intergroup understanding, intergroup relations, and intergroup action" (Gurin et al., 2013). The IGDs are standardized in terms

of content and led by facilitators specifically trained to take students through structured cross-racial dialogues[8]. Additionally, each group is purposely structured to have equal numbers of white and non-white students (Gurin et al., 2013). The study is important not only for focusing on the classroom but also for identifying specific dimensions of the classroom context—content, discussion, pedagogy-- that interact to become influential for students' learning. While incredibly impactful, the study by Gurin and colleagues doesn't illuminate the experience of most students who engage race in ordinary classrooms. By ordinary classroom I mean those where the instructor is not an expert facilitator of cross-racial dialogues[9], the discussion is based on a standardized protocol, the demographics are not engineered, and the learning goal is not primarily to cross-racial dialogue but rather to learn and discuss new academic content.

It becomes clear from this review of the literature, and especially the work of Gurin and colleagues, that there needs to be more analytical and qualitative focus on ordinary classrooms, classrooms where most students and professors are likely to engage race-related content. My remaining questions, also inspired by the Gurin et al. study, now center on further exploring the dimensions of classroom experience that, beyond content, influence learning—pedagogy and discussion. I turn to that literature next.

The Research on Pedagogy and Discussion

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[8] The university ran IDGs for race and gender discussions, but for my purposes, my focus is the race IGDs.

[9] Professors Thomas and Stone are undoubtedly experts and experienced leaders of academic discussions. I mean that they are not specifically trained to moderate cross-racial dialogues in the way that many IGD and other "diversity course" teachers often are.

Preceding the late seventies, dominant discourses in education research and practice focused on the question of how to educate "disadvantaged" children—students of color and low-income students, often thought of interchangeably—and integrate them into mainstream society. In *Crossing Over to Canaan*, Ladson-Billings (2001) employs the rhetorical question, "Can anyone teach these kids?", as a stand-in for that deficit-based, yet prominent discourse. Starting in the mid-seventies, scholars begin to resist that view. The impetus, they show, should be on how best to educate children equitably and successfully, given the fact of racism. These scholars propose pedagogy that builds upon, rather than excludes, the racial, ethnic and cultural dimensions of students' lives. While some argue that multicultural education has the same aim, some culturally grounded pedagogues critique the focus on curricula that defines traditional multicultural education (Banks, 2009). They argue that in addition to expanding curricular content, teachers must also deliberately change their pedagogy. They show that assumptions that teachers make about their students shape how they teach them and have consequences for the academic achievement and wellbeing of those students. Ladson-Billings defines culturally relevant pedagogy[10] as a pedagogy that aims to promote academic achievement through culturally competent teaching that supports students' sociopolitical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995). As one of many scholars who builds on Ladson-Billings groundbreaking work, Gay (2010) pushes for pedagogy that makes deliberate use of students' cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives as "conduits for teaching."

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[10] Culturally relevant pedagogy begins concerning itself with black students. As ideas about racial diversity within its discourse emerge, scholars begin to reference "students of color" or "nonwhite students." While this transition is more than merely semantic/chronological, it is beyond the scope of this paper. I prefer to refer to students of color generally excepting where I (or authors) specifically address a racial group.

By the mid-nineties, culturally relevant pedagogy considerably transforms the landscape but also gives rise to critiques that it is not responsive enough to hybridity and diversity within communities of color (Paris, 2012). To best respond to the contemporary moment, Paris (2012) proposes culturally sustaining pedagogy, to describe pedagogy that seeks to sustain the hybridity and plurality inherent in contemporary student of color identities (Bernal, 2002; Irizarry, 2007; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). Contemporary research examining pedagogies specifically concerned with teaching about race in practice (culturally sustaining pedagogy, critical race theory pedagogy, etc.) illustrates both their possibilities and their limits (Boler, Zembylas, & Tryfonas, 2003; Fishman & McCarthy, 2005; Irizarry, 2007; Nasir, Ross, Mckinney de Royston, Givens, & Bryant, 2013). The overall intention of the pedagogy reviewed above is to deliberately provide students with pathways toward critical thinking on issues of race. These are pedagogies that sustain students in making "leaps" in their understanding of race and of their lives in a racialized world.

The examples reviewed emerge from classrooms where discussions of race are common and frank. Research and theory on race talk in school contexts recognizes that race is socially constructed in part through talk and reminds us that, as a cultural practice that is embedded in and responsive to our social meaning-making about race, race talk in schools is often characterized by "predictable scripts and silences" (Pollock, 2009). Tatum (1992) writes extensively about her experiences teaching a course on racism and witnessing student resistance to race talk. In the class, she gives students a racial identity framework that they use to reflect on their learning. Through analysis of student discussions and writings, she describes different forms of resistance, some race-specific,

such as white resistance to personal prejudice, and some cross racial, such as the belief

that discussing race in a mixed-race setting is taboo. She proposes that the teacher is

primarily responsible for the creation of "a safe classroom atmosphere" for race talk or

discussion, one that is characterized by "clear guidelines for discussion" and conducive to

"opportunities for self-generated knowledge." Tatum argues that successful classroom

race talk requires different things: a teacher's authority and competence to do it, and a

teacher's willingness to model for students the benefit that such race talk provides

(Tatum, 2007). Tatum's overall argument is that Americans themselves, not just teachers,

often lack those necessary qualities.

Pollock provides one of the most helpful concepts in examining race talk:

colormuteness (Pollock, 2009). She defines colormuteness as "deliberate attempts to

ignore and prohibit the mentioning of racial categories that are patently visible and

clearly are impactful in the daily life of a school" (Pollock, 2009). In her ethnography of

a large public school, she describes the ways in which adults and students observe an

implicit code of race talk. While teachers are reluctant to ever discuss individual students

or student problems, such as absenteeism and discipline, in racialized terms, they are

comfortable using racial labels and explanations when discussing student peer groups—

i.e. who hangs out with whom. Pollock suggests, like Tatum, that this colormuteness in

schools mirrors what happens in the society at large. The metaphor of the "invisible

knapsack" created by McIntosh (1989) to describe white racial privilege is one of the

most influential accounts of the dynamics of white resistance to race learning. McIntosh's

work explores the ways in which whites are not given tools for discussing and

understanding their racial privilege, in part because they are taught to not speak about

race explicitly. Through this process, white privilege becomes an invisible knapsack—a resource that whites carry everywhere but do not fully see or comprehend. McIntosh's work is one foundation for the eventual emergence of critical whiteness studies, a field that in a way, draws source data from race talk by whites, specifically (Giroux, 1997; Leonardo, 2004). Scholars also examine the resistance by students of color to race talk and often find that it is rooted in those students' experiences of racial microaggressions in classrooms—for example, denials that racism exists (Sue, 2009).

This, the last body of research that I review, clarifies the importance of pedagogy and discussion—or race talk, as it is often called, as mechanisms through which learning about race is supported. The last conceptual piece of the puzzle then becomes how best to study classroom experience. Whereas much of the literature reviewed considered race-related pedagogy or discussion separately, the model by Gurin and colleagues accurately stressed the interaction between these dimensions of classroom experience. As I sought a way to conceive of a classroom as a whole, I found the sociological concept of cultural process to be most resonant.

Classroom Experience as a Cultural Process

Classrooms are contingent, intersubjective spaces and approaching them as a researcher is daunting: how best to capture such a space? I was not surprised when, at first, many professors that I contacted refused to let me observe their classrooms. I shared their concern with guarding the integrity of a classroom community. In our society, classrooms, especially diverse ones, can be rare arenas of shared practice, rare public spheres where our democracy comes to sort itself out. Much is made of the unusual racial

diversity that students encounter on campuses. While that is important, equally important is the diversity of perspectives, the healthy conflict of ideas, and the intellectual exchange that a classroom can provide. In courses on race in particular, the classroom takes on even greater significance, becoming a possible site of what Cornel West calls democratic soul craft,[11] what the early proponents of American higher education called character education, and what contemporary education scholars might describe as adult development.

The concept of cultural process advanced by Lamont and colleagues (2014) was helpful as I tried to make sense of the social world that is a classroom experience. Importantly, Lamont and colleagues highlight that cultural processes involve not just individual level cognition but also shared cultural scripts—for example, frames, narratives or cultural repertoires. While other social processes do touch on those dimensions, cultural processes are distinct for being "centrally constituted at the level of meaning making." They are also distinct in that both dominant and non-dominant actors participate in meaning making. Cultural processes bridge individual, institutional and structural dimensions, and in learning about race through a given classroom experience, students indeed engage ideas of race at the individual level, as well as the institutional and structural levels. Students' personal experiences, their interaction with one another and with the course content, as well as the wider social context of their lives, are also present within classroom experience. Students engage with one another, with the professor and with the content. They draw from the texts and their understanding of it, to

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[11] The Trump Era: Hope in a Time of Escalating Despair. A Hutchins Center Spring Colloquium, January 25, 2017.

produce "collective meaning making and shared categories and classifications." Students (non-dominant) and the professor (dominant) all contribute to the production of meaning in this way. For these reasons, considering classroom experience as a cultural process made sense. Considering classroom experience as a cultural process allowed me to take a sociological view of learning about race that was holistic. Rather than parse different aspects of a classroom, this approach—of observing and analyzing a process--considered the relationship between the interaction of content, pedagogy and discussion and students' understanding.

From literature review to research question

An important hypothesis that arose from this literature review was that influential classroom experiences supported students in thinking about race in more sophisticated ways. Throughout the literature reviewed, there were echoes of this idea that creative thinking, or more complex thinking around race, is why "race learning" is valuable in the first place. Indeed, the key idea in the diversity rationale is that students can develop new worldviews out of a process of exposure to and then integration of new perspectives from racially diverse peers. Multiple studies measured gains in cognitive complexity and pluralistic thinking. Similarly, the intergroup dialogue courses studied by Gurin and her colleagues were said to promote a "leap forward" in students' thinking about race. The research also suggested certain pedagogies or practices, like discussion, could produce those leaps forward.

In addition, my review of the literature revealed that the productive experiences of students and faculty in ordinary academic content courses on race, while common,

remained a black box. Given those promising insights and persistent gaps in the research,

I constructed my research question to illuminate said black box. I decided to ask: For

students who choose to enroll in two courses on race, what is the relationship between

their classroom experience and their understanding of race?

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[i] Indeed, many trace the establishment of the idea that race is "socially constructed" not to Du Bois, but to the post WWII context. Specifically, scholars consider the UNESCO "Statement on Race," commissioned by the United Nations and made public in 1951, to be a foundational moment. The document is written as a response to the Holocaust as a horrific embodiment of the excesses of scientific racism. In the Statement, social scientists construct a layered argument that race is not biological but rather draws its meaning from political and social life (Montagu, 1951).

One of the most significant conceptions of race that emerges subsequently is the notion of racial formations (Omi & Winant, 2004). Omi & Winant define racial formation as the "sociohistorical process" through which our racial categories are "created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed" (Omi & Winant, 2004). Central to racial formation theory is the idea that race is a "complex of social meanings" that bridges micro and macro levels of social life and is changeable (Omi & Winant, 2004). Racial formations are said to be susceptible to powerful social engines, such as the Civil Rights movement. In the decades after Civil Rights, sociological conceptions of race come to focus especially on racial stratification and inequality—the structural consequences of the historic and institutional racism that Civil Rights sought to undo (Massey, 1990; Wilson, 2012). Most recently and notably, Morris (2015) has shown that the erasure of Du Bois from the founding of American sociology, particularly the sociology of race as we understand it today, was the result of deliberately racist practices by white sociologists of his time.

Methods

I selected Gable University because like most selective institutions, they had a long-standing commitment to racial diversity, even if, as discussed earlier, that commitment was stronger in theory than in practice. As a well-resourced university, Gable offered many courses on race, from different disciplinary approaches and was likely to offer both larger lectures and smaller seminars—a contrast of interest for my study. In addition, the university possessed strong department of African American studies, where courses were more racially diverse than other courses. Lastly, Gable University had a number of experienced and well-regarded faculty, like Thomas and Stone, who taught highly sought out courses that students evaluated favorably. In seeking to study courses that worked well, my interest was to understand what, in terms of both the classroom setting and students' own learning, was working well and how. For that reason, it was important to situate my study in courses where the influence of classroom experience on students' racial understanding was likely to be perceived by me, classrooms that were the closest to "natural cases" (Charmaz, 2014). The intention was to locate myself in a dense data context most likely to yield answers to my research question.

Table 2. Study Overview

	THOMAS	STONE
Course Name	Slavery Stories	Black Political Thought
Discipline/Department	African American Studies & History	African American Studies & Philosophy
Class Format	Seminar	Lecture
Total Enrollment	18	40 (Discussion Section: 10)
Pedagogy	Discussion (2 hours/week)	Lecture (w/ minimal discussion; 2 hours/week) Discussion Section: 50 min
Number of Observations	14 classes	14 lectures, 10 discussions (24)

Interviewees	12	6
Race of interviewees	6 POC*, 6 white	3 POC, 3 white

*POC: People of color

During the fall, I observed Professor Charles Thomas's course, called "Slavery Stories." It was a seminar, cross-listed in History and African-American Studies, focused on narratives written by or about black people who were enslaved. Students read, among others, Olaudah Equiano, David Walker, Harriet Jacobs, Phyllis Wheatley, and Nat Turner. The entire class was spent in seminar-style discussion. During the following semester, I studied Professor Isaac Stone's "Black Political Thought" course, also a cross-listed course in Philosophy and African-American Studies. The course was a lecture, and students also attended a weekly discussion section led by a teaching assistant, Arthur Richardson. I observed every class section and in the case of the Stone course, I also observed the weekly discussion sections. I observed the professor's teaching style and choices, individual student's comments, as well as the class discussion as a whole. I focused on both verbal content and non-verbal cues and body language. I read course readings each week, in order to better ground myself in the classroom discussions I observed and to be a more informed interviewer. As mentioned earlier, both courses were chosen because they had been evaluated positively by students and taught by the professor multiple times. The courses were also chosen because, while not being identical, they had similarities in content. While one was a history course and the other a philosophy course, both were cross-listed in African American Studies. Both courses also relied on student reading and discussion of primary source materials. While attending to different time periods, both courses probed ideas about race as a source of both cultural

and political identity and inequality in America, about movements of racial emancipation, and about the consequences of racism for democracy.

Consistent with case logic, the two courses were connected through theoretical replication, as they differed in class size and format, two important initial variations I wanted to explore. Stone's course did involve discussion--an average of twenty minutes or less within each lecture, and the weekly discussion sections (fifty minutes) led by Stone's teaching assistant. My intention was to observe the difference that the intensity and duration of discussion and student-to-student interaction might have, when two other key dimensions—the pedagogical acumen of the professor and the academic engagement with race—remained somewhat comparable.

Thomas's course was the prototypical case and Stone's was a theoretically productive contrasting case. Distinct from an "average case," a prototypical case illustrates what might recur should similar conditions be found in the future (Orum, 2001). The contrast meant that insights concerning classroom experiences and dynamics that began to emerge in Thomas's course could be clarified and strengthened through my study of Stone's course (Orum, 2001; Yin, 2013).

I interviewed students who volunteered to speak with me between two and three times over the course of roughly 18 months. These were unstructured interviews, meant to feel like wide-ranging conversations that included consistent questions about how they were experiencing their class. I interviewed a total of twelve students, out of twenty-two, in Thomas's seminar. Stone's students were in weekly discussion sections that ranged between ten and twelve students. I interviewed six students from one of the sections. In the first interviews, I asked students about their backgrounds, about past experiences

engaging race in educational and non-educational contexts, about their early expectations

and impressions of the course. The second interviews, conducted at the end of the

course, reflected back on the semester's learning, with particular attention to how students

felt their own thinking had evolved and to what aspects of the course they attributed the

most importance. The final interviews took place six to twelve months after the course

had ended and focused mostly on whether the course's learning had appeared in students'

lives since (see Appendices for interview protocols).

The interviews were put in the context of classroom observations and, in an

iterative cycle, also shaped my perspective during class observations. I employed a

constructivist grounded theory approach in my analysis of field notes and interview

transcripts. Renowned sociologist Loïc Wacquant famously called grounded theory an

"epistemological fairy tale" (Tavory & Timmermans, 2009: Timmermans & Tavory,

2012). His argument, echoed by others, is that as proposed by Glaser and Strauss (2009),

grounded theory is an impossibility insofar as no trained scholar can truly bring an

entirely naïve perspective to her data—there is no blank slate from which research can

ever start. At the very least, if not an actual a priori hypothesis, the social scientist brings

the epistemological, theoretical and empirical know-how and baggage of her discipline. I

certainly brought that, but in my view, this is consistent with a more dynamic—and

perhaps more generous--reading of grounded theory. Glaser & Straus do consider a

researcher's pre-existing social scientific acumen desirable, as it provides a "theoretical

sensitivity" that qualitative research requires. Such sensitivity allows the researcher to

discern what data are important, given what we already know. Their grounded view can

be interpreted as merely proposing that we rely primarily on our findings and align those

findings with the existing body of knowledge after the fact—not before. Charmaz's

notion of "constructivist grounded theory" is useful for making this clear. In addition to

the characteristic iterative engagement between data collection and analysis that defines

all grounded theory, a constructivist grounded theory approach actually foregrounds,

rather than resists, the notion that the researcher brings to her study a "cultivated

position," and a set of informed preconceptions that she uses as "points of departure"

(Charmaz, 2014; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012).

My first round of coding consisted of organizing the interview transcripts

according to the interview protocol—meaning that I coded students' answers to my

questions in the most basic ways and produced preliminary charts organizing their

answers. Similarly, in the initial phase, I coded field notes segment-by-segment, or

moment by moment. I then reviewed those initial codes, in the transcripts and the field

notes, and began to sort and integrate them to produce more focused codes. For instance,

I pulled student answers and reflections that referenced similar aspects of classroom

experience and learning under focused codes such as: professor's authority, professor's

redirecting of discussion, student-to-student debates, key themes from the readings,

author names, and so on. These more focused codes were then merged into more defined

ones, as I moved to data to data comparisons (student to student, course to course) or

code to data comparisons (checking if a particular code continued to be resonant as

additional data were analyzed). Eventually, through theoretical coding, I connected codes

under categories that described, "what is going on": academic grounding, empathy,

bravery/courage, community, complex frames, and self-authored frames, to name a few.

In many occasions, the "names" of these main theoretical codes arose from the illustrative

and insightful language of the students themselves (in-vivo codes). For instance, it was the way students like Adina described how they felt "allowed to push" themselves, and Jessica's use of the word "brave" that helped identify and name the bravery/courage code. Similarly, students like Tessa and Lyor helped me recognize that the aspect of interpersonal interaction they were highlighting, where they were making allowances for the learning of others, was a particularly kind of empathy.

Limitations

The students chose to enroll in both courses. Stone's course, a lecture, had open enrollment. Students then selected one of three weekly discussion sections that best suited their schedules. Thomas limited his class enrollment and selected twenty-two students out of almost forty applicants. He selected based on information that they offered including their year of study and reason for being interested in the course. He informed me that in composing the class, he sought a racially diverse and gender balanced classroom, and he gave priority to sophomores who would be deciding on their majors the following semester—as a recruitment measure for the History department. He also made sure that the first-years and sophomores mingled with a few "older students who could help model the discussion." One limitation is therefore that I did not interview students who did not have at least an initial inclination towards or investment in learning the subject matter of the course. A related limitation is that in interviewing volunteers, I spoke to students inclined to reflect on how the class evolved. Yet, as mentioned earlier, such self-selectivity is a feature of this study even if it introduces some limitations.

There are also social desirability effects to consider. The fact that both professors knew me before the start of the study may have influenced students, given that they disclosed this information when they introduced me to their students. While it is possible that students came to think of me as a "friend of the professor," I did not sense that they did not feel comfortable sharing critical views with me, as they were assured of the anonymity of the interviews. Another aspect of social desirability worth mentioning is my own racial identity. While I do not have any data or impressions suggesting this was the case, it is possible that the content of students' views may have been influenced by the fact that I am a black woman.

Reflexivity and Positionality

> Not sure if you were there for this part but I guess you're always there? But I guess it's also good if I don't know if you are there, right?
>
> —Will, in Stone's course.

I remember two interview moments incredibly vividly. One is the moment above, a comment by Will, one of the students in Prof. Stone's course, during the second semester of the study. The other is a moment during the first semester, when I was interviewing Kate. I asked her, as I asked everyone at the end, how they thought the course went. Kate raved about it. I then asked her what she thought were the "ingredients" that made it work. She mentioned the quality of her peers, Prof. Thomas's pedagogy, and then: "Well, you." I remember my heart sinking to the beat of Kate's words as I thought, "I've botched this and I can't say anything about the environment because it's clearly only happening because I am there." And I also remember my heart soaring, listening to Will, and thinking: "Excellent! I have achieved invisibility in the

field." Of course both are overreactions, and neither captures the subtle reality of ethnographic fieldwork. The experience of the study crystalized for me the tension at the heart of research that seeks to observe the social world as it is. While this tension, of trying to disappear while being clearly present, occupies a great part of one's methodological training, only fieldwork itself can really provide one with a sense of how to navigate it. The trick was in being very attuned to the classroom environment or the interview setting, while maintaining myself at enough of a remove that I could observe and conduct interviews so as to capture the most of the experience. This meant observing the whole class, not simply the students talking but also how their comments were being received, the students who were quiet, the students who couldn't wait to jump in. In interviews, it meant being present and allowing for conversation to flow while noticing moments for probing or connections between earlier and later interviews. Overall, it was about focusing on the students and the professors primarily without forgetting to keep a self-critical eye on my impact on the environment.

The fact that both Thomas and Stone knew me before and introduced me to their students accordingly—warmly stressing their support for my study--made me even more conspicuous, especially in my own mind. Yet, more importantly, I felt implicated and personally drawn to the experiences students were having, as they resonated both with my past experiences as a student and my future projects as an academic. In many ways, I had been a student like them, and I hoped to become a professor like Thomas or Stone. As a citizen, too, the work of unpacking race and racism in a classroom resonated deeply with me. Beyond writing separate reflexive memos periodically during data collection and analysis to reflect on these tensions, I also instituted the habit of transcribing my own

thoughts during classroom observations or immediately following interviews, when those emergent ideas were related to me and not to what I was observing. I would stop fieldnotes, mark a new paragraph with "JdN," and type in italics so that I could recognize the shift in the fieldnotes visually later. This was a way to record my own preoccupations in real time. It kept me honest and provided concrete ideas to explore later in more developed memos.

This high degree of personal investment I experienced impacted the research mostly positively: students connected well with me, opened up, and seemed to enjoy their interviews, as these were lively and genuine conversations. Other times, that luckily were few and far between, more complicated instances arose where I lost track of my boundaries as a researcher and became overly invested. This happened a few times during classroom observations where I became fully engrossed in the intellectual work the students were doing—the ideas themselves being compelling to me, and lost track of my observation for a moment. While I never joined the classroom discussion, those instances did cause me to leave some data on the classroom floor. This almost never happened during interviews, but one example stands out. It happened during Kevin's penultimate interview. By this time, we were comfortable with one another. Kevin was telling me about the limitations of the Black Lives Matter movement, which he nonetheless whole-heartedly supported. His argument was about whether or how the movement could become "more effective" if it shifted the rhetoric to be more "realistic" about "American racism":

> Kevin: You have to address this racial narrative that currently exists in America that like black people do this to themselves—they get themselves arrested, their own problem. We need to fight that on its terms instead of taking something that's not even necessarily in the ballpark. Because just saying "BLM" yeah good luck

convincing that West Virginian who's met 0 black people and is living on $7.50 a day.

Janine: Do you think it's easier to say that because you're white?

Kevin: I mean, yeah. That I can think about it more objectively and I …

Janine (interrupting): Wasn't going to say that. I was going to say that it's easier to think about what is and is not practical or efficient for the movement. Do you think your [being white] influences what you think is "practical" and "efficient"? Not that you're more objective but that you have blind spots.

Kevin: Sure, I mean… I've never experienced racial inequality, so yeah, sure.

In the audio recording, I can clearly hear my frustration in my tone, when I ask him does he think he can say that because he is white, and more clearly, when I interrupt him with, "Wasn't saying that." I can hear in my voice that I am frustrated at what I perceive as white privilege on his part. Rather than let him elaborate and express himself fully, my interjection likely redirects him. I take it personally—who does he think he is, a young white man attending an elite university, to advise patience and pragmatism? It's clear to me that in that moment, I stop interviewing and start teaching. Part of my investment is my investment as an educator. While I had other instances where I was not at my best that I recall, and probably many more I didn't even notice, none were as serious or flagrant as this one. Ruining a piece of an interview is a horribly disconcerting experience, and it's serious. But it is also the best way to learn how to not do that going forward.

There is no doubt that studying race while being black is complicated. I have worked to, if not entirely resolve the complication, at least confront it honestly. One issue that I struggle with for theoretical, political and personal reasons is the extent to which working on race might reinforce the persistence of race and racism. This conundrum

obviously predates my study and is actually a core tenet in critical reflections by race scholars. Many, like Paul Gilroy—and Barbara Fields, on different grounds--have warned that race thinking thrives in part due to our reliance on it as a kind of master explanatory discourse. While "race" does explicate a lot, these thinkers suggest, race thinking also can obscure our ability to see "what else could be going on." Thinkers like Fields who are concerned with race ideology, think that critical race studies can hide the historicity of the idea of race and inadvertently reify it, make it a mythical, almost mystifying thing that we cannot deconstruct. Du Bois himself expressed a consistent ambivalence of his own about race; while he theorized double consciousness and the veil, he also spoke often of moments of transcending the veil, often through intellectual rigor and learning.

I have long taken these perspectives seriously and learned through engaging with them. But as a scholar of race who focuses on the realm of education and culture in the contemporary moment, an entanglement with race categories and race thinking is inevitable for me; I have to do my work. So what to do? The thinker I rely on to resolve this conundrum is Paul C. Taylor. A philosopher, Taylor waded into these debates to propose that a "pragmatic racialism" might be necessary. By this he means that while race is not a biological fact, and while when we insist on race thinking we reinforce the apparent reality of race, this race thinking is essential to our understanding of the phenomenon of race, above and beyond related phenomena like class or other identity categories. Because race is a social fact of profound impact, we pragmatically continue to use racial discourse and race thinking for the critical work of studying race. But importantly, this should be done while remaining reflexive and self-critical, precisely because race thinking is dangerously powerful. Taylor argues that if race thinking is to be

used "effectively and appropriately, [we need] to understand what it is, how it works and how we come to think of it as we do" (Taylor, 2013). This is what I endeavored to do throughout the study. I wrote reflexive memos continuously and aspects of those reflections that I consider important have been integrated in my analysis and my writing. During data collection, the analysis and the process of writing, I have been honest about my own thinking about race, and the way in which it is a core part of my intellectual and personal biography.

On a more practical level, I debated whether or not to include the racial identification of students after their names throughout this text. While I appreciate that some find the information essential, I find that it constrains our thinking as well. My compromise has been to (1) use only the identification that the students themselves provided me; (2) only elaborate on their racial identities where I elaborate on who they are *beyond just their race*; and (3) to only use a small, and hopefully discrete lower case letter next to their name throughout the text to indicate their racial self-identification. The issue is obviously not that I think race is irrelevant. On the contrary, the issue is my awareness of the power of a race label to prime us to consider it as the most important information about someone, even when it may not be.

As an experiment, I have presented this work without alluding to students' race and have found that people can completely engage with it, focusing on the broader themes around academic grounding, resilience and empathy. It is a liberating experience for me as a scholar to witness this, to see people considering students as "students" or "learners" first and foremost, without qualifying that perception with a racial label. It is only after someone notices and objects to not knowing the race of a speaker whose quote

I highlighted that the rest of the audience becomes uncomfortable. Usually at that point, people begin to tell me that they cannot fully grasp the significance of a statement or a finding without knowing the race of the students and professors. When that happens, I usually ask the audience to consider with me the implications of that idea. It presumes that knowing someone's race allows us to know something about them, above and beyond what they are actually communicating. That comes very close, for me, to a kind of essentialism I want to guard my participants against. In the spirit of reflexivity, I should say that I want to guard my own self against that as well. My hope is that readers will allow themselves to observe, internalize and discover something about the students and their learning journeys that goes beyond our proscribed logics of race.

Chapter 3

The Power of the Classroom:

Academic Grounding as the Foundation of Classroom Experience

> I think a really deep trust in the power of the classroom also came out of it for me. Because I had never, and still have not, seen a classroom function in the way that it did. It makes me really believe in my ability to connect with peers with whom I don't identify in the context of race studies classrooms. I think there is a really brilliant way that that classroom fostered trust and connections and an environment for risk-taking that really pushes, at least at Gable, the negative connotations that race studies classrooms, and seminars especially, can get.
>
> *-- And what are those connotations?*
>
> That they will be antagonistic, I think? A judgmental space, a space in which it's all eyes on the black students then the white students say something that's problematic. They're branded as very emotional [but in a way that is] somehow petty or insensitive. And I think this class was extremely emotional but it a very productive way.

Jessica, one of the students in Charles Thomas's "Slavery Stories" course, answered my question about what she felt she gained from taking a course that she had called "transformative." In her comments above, she summarized much of the core findings and implications that constitute this chapter. Indeed, research and practice literature attest to the many challenges that often face students in courses on race— challenges around trust, microaggressions, and empathy (Bergsieker, Shelton, & Richeson, 2010; Goff et al., 2008; Richeson & Shelton, 2007; Sue, 2010; Tatum, 2007) A large literature exists that is aimed at supporting teachers in rising to those challenges (Nagda & Gurin, 2007; Singleton, 2014; Tatum, 1992). The students in this study reported negative experiences in courses on race at Gable University or in high school. Consistently, they reported previous experiences of engaging race in the classroom that

were superficial, unproductively tense or awkward. For students in Thomas's and in Stone's courses, the experiences were positive, primarily—I will show—because they were academically grounded. I found that academic grounding allowed students to develop more resilient and empathetic stances towards one another to which Jessica alludes. That academic grounding then was the somewhat intangible "power of the classroom."

I use the phrase academic grounding to describe the way the professors connected content learning about race with the academic culture of engagement that best supports said learning. As we will see, both Thomas and Stone ushered their students, beginning with their introductory remarks, into the particular culture of their classrooms. In so doing, they suggested to students certain "ways of being" in the classroom that were required for the learning goals to be met. This linkage of academic culture and academic content was foundational to the classroom experience of students—it was the holding environment, or the ground on which students stood, in order to engage in intellectual "risk-taking," and share "trust and connection."

As will be illustrated throughout this chapter, academic grounding can have a different character given different classroom formats and pedagogical styles. For Stone, as we will see, the ideal way to be in his course was in part to reject kneejerk or unexamined opinions, in favor of rigorous, critical assessments. That defined what academic grounding offered students in his class. For Thomas, the ideal was in part to bring one's whole self into the classroom discussion—making them, as Jessica said, "emotional in a productive way." Once the stage was set for academic grounding, students

themselves sustained it, by engaging in the class as expected. Race can be a fraught classroom topic, but in these classrooms, students were able to engage with it, often touching on difficult questions, because they felt academically grounded: they knew what the content to be learned was, and they knew what intellectual ways of being were expected of them.

In what follows, I first engage the ethnographic data to take us into the classroom experience in both courses. In Part I, I show how Professor Charles Thomas's "Slavery Stories" course, a learning community defined by long and deep discussions and student-to-student interaction, was academically grounded. I use a particularly challenging learning moment to explore the ways in which that academic grounding sustained students and professor alike. In Part II, I illustrate how Professor Isaac Stone set the stage for academic grounding in his "Black Political Thought" course, and how his teaching assistant, Arthur Richardson, sustained it in the weekly discussion sections he led. As a course with less discussion, Stone's offers me an opportunity to show how students' individual reflections were as important to classroom experience as discussions. Following the accounts of the classrooms, in part III, I summarize the findings and consider their implications for research and practice.

Part I: Reading Slavery

Grand Entrance

Today is the introductory class for "Slavery Stories," a history course where students read writings by and about enslaved people, in order to "view history through

the eyes of enslaved people rather than through the eyes of their masters." They begin abroad, reading Olaudah Equiano and Toussaint L'Ouverture, among others, then make their way to the United States with authors such as Phillis Wheatley, Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs. In the last week, they consider the present day human trafficking in the U.S. and abroad. This is a highly sought after course, and the room is packed. Professor Charles Thomas stands in the middle of the classroom, in a basement of Kennedy House, one of Gable University's residence halls, where he serves as a house dean. At 6'4", he is an imposing but welcoming presence and his boisterous voice is equal parts rasp and warmth. Students expecting the typical review of syllabus that often happens on the first day are surprised. Without even glancing at the syllabus, Professor Thomas launches into a personal story that begins with his own undergraduate education at Gable, "ages ago," he jokes. As a rising senior, Thomas recounts, he wanted to write his thesis on early African American novels, but this plan had to be approved by a very intimidating faculty member. Thomas paints a vivid picture of this fateful meeting. On one side, the authoritative professor, a towering figure in the English department, and a "specialist on Puritanism," sitting in a large leather armchair in his study, displeased look on his face. On the other side, the young Charles Thomas, intimidated but eager, pitching his brilliant thesis idea about "the early black novel." Thomas quotes the professor's verdict to the students, mimicking his disdainful tone: "Are you arguing that black people were writing novels worthy of our attention pre emancipation?" The students are enthralled.

Without breaking narrative flow, Thomas segues into the motivation for the course they are considering: "In a very real way, I created the course that basically I wish I had back when I was standing where you are standing." As Thomas moves through these seemingly off-the-cuff remarks that, I recognize, are planned, I admire how effortlessly he inserts the biographical details. "As a working class, Irish kid from Boston," he begins one sentence. Then, as he is closing another sentence, he inserts, "as a gay man." While he does give the traditional information students expect during an introductory class—what department he teaches in, how long he has been at Gable, and so on--I don't jot any of that down, and I am sure students care little about that as well. By Thomas's design, we retain the crucial information: that one's engagement with academic life is very personal, that one's biography matters, and that one should speak frankly about race in a classroom setting.

When Thomas finally does bring up class expectations, they also are embedded in his larger narrative. "I want you to take risks, be critical, push back, not be intellectually safe, be provocative." But "respect is paramount," he tells them. "It is important because, among other things this course is about, it is about the disrespect of some by others. The least we can do is have enough respect for one another, the kind that wasn't present in the lives we study." He goes on to elaborate that respect also entails "showing up to class to be engaged, having done the reading." This, Thomas clarifies, will allow students not only to learn but also, "learn how to teach" one another. The end result will be "a space created where we are really respecting each other and assume good intentions and wrestle

with the most difficult content in our nation, across backgrounds, perspectives and political ideologies." He warns students that the subject matter will be tough at times and it might be challenging to uphold these norms: "Sometimes it's going to be hard to talk with each other about what we are reading…. But I know you will be fine and I have no doubt that you will treat each other with respect and be one hundred percent engaged." As he concludes his remarks, I take a look around the room and it is very clear to me that Thomas will have a long registration wait list for his small seminar.

Much More Jazz than Symphony

I walked into the classroom on the second week of class, to find the students sitting around a long seminar table, some twenty chairs in total, roughly half along each side. A couple of students sat at each head of the table. The students closest to where I stood made small talk with me and asked "what exactly" I would be doing in the class. I explained how observation works, while I scanned the room for an ideal vantage point. The ground level classroom was unusually bright given that it only had narrow windows at the very top of the walls. It probably was primarily a Music Department room, given the chalkboard covered in musical notation and the piano. I noticed that this group of students was more racially diverse than many Gable classrooms, which are majority white; here only about half the students were white. Given my myriad experiences with "the first day of classes," I expected awkward silences at first and anticipated that Thomas would carry much of the discussion. But this never happened. He made opening logistical remarks about how two students would be responsible for providing opening discussion

questions each week going forward—he called these "provocations." After, he simply asked the first question to get things started. Eileen, a middle aged woman eagerly introduced herself and let the group know that she was at Gable on a one year fellowship for museum professionals. As class discussion picked up immediate speed, I saw on her face a kind disbelief: is this what Gable students are always like?

From the beginning, the discussion felt as though students had met for a couple of weeks already. I reasoned that Thomas's opening remarks the previous week must have truly struck a chord and that the positive reputation of the class was also at work. Students dove into a lively and probing discussion that I immediately had trouble keeping up with in my fieldnotes. I frantically tried to watch and note who was speaking, then responding, then elaborating a further point. I also noted body language and nonverbal cues. I wondered if the few more quiet students were first or second years. (They were.) I had anticipated that, at first, students would be rather opaque to me, but the pace and depth of this first discussion changed my mind. They were fully present and being themselves and I could get a sense of them.

Even in this setting where everyone was very engaged, Kevin (w)[12]—white, male, and outspoken in a class on slavery--immediately stood out. He stood out to me and, it seemed, to everyone else. In his interview, Kevin described his engagement as connected to his upbringing in a family that encouraged children to debate important social justice issues regularly. But he also connected it with a negative experience in a Gable summer community service program he participated in before his first year, where he "was told

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[12] The racial identification is the one provided by the students themselves: Asian (a), black (b), Latinx (l), Native (n), white (w). If they provided more information (for example, ethnic/national identity, multiracial) I include it via footnote.

basically every time I would offer my opinion that as a white affluent man, my opinion

on these issues does not count."

> I thought, all right, thanks for doing exactly to me what you're criticizing I do to you, right? So, I kind of got sick of being told to shut up. I was just I was really hurt by it because I chose to do the program to become more educated on racial issues, gender issues, you know? And also because we were supposed to be building a community, as incoming freshmen, not being a separatist community.

Especially given that experience, Kevin became interested in engaging the topic

of race academically. He felt that setting, with the leadership of a professor, "an adult

present," would be more productive. That is why he took the class. He had a clear

awareness of how his outspokenness could be perceived.

> I'm afraid to say something that might be perceived as racist in any way. If I change four or five words by complete accident because I'm sick that day, or I'm sad that day, it can be perceived as really racist. So that's always a fear of mine.

Whenever he spoke, I could see his peers sizing him up. Lyor (w) would later tell

me that he felt as though Kevin's engagement made him unfairly targeted: "Some people

just feel they need to just disagree with him to disagree, and I think ok, when did he

become public enemy #1?" Jessica (b) references the same.

> There is one student in particular, Kevin, who I've noticed gets jumped on, for saying something that is sort of questionable or a little bit too ambiguous in phrasing. Usually that's a person of color who misinterprets or spins it, and he jumps right back to the defensive, to sort of better explain himself or back himself out of the corner he was put into.

Kevin and Adina (b)[13] were not friends at the start of the course but right away

they seemed to share a collegial battleground. Their disagreements often formed the crux

of class discussion because usually, before one of Kevin's provocative questions had time

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[13] Black/biracial

to hit the seminar table, Adina had picked up and thrown it back at him. Often, students would align around their two positions and elaborate them. In the process, the learning would take a kind of discursive sequence: two students then three, back to two, then a go-around the table, back to one student making summative comments, and so on. Sometimes the original back-and-forth involved different students, but this dynamic defined the classroom. The first time I really saw this discursive dynamic, the class (inspired by Walter Johnson's article, "On Agency") was discussing whether enslaved people could be said to have "agency"—an issue that was framed as both substantive and also related to debates in the discipline of history itself. Kevin offered that historians often made the error of "speaking for" people, not just enslaved people. Adina objected directly: "I find it super offensive that anybody would even ask that. All human beings have agency. Just because you couldn't advocate for yourself doesn't mean you lack agency."

Adina stood out to me for how joyful she seemed. Every week, there was a genuine exhilaration as she entered the discussion—she was thrilled to be learning. Adina had come to Gable as "a complete conservative, oh my God, are you kidding? I was like, a Republican." She did not have those views anymore and fully credited her courses for that: "You come here to be transformed, to change your mind." Adina, who was biracial but identified as black, balanced her excitement with her development with a sense of empathy for her parents, who saw her changing so drastically. As she was growing up, her family "pretended race didn't exist," and it was hard for her parents to engage with how frankly she spoke about it now. Adina, like her peers, was actively

pushing herself every week to consider ideas she had not considered before—this was

after all, what Thomas had asked of them:

> We are allowed to push ourselves. To take risks and ask questions. Class has these
> tensions—always does—but I enjoy it because that is how I learn… If you feel
> scared to say what you think, you don't get the same impact. Just being able to say
> it is a learning process in itself.

The "agency" discussion, which dominated the first week of class, was one of a

few "big ideas" that kept anchoring weekly discussions. Another such theme was referred

as just "the Fields." Barbara J. Field's "Slavery Race and Ideology in the United States of

America" was read in the first few weeks of class and, in the words of Deyanira (b)[14],

"rocked these people's worlds." The students engaged with this text deeply. They debated

its thesis: that race was the historically situated ideological product of the economic and

material practice of slavery and not some unchanging, ahistorical permanent force in

human affairs. Deyanira found that the thesis was brilliant but not a novel idea; the social

construction of race felt obvious to her. She identified as black, stressing that while

people of Dominican descent "speak Spanish we are not Spanish, ok? Spaniards hate us."

For her, notions about race felt lived in and obvious, in ways she felt they did not to her

white peers. In these discussions of Fields, Deyanira's body language first suggested to

me that an outburst might be most eminent. When I asked, she said she was not always

frustrated: "I'm either having some angry feelings or trying hard to listen to what

everyone is saying." While Deyanira never did lose her temper with anyone in class, she

struggled with Kevin's approach.

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[14] Dominican

I said something and he cut me off while I was talking. I thought one, you're getting defensive because you said something that was not that great. And two, you're interrupting me because you think what I have to say is more important than what you have to say. I had to put my hand up like, wait I'm not done talking. Things get said sometimes that sting but it's better when you can have a productive conversation about it, instead when someone is just trying to overpower-overpower-overpower the conversation. Also let's be real, we're doing a class on slavery right, slave narratives, freedom and there's a white guy dominating the discussion? That's going to make me really uncomfortable. I take these classes because this is where my opinion really matters. You try to find these spaces where you think your experience is what's at the top. So when there is an active effort to try and go against the current of white supremacy, which is what this class is and then those structures still come into play in the classroom itself that's very frustrating.

In her frustrations, she evoked a place that is familiar to many students of color who attend predominantly white elite institutions. These students often find that what they are learning puts them in a collision course with their university, their society, and seemingly, the history of the world. To become educated about race meant to move from a place where racism was experienced and not fully understood, to a place where racism is unequivocally confirmed and understood. At first, the feeling is liberating and edifying, but it can also take a toll. Gable was "killing," her, she began her first interview, sighing.

By the end, she told me our conversation had been a "detox" and "like therapy." While I was happy to hear that, Deyanira was the only student who did not sit for a subsequent interview. In retrospect, I could have seen that coming: I still have vivid memories of how exhausting it was to confront issues of race in college.

During one Barbara Fields-themed discussion among many, Deyanira vividly provided illustrations that allowed her peers to better understand the article. As Lyor (w) listened attentively and later expressed to me how important he felt her contribution had been: "The person who best explained it, made me understand was Deyanira when she

talked about how superficial our notions of how you diversify the classroom are and how

they reinforce racism." From Lyor's first interview, I experienced him as someone

unusually attuned to observing the classroom. Lyor's observations of his own learning

and the dynamics in the classroom were detailed and insightful.

> The thing that I hate about most of the classes here is that everybody is just so
> kind of complacent, "Oh yes, I agree." Even the language that we use to disagree
> with people is super coded. You don't disagree, you "push back" or you "play
> devil's advocate," as a way of kind of avoiding any accountability, you know?
> But here I think people are actively disagreeing, even intensely so
> sometimes. But that's probably my favorite part. It actually feels like an
> interactive, dynamic class, where you're building on things others are saying.

Lyor grew up in Staten Island, NY, the son of working class Israeli immigrants,

whom he lovingly described as "old school." His background seemed to give Lyor a

healthy curiosity about racial dynamics.

> There is diversity and clear distinctions for example between Jewish people of
> Eastern European origin and those from Africa, or Spain, that kind of thing. And
> to think of race as something as constructed to justify something [else] is easy to
> understand for me, that it's not solely an issue of color.

Almost without prompting, in his first interview, he addressed the difficulty of

being in classrooms discussing race that often were not racially diverse. This "tokenism,"

he felt was counterproductive. He found that in Thomas's classroom, the racial diversity

of his peers enriched his learning. This happened explicitly, as in the example with

Deyanira, but also implicitly, through his observations.

> When Kevin was talking about Fields and said that human beings actually have
> differences and actually do get into conflicts over them, since like, forever, he
> somehow used the word blood, like different blood. Jessica and Deyanira just
> looked up at one another at the same time when he spoke. It was amazing. That
> they would have the same exact reaction. I would have thought nothing of him
> saying it like that, besides that he didn't pick the right word, but Jessica just

looked up at that word, blood, and Deyanira was looking right at her from the other end of the table. And I thought, wow.

As Lyor had observed, Deyanira's most apparent ally in the classroom was Jessica (b). It was usually to a discretely amused Jessica that Deyanira directed her knowing looks and audible sighs whenever the discussion proved challenging. While Deyanira wore her emotions on her sleeve like a kind of body armor, Jessica's emotions were usually kept beneath a calm confidence befitting a professor or a diplomat. Jessica grew up in Glaser, an affluent suburb less than 50 miles from Gable University. Like many black students who grow up in majority-white suburbs or attend predominantly white schools, she found it comforting to find a diversity of black peers in college.

> Here I found just such a big community of black kids who are smart and interested in different stuff but a lot of us share that experience of growing up being the only black kid in the class, so it's nice to be in a community.

She took her academic and scholarly persona seriously and had very high standards for her conduct as such. This was compounded by her high visibility on campus as a campus student leader.

> Because I think I was raised by my parents really like, "You're black so you need to excel because people are going to try to hold you back and no one's going to kind of give you that safety pass. And so I just wasn't raised to seek comfort, I was raised to be excellent. I just don't get the whole comfort safe space thing. I work to feel confident. I don't really think about being comfortable.

Given this perspective, I was surprised that she chose to be very emotionally open to her peers at one moment, when she shared the history of slave ownership in her family ancestry. She discussed openly in the class that her family descended from free people of color who owned plantations in the South. She reflected on this moment as arising from

other students' examples and a desire to respond to Prof. Thomas's call to bring their

whole selves to the work.

> I shared that because I really believe in bringing your whole self to a
> classroom. It really confuses me when people try to say ok there is intellectual
> Jessica and then all other versions of Jessica should exist in a place outside this
> weird classroom vacuum. I think, if I'm going to bring myself to a classroom fully,
> if something is relevant, that comes from a more personal space, I'm going to
> share it. It was clear that I was kind of wrestling with this as I was talking, and I
> was not comfortable, not really sure about where this is going to go. I think my
> own, like, insecurity in that moment maybe opened up a space, maybe that invited
> the moment of, the spirit of wrestling with the hard stuff. Let's backtrack and sort
> of unpack the harder and more significant questions.

Evans (m)[15] had a strong and negative reaction to instances where too many

personal stories were injected into discussion, at first: "I just expected things to stay more

academic." For Evans, these forays into personal narratives were self-indulgences that

veered away from "these really important texts." Evans realized that a purely academic

discussion "went out the window early," and it frustrated him even if he understood why

it happened.

> The class is academically rigorous and really interesting right, but it is also about
> solidarity and the practice of talking about race and affirmation. So the present
> and the personal get mixed in all the time.

He wrestled with the value of the personal experience and concluded that if it took over

the discussion, it took away some of the common (academic) grounding that the class

depended on.

> I think it can be helpful [to introduce personal narrative] into discussion but as
> long as it doesn't become this thing that derails the class. If it's a super personal

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[15] Mixed race: white, South Asian.

experience that half of us have no access to, we are excluded. Because the point of the class, a lot of it is the fact that we read the same texts each week and this establishes common ground that doesn't exist from looking at personal experience.

A self-declared "theory nerd" who was "reading Weber for fun," Evans was

critical of what he saw as the excessively personal tenor of the discussion also because

those comments fell neatly into a Black-White racial binary that silenced other

perspectives. In other words, while the discussion was really resonant for some students,

Evans suggested, more fluid, multicultural or nuanced perspectives and identities were

being excluded. This naturally unnerved him, who was happiest when playing with

identity categories.

> During the Obama campaign I would canvass with a black colleague and people would ask me where I was from. They needed to place me. And I liked being a kind of like, ethnically ambiguous interloper. And vaguely answer, Miami.

Aside from an intellectual inclination towards critique, Evans was driven by his own

multicultural biography. He was part of a family that blended different white and South

Asian cultures and identified as biracial.

> I am sensitive towards appropriation I am sensitive to continuing ongoing patterns of exploiting people of color for white people's gains but it's not like culture no longer exists in a performative context either. There's a whole thing going on Facebook in the undergrad community about "my culture is not a costume" and for me my culture is a costume--this a costume (points to his outfit). Do I wear this when I see my Indian grandparents? No! Do I wear Pakistani clothes when I see my white grandparents? No, when I see my Pakistani family, yes.

Evans' playfulness hid a larger point about the need for the classroom to be "an open

space" for "trying out ideas." I asked him why he felt strongly about that:

> Sometimes in classrooms I see people saying things and I'm like okay that's what they're reading, that's what they're thinking right now, it's not necessarily their full view of the world, it's them trying to figure something out in this space. And that's the biggest worrisome thing for me. Making the classroom a place where people can experiment and try things out. Test out an idea, maybe push it too far, run it a bit back, push it too far in another direction.

Evans felt that while the discussion was engaged, it was not self-critical enough sometimes.

> We were saying and examining how race is socially constructed but unable or unwilling to admit and explore that we ourselves were doing the social constructing. You are constructing Kevin as privileged white male as you read his comments always with hostility. Then you are constructing yourself as some kind of ethnic curious person when you construct or present yourself that way.

For Evans, not doing this kind of self-critical probing meant that the discussion became exclusionary of some perspectives, including his own.

> By the end of the semester it was no longer my place to be a thinker or a feeler... It's incredible that a teacher can set that kind of thing up or help facilitate it when it does happen and turn it into a really productive intellectual, social direction. But it wasn't a space for everyone. I wonder you know, did Kevin feel like he was on the outside looking in at the end? And Keli'i too? I talked to Keli'i at length about that.

I was eager to ask Keli'i (n) about his experience but I was also nervous. I felt self-conscious asking a Native student about race or culture or their experience on a campus where they were part of such an egregiously small minority, "less than twenty students" by his estimation. I felt self-conscious about the ways in which my own black identity, while challenging in its own right, was more visible than his Native identity, in the class and on the campus. More than Evans discussed, I imagined that Keli'i experienced a kind of erasure, in most classes at Gable, including ones that purported to

be concerned with race. Contemplating speaking to him made me feel acutely aware of a kind of racial privilege I did not often consider: the privilege of at least having my "own" history acknowledged, even if poorly.

Keli'i's easygoing presence and thoughtfulness put me at ease right away. Since Keli'i was one of the more quiet students during class, I first asked him first about that. His answer was, as would prove consistent with him, rendered with frank humor: "I am quiet because so many of those kids are so smart (laughs)! Honestly! That's the main reason I am quiet. I don't wanna screw up." Digging more deeply, he discussed what it felt like to have issues of race and oppression discussed only in terms of enslaved African people, with no attention to Native people. Yet he was also aware and actively learning from the "profound connections" between the class content and his particular interests.

> [The class showed me] pretty profound parallels between colonialism and slavery that I come back to every semester almost. But also the way I approach my classes now is much more critical. Thomas's class was the first real race class that I took that really dug deep. So it was a springboard, even within my limited choice of classes.

Like Evans who went to recommend the class to his close friend the following semester, Keli'i felt the class was incredibly valuable. "I really miss it. It was the most emotionally and academically invested classroom I have ever been in."

> What I learned the most was how to enter the conversation from my particular place, whether raising the question of what about other people, native peoples, or just problematizing in a way that is also useful to me in my own research.

While I never explicitly discussed these issues with Thomas at length, towards the end of the course I asked him if he felt there was an imbalance in terms of whom, most often, felt comfortable injecting their personal narratives into the class discussion. He cut to the chase: "You think I accommodate the Black women more?" I told him that maybe yes, though not in a way that felt exclusionary to others. He thought about it.

> What you're asking more generally is, can white kids talk race in my class in the same ways that people of color can. And I would say no. That's because the history of race produces all sorts of differentials and that's the point of the whole thing (laughs). The fact that in the class you have a situation where black women can put their stuff on the table and white people have to check themselves, that might be a sign of progress. That certain folks are being heard in ways they have not before and certain folks are on notice and listening in ways they have not before. That's not necessarily a bad thing. But it may not be a fair thing either so how do I deal with that pedagogically? For me the work of teaching does not begin at 1 and end at 3 pm. I have done a lot of work with Kevin outside of the classroom that has supported him. Same with Deyanira and a number of students. Me and Keli'i have spoken extensively about the challenges he faces in my class and generally here. You can create more intimate moments of pedagogical intervention to do some of that work that can't always be done in the classroom sometimes. If in the classroom context Jessica and Deyanira and Adina get more time to speak from the personal to the intellectual than Kevin might, that doesn't mean Kevin does not get pedagogical space to do that.

Thomas had described his teaching style as "much more symphony than jazz." This brought to my mind a pedagogy that improvises on known themes. This answer brought that characterization to mind. While Thomas always came into the class intending for students to focus on a few specific, important ideas in the text, he allowed for the discussion to be freely formed, and for students to take the lead: "It is humbling to see but they clearly can learn without me being in the room." He told me that every year, students seemed to bring up things he had never considered: "Every week students say

things I have not considered before, that make me rethink my ideas. I am really interested

in that reciprocity." In the case of this complicated issue of classroom participation, his

improvisational style and his inclination to be creative in how he addressed the issue

came through clearly.

His teaching style also manifested in his choice to remain mostly quiet, and in the

moments when he chose to interrupt. He did so to inject insight or context that would

clarify important ideas for students, or to correct common mistakes, or to synthesize and

move the discussion along. He also intervened "when I see a tension developing that is

not going to be productive." Eschewing the head of the table, he tended to alternate which

side of the table he sat on, so as to near different students. That said, Thomas seemed to

underestimate the considerable power of his personality and his willingness to share it

openly with students—something Evans felt shaped the discussion significantly.

> To say tell us he was a lifelong activist, to play that card on top of the adult card, then the professor card, the person who knows material more card (laughs), the person in a suit card, that is a lot of compounded privilege to activate in the room. I wouldn't say it was "heavy handed" because the class was so meaningful and important to so many people but it was complicating.

The metaphor of the jazz ensemble also held meaning for how the students

connected with and worked with one another. Through setting the stage for and then

supporting his students to maintain an engaged and deep discussion, Thomas facilitated

collective meaning making. The most salient trait of the classroom experience was

interaction and discussion. It was visible in the way students referenced the ideas of their

peers as concrete and known influences on their own learning, from Lyor's noticing of

Deyanira and Jessica's knowing looks, to Warner's awareness of interpersonal tensions,

to Adina's observations about the intellectual risks that she and her colleagues, including Kevin, were learning to take when they "pushed themselves." This also allowed students to get to know one another and to build a community. Still, this vibrant space was one of challenge as well, particularly because, in tense moments, the openness of the discussion increased the risk of tension. An illustrative occasion was the class on *The Confessions of Nat Turner*.

Questions That Raise Our Blood Pressure

We are two weeks before the end of the semester. Over many weeks, Thomas's classroom has developed into an incredibly vibrant learning community where, as Jessica says, "everyone brings their whole selves." By this point, students have read and dealt with complex texts, including personal narratives by enslaved people, as well as texts by critical scholars. They have disagreed vehemently, and they have struggled through complicated questions. They have also come to know one another as colleagues. As Warner puts it, they even know in advance "what other people are gonna say." As a special treat, the class is meeting back in Kennedy House, this time in a private room adjacent to the dining hall, so tonight's discussion could follow a class dinner, courtesy of Professor Thomas. At this moment, they are struggling. The week's reading is about Nat Turner, the leader of the violent slave revolt of 1831. They are focused on a particularly difficult passage. Deyanira and a colleague who were the discussion leaders for today have brought this provocation: "What is the place of violent rebellion in slavery?" Some students immediately focus on the idea that Nat Turner is akin to terrorists, and his

violent revolt is abhorrent. Others want to explore whether a turn to violence is ever

justified. For the first time, it feels like the trust, patience and empathy these students

generally have for one another is not present. They are clearly getting on each other's

nerves. People's voices are sometimes raised and they talk over one another, unable to

make this or that point. They are tense. A kind of stunted, belabored discussion,

uncharacteristic of the group, takes over. The discussion is slow at first, and eventually, it

stops, to my eyes, most dramatically at the word "sociopath" which emerges in a back-

and-forth between Evans and Kevin.

> Kevin: Wait but… I think we frequently don't look critically look at Turner's inhumanity...
> Evans: What's inhumane?
> Kevin: He enjoys it! He's having a good time! He's a sociopath.

Evans accuses Kevin of speaking without any concern for context, "in a vacuum." Others

agree and vehemently with the "sociopath" comment. Kevin is visibly frustrated in his

attempts to assert he is trying to be objective, not ignore context. It is as if things are just

too heavy to push forward. The violence from Nat Turner's rebellion 180 years ago is a

ghost made flesh in the classroom. It is the fall of 2014 when, one hashtag at a time, we

routinely confront the shooting deaths of unarmed Black people at the hands of police.

When summer protests erupted, some called them riots. It is difficult for students to

engage a text that centers the violence of slavery, at a time when the violence of

contemporary racism looms. But none of what I am thinking, and what I imagine

everyone is thinking, is being said. I realize that learning about race can be difficult no

matter what level of pedagogical or intellectual prowess is in the room; it is difficult

because racism, and its related ideas, like antiracist violence, are difficult to confront.

Professor Thomas abruptly rises from the seminar table and paces over to the wall. His usually steadying energy is gone. I have never seen him nervous in front of students before, so it is striking and obvious to me. He speaks to no one in particular, half-laughing: "I walked up here as if there was a dry-erase board to write on because I just needed to do something, and of course there isn't!" Everyone laughs with him, relieved that some tension is released by his naming it. The silence thus broken, Thomas returns to his seat and addresses the students. He tells them that while "this is really hard," all the questions they've worked through this semester have been hard.

> The fact that something is hard doesn't mean anything, except we work harder to understand and talk about it. We often want our revolutions to be neat, to be without violence and they are not. We construct ideas about crime and violence as immoral, but is slavery the biggest crime? Isn't slavery one big crime scene? These questions that raise our blood pressure around the table are the point of this class.

Ever the observer, Lyor immediately recognizes what Thomas is asking: re-engage. He speaks first, and makes eye contact around the room, something all the students had stopped doing earlier: "I don't think we're here to judge Nat Turner specifically… Whether he was crazy or not… I think, we should consider the bigger issue of revolt and what does it take to resist." Other students chime in, and the commitment that these students have for their class and their learning, seems to wash over the room. Kevin offers a clarification: "I just don't want him off the hook. My idea about him being a sociopath was less about the violence, the ends, and more about the means… And also, he thinks God is talking to him, so you know, maybe he is a bit crazy?" Slowly, more re-

enter the discussion. Jessica suggests that what is hard is to consider that not all Black

liberation struggles are easy to uphold.

> His heroism is kind of filthy and we don't know, as Americans, how to deal with
> this. How do I stand on the shoulders of a Nat Turner like I stand on the shoulders
> of an MLK?

Deyanira, one of many who had been nodding vehemently as Jessica spoke, speaks up:

"But you already do, right? We all do." By now, the students are back together, working

through the problems the text raises. Evans suggests it may be about "the difference

between how we see systemic violence and individual violent acts" and Adina agrees

with him.

> You think Nat Turner is crazy because he does and thinks what he does. With the
> system of slavery though so many people bought into a crazy system of violence.
> It horrified me to hear about him talking about killing babies but I was
> desensitized to all the dead babies that slavery produced.

This thread, about the difference between individual and systemic violence in the context

of slavery, captivates the whole group and they engage it for the remainder of the class. It

is a lively, complex, dark and difficult discussion.

At the end of the class students do not want to leave. They are not particular

talkative. They look like they just went through something and are unsure how to go back

to their ordinary evening. Almost one by one, they check in with Thomas before they

slowly walk out. "Wow, that was deep," someone says. "That was a tough class… but

great," says someone else. "Can I get a hug?" jokes one student. Some laugh and the

laughter sounds relieved and surprised at what is possible. Jessica and Deyanira stay to

speak with Thomas outside. I join them as they talk for about ten minutes, without pause.

Deyanira reflects on the intensity that she was feeling "the whole time" in the class, and how astounded she was that such "a real and raw discussion" was possible. "It was beautiful to me"—she repeated that word, "beautiful" more than once.

When I reflect on this discussion later, I note that what had begun as Jessica and Deyanira's reflection on the Nat Turner class had become a reflection on the entire semester. The students had used words to describe the class that encapsulated what I had observed over the semester: engaged, brave, respectful, learning from each other. From the first day, Thomas had set the stage for the classroom to be a space of intellectual rigor and emotional and interpersonal connection—through sustained and deep discussion, mingled. This had been the signature of the academic grounding for this group of students. Taking their cues from Thomas, they had then sustained this kind of academic community and felt comfortable challenging themselves and others, while also being empathetic in ways that supported deep learning.

Part II: Journeys Into Black Political Thought

The Philosophy Professor

The first question I asked Professor Isaac Stone was about his motivation for teaching the course on Black Political Thought.

> There are two reasons. I started doing it when I was writing a book about that era in black political thought, and as is often true, people tend to teach courses around things they're working on. I thought this would be a good way to think through these issues with students. Then having done it, and being in a Black Studies department, I felt like we should always have such a course.
>
> *--Why?*

Black political thought is marginalized, especially in terms of philosophical attention to it. Historians have engaged it a fair bit but within political theory and political philosophy it doesn't really get much treatment. But it's an important tradition because it has much to be said for it, even if there is much to be said against it, which I think there is. That's the reason why I think it is important. And since it is marginalized, I think you need someone who knows it well and is sufficiently sympathetic to teach it in a way that students can see not just its flaws but grasp its power.

As I waited for students to fill the classroom, I reflected on how both he and Thomas thought similarly about the need to center the black experience within an academic cannon that, even now, often marginalizes it. Unlike Thomas, a self-proclaimed scholar-activist, Stone felt it was important for students to engage in intellectual inquiry with full commitment and an understanding of its value in and of itself.

These are not ideas that are only important if you can apply them, say, as a student activist. These are persistent and complicated questions that folks have explored for a very long time, ideas that are important within the tradition of ideas that we study in Philosophy.

At Gable, students often gushed about Stone and casually called him "brilliant" as a first descriptor. They often commented, with humor, on his ability to stump them with complicated questions. One student referred to them as "answer-less" to express how challenging the questions could be. Stone felt that his questions were in fact, very answerable, but often struck students as challenging given their lack of practice with critical reading.

Sometimes I think maybe the question is too difficult. Sometimes it's probably a failure on my part that I don't realize that questions that seem obvious to me, having been thinking about stuff a long time, just don't seem obvious to students. But I do feel like it is their responsibility not only to do the reading but also do it in an engaged way so that they are thinking with the text, and asking questions of the text, and challenging it in their minds. So they already should have things to say--just having read. If they are reading in a way that's not just skimming it and expecting me to come and explain it, it shouldn't be that hard to have something to respond.

Interestingly, Stone described his pedagogical style as "clinical," meant to be a metaphor that both spoke about dispassionate, objective intellectual inquiry and his expectations that students take responsibility for their own learning.

> Because I study race, class, black political thought, and so on, and have been doing it for 25 years or however long (laughs), I'm clinical like the surgeon where it's the hundredth time they've done the procedure and their passions are not engaged, their emotions are not engaged. I just do the job of seeing, ok what can we learn from this? For the students, I am sure that, if they are listening to Amiri Baraka do his thing, or Huey Newton says something really provocative, for them it is really emotionally engaging or challenging. But for me it's not. [It is also] clinical in the sense that as that surgeon I don't have a good bedside manner. I'm not so much attending to their emotional reactions, probably in a way that I should. I let them sit with it and I want them to resolve it however they resolve it.

Stone began his first lecture by promising that he would share his PowerPoint slides—sparse outlines not meant to replace his substantive comments--with students after the lecture and that they needed not take frantic notes. This fell on deaf ears as multiple laptops were already opened and ready. As soon as he began to speak, a recognizable hum of keyboard tapping washed over the room. He laid out his motivations for teaching the course by explaining the on-going frustration that he felt with having the material isolated in a specific course. "These thinkers are crucially important to modern political thought, period" he stressed, yet were not studied in philosophy departments, including his own. He echoed his comments to me in the interview.

> To be clear, Huey Newton is not important because he is a Black Nationalist if he even is that. He is important given the innovative ways he is thinking about political power, democracy, and Marxism.

The same argument could be made, Stone argued, of all the authors in the syllabus, which he began to briefly outline for students: David Walker, Martin Delany, W.E.B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, Frantz Fanon, Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, Amiri Baraka, and Huey Newton.

Stone told students that a related frustration he had was that, when given any attention, these thinkers were often lumped under generic terms, such as "Black Nationalism," in a kind of slippage that belied the very important diversity among them. He explained that in his attempt to redress this in the course, he would be taking students through a kind of systematic, objective appraisal of these ideas: "In this class we are going to give these authors and texts the kind of attention that they require." He stressed modes of engaging with ideas that he said came specifically from the discipline of philosophy but connected to the nature of the course—a course on ideas. Students, he said, would be reading in a "generous but critical" manner: "Unlike the rest of the world," he said with a smile, students would not fall for the trap of trying to "define" a whole tradition of thought. This was, for him, an impossible but also foolish task. The appropriate task, and core learning goal for the class, would be for students to gain the ability to "characterize" these thinkers: "Within the parameters of their ideas, as they lay them out, what are the good aspects of the argument they are making, and what doesn't quite hold up?"

The more Stone became engaged with what he was saying, the more he became enthusiastic and animated—visibly warming up to why teaching the course, "for the 5th or 6th time," still mattered. His hand relaxed into a kind of black vernacular set of gestures.

There is a choreography and cadence of hand gestures that accompanies black vernacular speech. It is as elusive to describe, as it is easy to recognize if you know it. I knew it, and I imagined some of the students knew it too. Stone was cutting the air with his hands, as if to say, let *me break it down like this,* as he reinforced his argument.

> These ideas are integral to modern political theory, *period*. And if you don't know them, then you don't know modern political thought, simple as that. You just *don't.*

Then, before he closed and let students go, Stone broached one more topic, in a softer voice.

> I should probably tell you something about myself. I am an introvert. And when I am listening attentively and thinking hard, I tend to look away from you. It's just what I do to hear myself think. But over the years, I have been told that this comes off as aloofness.

He assured students that "aloof" couldn't be further from the truth and he wanted to make sure they understood that. Smiles and nods washed over the students, who had all stopped typing and looking at their screens, and now were looking at him, this incredibly imposing professor, the admitted introvert. It was the end of the class but it felt like they were seeing him for the first time.

Letting Go of the Clutter of Every Day Life

While Stone had laid out for students the form and function of his "clinical style," responsibility of reinforcing it during the weekly discussion sections that complemented

the lecture, fell to Arthur, the teaching assistant[16]. A PhD student in Political Science, Arthur had taught the course with Stone twice before. By now, the two instructors were attuned to one another's styles and did not require intensive teaching preparation together. Arthur told me he thought that he and Stone "mostly agree on the key points" and he appreciated being left to lead his sections alone: "He lets me do my own teaching, develop my own thing, which I appreciate." For his part, Stone actually was aware that they had different approaches and even emphases, but he felt that this intellectual diversity was a benefit to students.

> I have known him a long time and we do have a different sensibility but I more or less give him free reign. I understand that he is trying to take up the practice and lead his own classroom in his own way. And also, I think the students can get something out of the contrast in our approaches.

To my eyes, despite their differences, Arthur was an extension of Stone's personal style in many ways. On our way to the weekly discussion section, Arthur and I would often walk by his fellow graduate students going in to teach as well. With few exceptions, these graduate students would be in jeans, t-shirts and eventually, as the weather allowed, even flip-flops. Unlike them, and very much like Stone, Arthur dressed well to teach. He was never too formally dressed, but most often had a blazer on. In my field notes, I noted "young Frederick Douglass" as shorthand for Arthur's overall look, hair included, and a compliment to his style.

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[16]Arthur taught 3 separate discussion sections, given the size of the class. Each had about 10-12 students. While I visited them all initially, I only observed all the meetings of one section.

Arthur exuded the cool teaching assistant's mix of great knowledge and great approachability, but did not allow comfort to take away from the seriousness of discussion. Still, he seemed more at ease being informal, if the occasion merited it. At the beginning of the first discussion session, Arthur began by restating a lot of Stone's recommendations about rigorous, philosophical, critical inquiry. He said that in order to achieve this, students must try and come to section well read, ready to engage. He spoke about the culture of Gable University, where students were often over-committed, which sometimes led them to skip or skim readings. Students smiled and nodded, recognizing themselves in his words. Aside from preparation, Arthur told students they should come ready to "let go of the clutter of everyday life," which he located by waving his hand in the direction of the door.

To help with that, Arthur said, they would begin every section, starting with that one, with a short exercise. "Close your eyes and place your hands lightly on the table." Surprised at this turn in his opening remarks, I kept my eyes open to see if students would do it. Students briefly smiled and looked furtively at one another, before doing just that. I joined them. In the dark, I heard Arthur lead us through a brief meditative moment: "Let's take a deep breath in and when you breathe out, let go of all the craziness from the outside and center ourselves in our discussion." He then asked us to take two more deep breaths after that. When eyes were reopened, the energy in the room had palpably shifted.

Arthur later explained to me that the breathing exercise was a tool to help students to further recognize the clear distinction between their academic classroom and other spaces.

> I want them to know a classroom is an opportunity, distinct from everything else
> they have going on, to show up and to ground themselves in what they are
> reading. And it's hard so I hope the short meditation helps with that.

    One creative approach Arthur took in the early weeks to further support students in immersing themselves happened when the class was reading Frederick Douglass. Students read a debate, in which Douglass and his opponent argued about the repatriation of freed black people to Africa. Arthur and Stone were aware that students often projected their contemporary views onto 19th century thinkers and Stone considered this a recurrent challenge in the course.

> Every year I teach this, I have a hard time getting them to take the 19th century
> people seriously. Because for them multiculturalism is so obvious, it grates on
> them to read people who don't believe that stuff. But I want them to think about
> their multiculturalist and cultural relativist commitments in light of different
> challenges, different contexts.

Arthur structured the discussion as a mock debate with this challenge in mind. Students were asked to prepare the Frederick Douglass argument, while Arthur would embody his opponent. As section began that day, with visible amusement and interest, Arthur and his students only spoke in character.

    Observing the debate and reflecting on it later with students and with Arthur, it became clear that, as a pedagogical tool, it was very effective. The debate activity allowed students, irrespective of their own views and identities, to speak in the first person. This gave them a heuristic for truly thinking from another person's perspective. And, by constraining students to the arguments on the page, it forced students to stick to the ideas in their proper context. All of this was in keeping with Stone's directives that students should be "clinical," and assess arguments critically but dispassionately, "on their

own merits." As students spoke in the first person to express the arguments of black thinkers, as they tried them on for themselves, they seemed to understand the ideas better. This perspective taking seemed to better allow students to consider, in a rigorous way, ideas that they had initially dismissed.

Despite observing these rich pedagogical moments, and discussing their resonance with students, my previous experience in Thomas's close-knit discussion seminar led me to believe that students in Stone's course were not getting enough time for discussion. They did not probe the more complex or controversial ideas in the texts in the lecture; most students were quiet when Stone asked questions of the room. In the weekly discussion section, students spoke up, but the time was limited to about 40 minutes of real engagement. Overall, students had less interaction and discussion with one another, and this created less interpersonal trust and familiarity. This contrast between the two courses was crystalized for me as when I observed Stone's students engage with the issue of violence in the work of Frantz Fanon.

Concerning Violence

Last semester's "Nat Turner class" is very much on my mind as I sit to observe Professor Stone's class on Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*. My experience watching Thomas's students struggle with issues of violence suggests to me that Fanon will be an even more challenging undertaking. Fanon is the first of the authors in this class who directly discusses violence not as a last or possible resort, but as intrinsic to the anticolonial project. Fanon is also more contemporary, writing about the Algerian war

and modern colonialism, and thus bringing Middle Eastern conflict and terrorism to students' minds.

> *The naked truth of decolonization evokes for us the searing bullets and bloodstained knives, which emanate from it. For if the last shall be first, this will only come to pass after a murderous and decisive struggle between the two protagonists. That affirmed intention to place the last at the head of things… can only triumph if we use all means to turn the scale, including, of course, that of violence…[The person] who decides to put the program into practice, and to become its moving force, is ready for violence at all times. From birth it is clear to him that this narrow world, strewn with prohibitions, can only be called in question by absolute violence. (Frantz Fanon, "Concerning Violence," The Wretched of the Earth).*

Class begins with Stone's lecture and orientation to the topic, as always. For Stone, it is important to guide students as to what the terrain of inquiry looks like—as he puts it, "what's at issue." He does not do this to restrict students; on the contrary, Stone sees his lectures as providing the context that will allow students to ask the more critical questions. Over the past few weeks, I have noticed that Stone does not always pause for class discussion at the same time during lecture, nor does he stop for the same duration. He prefers to shift between quick probing questions to more sustained stretches of discussion, as the topics direct him. Despite knowing that students are often reluctant to speak in the large class, I fully expect students to have a lot to say today because the text is so provocative. Given how early in the class he turns to discussion, it appears to me that Stone expects the same. He asks a deliberately open-ended question: Why is violence, according to Fanon, legitimate?

To our mutual surprise, students are not quick to engage. Most avert eye contact with him and look to their laptops. After an awkward minute, Stone smiles then nudges:

"Nothing?" The class slowly warms up as a few people begin to talk, including Tchaiko (b), a student who usually speaks up. She suggests that anticolonial violence is legitimate, and Jake's (w) hand shoots up, and he almost begins to speak before being called on. He sounds nervous, angry, or both: "There is a huge difference between soldiers fighting colonizers in a war and people blowing up a café, which is what he is actually talking about." Jake does not look at Tchaiko as he says this, but at Stone. From behind him, Tchaiko, clearly frustrated, responds: "It's not so clear cut." She is seated a few rows behind Jake and, like him, seems to rely on the classroom layout to not make eye contact. In my observation, the tension in their exchange is made thicker by this avoidance of face-to-face interaction. The rest of the students are silent. Stone lets a silent minute go by and tells the class to take their break.

During the break, Stone walks over to tell me that it is confusing that students are "not biting. Usually Fanon is a good discussion." He speculates that maybe it is because Jake and Tchaiko's disagreement illustrated "connections between Fanon and the contemporary Middle East situation" that he had alluded to in his opening remarks. When students come back from break the discussion doesn't pick back up and Stone doesn't push. Even Arthur's discussion section in that week is slow to warm up and unusually meandering—the discussion is not deep. The majority of the students are quiet despite Arthur's adept attempts at facilitation. I wonder if the awkward moments in the large lecture made it less easy to engage this text for students. While students are more vocal in Arthur's section than in class, they have not become a particularly close-knit group. It

seems plausible that Fanon's revolutionary violence is too tall an order for a discussion among strangers. After all, even Thomas's students, with their considerable rapport, stumbled when it came to Nat Turner. As discussion section wraps up, it feels as though Arthur and the students did not get far or deep enough for the first time.

In my view, the Fanon discussion had been short-changed due to the controversial nature of the text. For Stone, who had a long view of teaching the course, it had more to do with class size and the culture at Gable itself.

> They are very self-conscious about their peers' opinions of them and are often reluctant to speak. Unless you have a really small group and can really develop rapport and trust between them. They should push past that. I think sometimes they can be more passive about their own education than they should be.

Confirming Stone's impression, Jake (w) reflected that the size of the lecture made it intimidating to risk "sounding silly" by speaking up. The size also made it hard to "connect with people" and this made real disagreements, like the one he had in the large class with Tchaiko, "hard to talk through." Given the challenges of the large class, and the existence of a weekly discussion section, students just opted to be quiet.

> You sort of just get used to the rhythm of mostly listening in class, because that is easier, and really discussing in section. So when he cuts to discussion in the large class, you're not really prepared. You don't know all the people and you feel on the spot so you think let someone else take that question.

Contrary to what I thought, however, the challenges with broaching more difficult topics, like Fanon, in discussion did not mean that Stone's students did not engage with that content deeply. In their interviews, all of Stone's students shared individual reflections that they did not express in discussion that attested to their deep engagement

with the ideas in the course[17]. In this way students helped me understand how the

classroom experience extends some time and some distance from the classroom itself.

Stone deliberately fostered a classroom experience that supported autonomous

intellectual inquiry and engagement with the authors' ideas—the making of one's own

mind--as a matter of disciplinary and personal inclination. He wanted to model for

students a way to be intellectually—but not emotionally or politically--involved and

passionate.

> I think pedagogically I keep it kind of simple. I just think you try to create a spirit of open inquiry and I try to do it by example. Nothing's off limits. You can ask any kind of question, you can disagree, you can run a line of argument that seems outlandish. Because I mean, the whole course is about running outlandish lines in a way (laughs)! So that already opens up space, the fact that they are reading people who are saying these quite radical things. I try to make them feel that they can make any kind of comment and we'll take it up in a serious way.

This was in keeping with Arthur's direction that students let go of the "clutter of everyday

life." Both Stone and Arthur pushed students to fully engage with the ideas in the texts

but to do so in intellectually rigorous ways that were not beholden to present realities and

previous assumptions. Students told me they resonated with Stone's dispassionate

academic approach, especially since issues of race were emotionally and politically

charged. Isabelle (w) appreciated it, especially given her previous experiences:

> I took a class about gender and all the professor did was bring headlines from the news. It felt like we were not really working on the texts. I want to be challenged in a class to really rethink things and an overly political or emotional class doesn't let me do that.

---

[17] See following chapter.

Stone, she felt, modeled and taught the benefits of intellectual inquiry that abstracts "out

of real life" for the sake of analysis and understanding:

> I feel like there are some [political] commitments that you come to a topic like racial inequality that I feel can really inhibit you intellectually. And I think Isaac Stone has been really amazing at not doing that and really making this about the material, all the different approaches you can take to the subject matter. There's been no proselytizing. In some ways he really teaches you to abstract out of real life so you can think. Maybe some people think there are problems with that but that is what I want from a classroom environment.

The emphasis in Stone's class, which he emphasized early on and modeled

throughout, along with Arthur, was in getting students to take the perspective of the

thinkers they were reading—thinkers who elaborated complex, nuanced, and

contextualized visions for racial justice. The engagement with the ideas should be

passionate and creative, according to Stone, but it should not be ahistorical or so political

that present-day concerns would prevent students from gaining a real understanding of

them. A certain dispassion and analytical rigor, and a certain self-regulation of emotions

were hallmarks of the academic grounding in Stone's course. As exemplified with the

relatively lack of depth in the discussion of Frantz Fanon's thesis, more emotionally

charged topics did not always get discussed in the group but, as interviews revealed,

students engaged with them deeply, as individuals. Nonetheless, given the lesser amount

of discussion in the lecture and the shorter duration of the weekly discussion sections,

students in Stone's students did not become as close-knit a community as Thomas's

students. While some more talkative students like Will and Jake seemed very comfortable

speaking up in section, other students seemed to struggle, especially faced with more

complex issues. Those issues, according to Isabelle (w), were harder to discuss with "strangers."

> We've not talked about the fact that this is a class on race and we're in a racial, a racially charged school, like, institutional environment. And I mean I don't know if it would help to raise that at the beginning of the semester and say, look it's important in this class for us to be really open, not only about the ideas that we're talking about but personal experience with each other. I don't know if that would really help, but we are strangers to each other still, you know?

Part III: Academic Grounding as the Core of The Classroom Experience

Each professor's pedagogical style and personality informed how they set the stage for academic grounding. While both courses were academically rigorous and very demanding, Thomas promoted an academic space where intellectual engagement mixed with the personal and the emotional. This suited his political and passionate scholar-activist personality. Stone's cerebral and more introverted nature created for his students an intellectual space that supported an objective and more philosophically detached engagement. Despite distinctions, both professors—and Arthur—provided students with learning communities where they could productively learn about race.

Academic grounding, the blending of academic content and the culture, works through providing a group of students with both common and solid ground—a sense of the goals and the terms of engagement with race-related content. As Kenneth put it, it gives students "a lifting."

> I think the text opens people up. So it gives you a lifting [gestures as if to make a support structure in the air] like a place to start from. Whereas if you have a random conversation with no context, there's just so many aspects you could talk

about race productively. I feel like a text can kind of contextualize and say [we're looking at] this aspect. It gives you somewhere to go.

Will (w) also spoke of academic grounding in my view, when he referenced the "concrete basis" for engagement that the class provided.

I think the class, the historical and textual stuff, gives people a way to engage without endangering their politics maybe? I think a really cool thing about the class is that it provides some sort of concrete basis for people to have discussions that maybe change their minds rather than just kind of presenting ideologies. No one is persuaded by that usually. But maybe they can be persuaded by thinking about it on their own terms

Kevin (w) saw the distinctive quality of the classroom—what I identify as academic grounding—in clear contrast with the kinds of activities that take place during orientation week, what he termed "social justice training."

Students should be required to take a course like Thomas's. Because I think it's really different than going to social justice training. It is sustained throughout the year and it feels less like you're being assaulted for being who you are, and instead you are learning to understand things.

--Why?

Because there's an adult there, the professor. And because you're grounding it in a consistent subject, academic content, instead of this big picture, "social justice" which you know, great concept, but what does it mean in practicality? What are we really talking about?

Consistently, students described the classroom as providing a holding environment that supported learning about race. They referred to it as a common basis, a solid set of parameters, feeling grounded in content, and so on. That combination of academic culture and content, that is experienced by students as "the vibe" or "power" of the classroom, is what I call academic grounding. It was differently established or

defined by Thomas and Stone, given their different personal styles and pedagogies, but it consistently provided students with a connected thread, linking classroom culture or ways of being with classroom content. Students seemed to draw or rely on academic grounding to dig deeper and be more empathetic—essentially, to learn.

Drawing from Academic Grounding to Build Empathy and Community

Another important value of academic grounding is that it fostered a sense of intellectual community. In their classrooms, students had a sense that they were in an academic community that was diverse but could sustain discussions of race without conflict. This intellectual connection allowed students to access more interpersonal empathy. Research suggests that interpersonal relationships—such as friendships, dating, and residential life generally, have a greater impact on students' attitudes about race and that the effects of classroom learning about race are not significant after college (for notable exceptions, see Bowman (2016), Jayakumar (2008)). My observation of Thomas's and Stone's students showed me that having a deep engagement with issues of race with their peers was important for students. Through the exchange of ideas about race, students experienced being known and getting to know each other in meaningful ways. In both courses, students reflected that this kind of productive exchange about race was rare at Gable University. In her last interview, Adina referenced limitations she encountered dealing with issues of race, even in the company of close friends and roommates she loved.

> So we got into this discussion about race and what it feels like to be ostracized or bullied as a student because of your race. My roommate who is Jewish, white, upper middle class was saying, "I can empathize because I was bullied for my learning disorder." And I said, "No you can't and it's kind of arrogant to say you

can understand what racism feels like." And I said, and I know this went a bit overboard with them, but "I went to a school where I was the only person of color with a bunch of white kids in the middle of nowhere and I was called bucktooth frizzy hair nigger" to my face. I told him and it was shocking to him. But I would love to see him in a class with Prof. Thomas, in that situation. Because you had so many people coming from so many different places but yet there was discussion that was able to happen without people being pejorative. That doesn't happen in dorms, even with people that you love.

Tessa (b), who was not close to any of her colleagues in the discussion section in Stone's course, also reflected on how that setting led her to both extend and experience greater empathy.

> The discussion in the class showed there can be very positive discussion of these issues, and it's possible to have students who can engage and they're not going to offend each other. I remember one guy said something and I definitely wanted to, well I remember I had a strong reaction. But I thought, well we're discussing it, so I can explain my point of view on why I disagree, as opposed to just react angrily. Which is why I think that the university should kind of require classes like this to foster that sort of like, I guess empathy is the word I keep coming back to.

This empathy was not always easy to come by, but students understood that it was necessary for the learning to occur and that it was somehow "fostered" by the classroom, as Tessa said. Part of it was that their professors had set the stage early on for this. As Warner explained: "Prof. Thomas would not tolerate [disrespect], he let us know from day one." Students were therefore primed to give each other respect and space to learn. But part of it was also the result of the students' own efforts. To illustrate the role of empathy in their class (although not by using that term), many of Thomas's students brought Kevin up. Here is Lyor explaining this dynamic that, for him, distinguished the classroom experience from other experiences on campus:

> You respect people. You let them say what they want to say and you take it… there's a task of taking it in less of an emotional way, in more of a rational way… You want to try and analyze on that [intellectual] level. It creates a level of

comfort where you can misspeak like Kevin misspeaks and I don't think anybody thinks he's a racist because he misspoke. Whereas if he said things in a different context it could be more problematic.

Whether in Thomas's class or Stone's class, I saw students extend to one another the kind of empathy that they themselves needed: an understanding that learning required someone be given space to ask questions, and to push themselves. Like Tessa, Jessica also remarked on how she refrained from "jumping down someone's throat" in the context of the class.

> I think I'm a fighter and I have a really strong impulse to fight and to want to push back. And I think that's really appropriate sometimes. But I think I've been sort of learning how to temper what is just a visceral reaction because as a scholar, I think we're entitled to having dissent. And so I have wanted to jump down the throat of some people but I haven't because I've instead tried to sort of rephrase that into an academic pushback when what I'm feeling is an emotional response.

When I asked her, Jessica said she didn't think that empathetic, academic stance translated easily outside of the classroom.

> *-- Does that carry [outside of class] or do you think that is possible [in the classroom] but is not possible in general on campus?*

> That feels hard to me. Talking to the 20 kids in Thomas's class is not like talking to people outside class. I think it takes a specific analytical lens to be willing to look at things like that.

Deyanira also agreed that the classroom inclined her to be more patient and generous with peers when there were tensions. She used a tense moment with Kevin as an illustration.

> He was so defensive because he thought I was calling him racist. I thought about this a lot. I wanted to have a conversation and say, I was not having an adverse

reaction to you; I was having a reaction to what you said. I don't take what you say as a reflection of you but as a reflection of how you perceive a certain thing. We are all here thinking, so we are reacting to each other's thinking, not to each other.

--If you were not in a classroom would you have thought of it in the way you just described? And about reaching out?

I think out in the world, I would have just said, "I am not calling you racist, calm down, relax!" Saying that in a classroom in front of people would make him even more uncomfortable and I don't think that would be fair. Outside I would have said, "I'm not calling you racist," and I wouldn't have thought about explaining it to him.

As students describe it, this empathy took work and was a kind of risk-taking that only made sense to them within the classroom. I asked students in their first interviews to do a free word association: What word comes to mind when I say "classroom discussions of race?" Students were then asked the same question at the end of the class. For Jessica, the first answer had been "hesitation," as she described to me "the extra time" she felt she needed to take to craft her comments about race in most classes. When asked about it at the end of Thomas's class, Jessica reflected on the intellectual courage she saw emerge over the course of the semester.

I think I would say "brave." I think a lot of risks were taken. I think at the beginning of the class I was very critical. I came in with this sort of critical eye on, who's going to say something that sounds crazy? And I think a lot of the tension was coming from people not knowing what to say and not to say, and feeling scared to say the wrong thing. And I think throughout the class we've sort of landed on this feeling that there isn't a wrong thing to say. Because a lot of us said things we wouldn't have said in other spaces. And I think that's what I'm most proud of.

Brave Community: a new perspective on classroom experience in courses on race

The academic grounding that both professors established was sustained by

students, who could follow their cues and lead about what "ways of being" were ideal in

the classroom. Academic grounding provided students with a solid foundation for their

learning: they knew the terms for intellectual engagement and felt they could take risks.

Drawing from a sense of belonging within an academically grounded classroom, students

took on more empathetic and intellectually courageous stances. This led to classroom

experiences that were overwhelmingly judged by students to be positive and productive.

In the case of Thomas's classroom, the intensity and duration and emotional register of

the discussions—and the small size of the class—catalyzed the process I described or

intensified it. Whereas what I observed in Stone I would characterize as an academically

grounded community, I would characterize Thomas's classroom, in part inspired by

Jessica's words, as a brave community. I define brave community as the process—or the

kind of classroom experience—where students draw from academic grounding to develop

empathetic and intellectually courageous stances that support meaningful learning about

race. (In chapter 5, I delve more deeply into brave community as process and teaching

practice.)

These findings resonate with previous research in important ways. The critical

dialogic model defined by Gurin and colleagues identified pedagogy, content and

interaction as key features that supported student learning in the Intergroup Dialogue

courses (Gurin et al., 2013). Similarly, research on race-related pedagogies and race talk

also suggested that a direct and frank engagement with issues of race was ideal, even if

challenging (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009; Paris, 2012; Tatum, 1992) . However, this previous research focused on specialized and, I argue, over determined settings and conditions. The intergroup dialogue courses are highly controlled: the content and its delivery are predetermined to move students from a personal understanding of their own identities onto a facilitated engagement with "hot topics", and the demographics of the course are engineered to provide racial balance. Similarly, many race-focused pedagogies, such as culturally sustaining pedagogy or critical race theory educational models, prescribe that students accept, almost a priori, critical insights regarding the working of structural racism. While understandable and worthwhile, these prescribed approaches are not widely representative of most courses on race that most students might encounter. Further, as pedagogical approaches, they are limited in their application: in the case of IGD because only certain universities have them, and in the case of the race-focused pedagogies, because only certain students (or faculty) might approach them.

In contrast, these findings pertain to "regular" academic classrooms. The professors simply attended to creating a classroom experience conducive to the teaching of their content (history and philosophy content) to all students. They did not orient their pedagogy specifically to students of color or white students, nor did they prescribe what those students should think about race and racism. Therefore, these findings broaden our knowledge of what can happen in every day courses on race where certain pedagogical choices and classroom dynamics occur. They suggest that we can plausibly expect that, given a strong academic grounding, rigorous and engaged students, and relevant content, deep and productive learning about race can happen.

Chapter 4

These Classes Equip Me: Students Learning Deeply about Race

Too often, theoretical ideas regarding race are stated to students as givens that they are expected to understand. Some of these ideas almost become academic catchphrases: structural racism, white privilege, double consciousness, the social construction of race. The students in both courses I studied were able to push beyond that kind of cursory engagement towards real learning. Being present as the students grappled together with complex ideas about race, and listening to them describe their own learning in interviews, offered me insight into the often fleeting phenomenon I call learning about race. As the examples in this chapter illustrate, I observed students taking ideas across the semester and over different discussions, running these ideas past their own preconceived notions, and putting them to use in new ways, in the classroom and beyond. The focus of this chapter is the progression of students' understanding of race throughout the course. I argue that, in both courses, students were able to develop more complex and self-authored race frames. These race frames appear most clearly as students apply them to complicated questions, such as violent resistance and self-defense, anti-white sentiment, cross-racial interactions, campus controversies concerning the legacy of slavery at universities like Gable, and the role of white allies in Black Lives Matter.

To capture students' understanding, I created an interview questionnaire that invited students to reflect with me about their learning in the course. My intention was to have students' thoughts and interpretations complement and inform my own observations (see Appendix A for interview protocols). I planned to ask the same question twice, once

at the start of the course, and then at the end. The first version was to be about

expectations, ("Do you think taking this course could change your fundamental ideas

about race?"), while the second would be reflective ("Did the course change your

fundamental ideas about race?"). In this formulation of my questionnaire, I had been

inspired by Ann Morning's work on the effect of academic learning on college students'

racial conceptualization (Morning, 2009, 2011). During his first interview, Lyor (w) was

the first student to suggest that I amend the question. In his typically thoughtful manner,

he first wrestled with the question silently for a bit, before he answered.

> *Do you think a course like this could change your fundamental understandings of race?*
> Yes, it could. It could. But, I don't know, when you ask if it could change the *fundamental* opinions of race, my mind jumps to something like will it be a huge shift. Whereas I think it's more the subtle stuff that it could change in a lot of ways.

Eventually, other students also answered the question by first rephrasing it or qualifying

their answers. By directing me to rephrase my question, students not only showed me that

I needed to tweak my interview protocol, which I did, but they also showed me that the

kind of thinking about race that they believed the course influenced was not at the level

of "fundamental ideas" or "core beliefs." Consistently, students like Keli'i (n) did not

expect dramatic shifts in their race thinking to occur--they expected more subtle shifts.

> *--Going into a class like Thomas, do you go in thinking it could change your fundamental understandings of race?*
>
> Just because you use the word fundamental, I'm going to say no. A lot of critical race theorists say, although it is a social construction, you cannot escape it, right? Personally that definitely reflects how I grew up. The way you see race as you grow up, you're not going to shake that anytime soon. The fundamental way in which I see race is very concrete for me and that's not changing. The way I conceptualize my own racial framework definitely changes, the way I see the framework changes but I don't think the framework changes, I really don't.

--And is there a benefit to that?

I'd say yeah. Because although the framework is very concrete, and that's not going to change anytime soon, I don't think that dictates the way I conduct myself. I think the way I see the framework plays more into that, into my actions in a day-to-day basis.

As he elaborated, Keli'i helped me see clearly what he and his colleagues were talking about. His words, describing how he "sees" the framework and applies it to "actions in a day to day basis" illustrate well the kind of interpretive and contingent thinking that individuals engage in. Once I analyzed these student reflections, and their careful way of restating then answering my question, I identified that students were reflecting on how they were *framing* race.

In his original formulation, Goffman (1974) defines frames "as tools for interpreting experience." What Goffman convincingly argues is that unlike ideology— which is often stable and imposed by structures outside the individual—frames are contingent and self-constructed. Frames operate like lenses, bringing certain aspects of experience into greater focus and salience and thus supporting individuals' particular interpretations of the world. These interpretations in turn inform individuals' orientations to the world and their behavior. In other words, how people frame phenomena in social life affects how they react (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Frye, 2012; Small, Harding, & Lamont, 2010). In their contingent, interpretive aspect, frames fit within a larger typology of tools that individuals use to make sense of their lives and sociologists study that includes narratives, scripts, and repertoires (Lamont & Small, 2008). In their study of elite white students' attitudes towards race and merit, Warikoo & de Novais (2015) highlighted how different and even contradictory race frames can co-occur and confound

individuals as to what the appropriate actions or conclusions should be. My observations and my interviews with students allowed me to capture the process through which they constructed or developed their race frames within the context of the courses.

By the time I asked the same question at the end of the courses, all students answered in the affirmative. Lyor, who in the first interview had been skeptical, was in the end surprised at how much his thinking had changed.

> *--Agree or disagree: the course made me rethink my understanding of race?*
>
> Agree, yes. It did, definitely. It made me rethink race by making me rethink the way race works.

As in the previous chapter, I will first delve into the ethnographic data in order to describe students' learning journeys, collectively and individually (parts I through III). In part I, I describe moments of students learning collectively to understand the constructed nature of race, first in Thomas's course, then in Stone's course. In Thomas' course, discussion-intensive learning was a weekly occurrence, and the example I provide shows the students constructing understanding of a recurring theme, inspired by an important article. In Stone's course, I show a moment of synergy that occurs during the last discussion section of the semester. It is a moment where students seem to be able to engage with one another and construct knowledge together in a more seamless and productive way than before. I then move on to show, in parts II and III respectively, how students constructed or developed more complex and self-authored race frames. As in the previous chapter, I turn to the implications of these findings in the last part of the chapter. I focus specifically on students' sense that learning about race in the courses empowered them.

Part I: Understanding Race Together

Since It Was Done It Can Be Undone

Fall, 2014. Thomas has placed Barbara J. Fields, along with Paul Gilroy, Walter Johnson and Vincent Brown, at the beginning of the semester, as authors who represent "some of the most important scholarship on race and slavery in the last generation." Together, these authors offer key ideas within the broad theoretical terrain of the class. In Walter Johnson's article, students encounter a critical examination of the concept of agency within historical scholarship on slavery, while in Vincent Brown's article they engage with Orlando Patterson's seminal concept of "social death." Paul Gilroy's work urges students to consider the implications of a cultural and transnational understanding of slavery and race.

Among these important interventions, Barbara Fields' article, "Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America," resonates the most with students. She begins her widely influential article by explaining that the historical archive clearly shows how racism was deployed to sustain the economic system of slavery.

> *Probably a majority of American historians think of slavery in the United States as primarily a system of race relations—as though the chief business of slavery were the production of white supremacy rather than the production of cotton, sugar, rice and tobacco. One historian has gone so far as to call slavery 'the ultimate segregator'. He does not ask why Europeans seeking the 'ultimate' method of segregating Africans would go to the trouble and expense of transporting them across the ocean for that purpose, when they could have achieved the same end so much more simply by leaving the Africans in Africa. No one dreams of analyzing the struggle of the English against the Irish as a problem in race relations, even though the rationale that the*
> *English developed for suppressing the 'barbarous' Irish later served nearly word for word as a rationale for suppressing Africans and indigenous American Indians. Nor does anyone dream of analyzing serfdom in Russia as primarily a problem of race relations, even though the Russian nobility invented fictions of*

their innate, natural superiority over the serfs as preposterous as any devised by American racists.
(Barbara Fields, Race, Ideology and Slavery in the United States, 1990).

The crux of Field's thesis is that when we lose sight of the historically constructed origin of the concept of race, whether in scholarship or in everyday life, we normalize it and reify it. Students return to her argument almost every week. What does it mean to show, through the historical archive, that race was constructed after slavery, to justify slavery? Is it slavery that begets race and not the other way around? If race is so easily revealed to be contingent and constructed, can it be deconstructed? Students also wrestle with Fields' most provocative argument that scholarly engagement with race as if it "has a life of its own" rather than a historical basis actually contributes to the reification of race and the persistence of racism. They ask if they themselves, in the class, are contributing to the permanence of race.

During the discussion of the Haitian revolution about four weeks into the course, students focus on the status of so-called "mulattoes" in the Haitian Declaration of Independence and vision for their new society. As some students argue that biracial people would be automatically given equal consideration, Adina doubts that this could happen "so easily." In her experience, "as a biracial woman, I am never good enough for either side." Inspired by her colleague's "bringing of her whole self" to the discussion, Jessica (b) discloses her family's history of slave ownership in the South (discussed last chapter). Kate (w) speaks up to suggest a direction in which the discussion might go after Adina and Jessica's challengingly personal comments:

> We should take that to make us look beyond, to consider the polarity around race, and what it was about, and the grey areas, what the identities meant in their context.

Taking Kate's lead, students begin a wide-ranging discussion of the fluidity of biracial or

multiracial identities *in The Black Jacobins* and in real life—as Adina's and Jessica's

personal stories had suggested. They then shift to discuss the possibilities and limits of

the constructed nature of race itself. Strategically, Thomas intervenes to synthesize the

ideas floating around the room and make explicit their engagement with Fields' idea:

> Everything you all are saying speaks to what Fields said, as much as some of you
> got pissed about it. Race is a fraudulent fiction in a way, unstable, tied to its
> historical context. It is psychologically and culturally unstable and yet its power is
> like nothing else in the history of the world. So are we perpetuating it by
> discussing it without considering that, as Fields says?

Kevin, impatient with what he saw as Fields' "oversimplification," answers immediately:

> No! Because how is [race] eradicable now? How could we just stop talking about
> it? I don't buy that we can eradicate it that simply, the differences among us that
> stuff matters, those things are real.

Lyor tries to return Kevin and the discussion to a more nuanced place: "Saying something

is real does not mean it's not created or constructed. Just because it's socially created

doesn't mean it's not real." Jessica and Deyanira exchange smiles, which I take to mean

that both are ready to interject here. Deyanira goes first, sounding like a teacher trying to

make the abstract more concrete: "Fields is saying we're not talking about it the right

way," she said emphasizing "right way" before she went on:

> For example, when Gable and other colleges want to talk about diversity instead
> of racial justice for instance. They have a couple black kids in a class of 30 and
> they act like they're not a racist institution, like we're all good, we're done. Fields
> is saying we created this thing and we keep not dealing with it the right way. It's
> just like, really complicated.

Jessica, never too far from her friend's comments, follows. Her comment is one of those where the student almost discovers the significance of what they are saying as they are saying it:

> Yeah, we wrestle with that essay because it's really complicated. I think Fields is saying since it was made once, since it was done, race can be undone.

Adina agrees and sees it clearly: "That's the key to fixing this. It is an ideology and it can change." Laura (w) speaks next, reflecting on the Haitian Declaration of Independence text but also speaking, it seemed, to the current reality: "Maybe the reason why racism persists is because the work that is done is still done within a racist society when creating one outside of that would have been the right thing. Kate (w) agrees, "Part of the legacy is we still grapple with race. Are any of us truly free if still grappling with race?" Keli'i sees a missed opportunity within the story of the revolution: "It's almost that there is a revolutionary moment, this possibility, but then what is recreated strengthens the racial binary all over again."

At this moment, Thomas poses the question that was forming all along: "What would a successful revolution that changes the racial status quo have to look like? What would it have to do?" And before anyone mistakes his rhetorical question for a real one, he answers it himself, wrapping up the day's discussion: "We will continue to ask that."

Weeks later, it is the last class and the initial discussion of contemporary human trafficking around the world shifts to a discussion of contemporary racism. It is December, and the semester has brought numerous protests, as the officers responsible for the killings of Michael Brown and Eric Garner are not indicted. This is the first time

that the outside world is explicitly discussed in the class**.** Fields' thesis is front and

center, once again.

Jessica argues that undoing American racism is difficult but possible, and brings

back her comments from a few weeks before: "Since race was made or constructed, it can

be unmade." This in turn prompted the group to rekindle the discussion they had during

the class on the Haitian Revolution. A familiar dynamic, a back-and-forth between Kevin

and Adina ensues, about the role that education could play in transforming a racist

society. Adina is optimistic.

> I came into college a very conservative student and that's already radically
> changed because of what I am learning. And I argued all [Thanksgiving] break
> with my parents. I walked into the kitchen and my mom asked me, "Do you hate
> that I am white?" I didn't even know what to say to her. But my point is progress
> doesn't need to take time, it could happen tomorrow. You don't need a long time
> you need 3 months at Gable.

 Kevin is pessimistic and thinks his colleague is underestimating the grip that racism has

on society:

> I think that's a bit naïve. I think I have a lot of help in this class for my ideas to
> shift, you know, with new content and great peers and the guidance of Prof.
> Thomas. I have help confronting this history, white privilege and all that. But try
> to tell that to the white person in West Virginia who never sees a black person and
> lives on a few dollars a day, to just say hey your history is not true, you have
> privilege, everything you believe is false, that is counterproductive. You got to
> meet people where they are. The experience we have at Gable is comfortable and
> that helps us learn. If you start by making people uncomfortable, they get
> defensive.

Deyanira rejects the notion that people should be protected: "Why shouldn't people be

confronted with this history of racism? Why should they be made comfortable?" She

notices that Kevin seems a bit defense and adds, "We're not disagreeing, I'm just saying

that doesn't have to be how we do things." Kevin speaks again to restate his previous

point and Lyor interrupts, sounding uncharacteristically exasperated:

> The comfort you feel Kevin is not about being at Gable, and about learning this, it's from your race! That comfort is the difference between white people and frankly everybody else!

The whole class is looking and seems surprised by his forceful tone. Lyor pauses, as if to

calm himself down, then resumes:

> I'm just saying, there is at least a century of African American literature that is sorting through the clusterfuck that Jefferson left behind. His "Manners" chapter alone, the fact that he knew all that and was still racist means you can't be pragmatic and incremental about any of this. Du Bois singlehandedly recounts every mistake made trying to be incremental about shaking up white supremacy. It has to happen some other way! I don't know how but it's not happening incrementally.

At "I don't know how" he throws up his hands and shrugs. There is a short silence then

Kate (w) intervenes:

> Privilege as a word, hits me pretty hard. Kevin discusses caution and I hear that but I hear Lyor too. The day the verdict[18] came out I was on Facebook like everyone but I realized I had not posted. I was thinking, I am implicated. I was scared and cautious. But you can always be mindful, but not cautious, not scared.

In the last ten minutes of class, Evans finally speaks up. He is calmer than his peers, and I

realize he has been unusually quiet the whole time. I know from our interviews that for

Evans, Fields' argument had been a rallying call for the class itself to deconstruct its own

engagement with ideas of race, something he felt disappointed they had not done. He now

does some of that deconstructing himself and tells his peers that they are looking at the

large structural, historical levels, when--

> So much has to do with personal interaction and the sense of our understanding our lives today as a place where we remake the world. We should think about our

---

[18] Kate is referring to the grand jury decision not to indict the officer who killed Michael Brown.

> relationships, how we treat people around you, who are the people around us. We can start by treating one another better here at Gable. This class is not the laboratory, your life is.

As Evans speaks, everyone nods and smiles. With his comment, Evans opens up a possibility that there is something concrete that they can do, immediately, to change the racial status quo in their own lives, even if changing "the broader society" feels difficult or impossible.

The moment feels particular poignant to me because it brings to mind the relationships students had forged over the semester. Together, these students had experienced serious disagreements, gone on emotionally taxing trains of thought, and navigated exhausting interpersonal tensions. Yet, they had also enjoyed many moments of hard earned, shared understanding. I wonder if these relationships, the ones that are new, will last beyond this classroom.

What Do You Mean By Blackness?

Spring, 2015. It is the last day of Stone's class and one of the first warm spring days. The students are elated when Arthur spontaneously says that the discussion section is moving outside to take advantage of the gorgeous weather. The class walks around for a bit, struggling to find a space on the lawn in the middle of campus, as every other class seems to have the same inspiration to sit outside. During this walk, I noticed an unprecedented friendliness among the students. For the first time, students joke and engage with one another. Some even joke around with me, as well, which until then they had made a concerted effort not to do—a wonderful effort on their part to support my researcher positionality.

The day resonates with my many memories of the first warm day on any campus. There is a way in which the combination of the first truly warm weather and the looming end of classes illuminates and warms a campus. Students suddenly appear in spring clothes, t-shirts, shorts, dresses and sandals, showing a bit more of who they are than hoodies and parkas and hats had allowed until then. The warm weather usually comes with an improved rapport among students, even if they have not been a particularly close-knit group. I think this happens because great pressure is finally released and it dawns on students that they have shared a long semester together. We finally find a quiet space and as we sit in a circle on the lawn in the middle of campus, their warmth with each other reminds me of Thomas's class. Given that I have never seen them this seemingly comfortable with each other, I wonder if the tenor of the discussion might change. I reflect that the familiarity I'm witnessing had to be building over the course of the whole semester, but I had not noticed it since it was not explicitly displayed during the focused 50-minute discussion sections.

As Arthur begins with opening remarks, I look at the perfectly blue sky and the manicured lawn, recently retouched and accessorized with additional flowers for upcoming graduation exercises. The scene is idyllic, as if pulled from a Gable admissions brochure: a racially diverse group of undergraduates, led by their charismatic teacher, sit engaged in an intense discussion of Huey P. Newton's "To Die for the People." Students hold their books full of pages marked with post-its and highlighted passages. And yet, as students begin to speak up, the idyllic veneer disappears as they bring up Baltimore, the latest city to be engulfed in an uprising over the arrest, abuse and death of Freddie Gray.

For today, Arthur wants the class to discuss Huey P. Newton's 1970 address to Boston College students. In it, Newton describes "intercommunalism," which he identifies as the new ideological position of the Black Panther Party.

> *Every nation of the world has been violated by the ruling circle of North America, and every nation has thus been transformed. They are no longer nations. The global non-state has been established. The ruling circle has recognized that this is one world. They no longer acknowledge wars, they call them 'police actions.' They say we're having a civil disturbance because the people of Vietnam are rioting. The police are everywhere and they all wear the same uniforms, and all have the same job, which is to protect the interests of the ruling circle… [The Panthers seek to establish] a global group of interdependent socialist communities or "intercommunalism."*
> (Huey P, Newton, Boston College Address, 1970).

Isabelle remarks that the address was directed to an all-white audience of college students, and students reflect on the similarities between that context and their current university. They consider why colleges are historically sites for activism. Arthur pushes the students to consider the tone Newton is using in addressing "that college audience." Jake and Will dialogue between them about how this "philosophical tone" and the "academic tone" is different than the tone Newton and other authors use to talk to "the masses." The class considers why Newton might be so theoretical. "Why so much detail about the foundations of like, Marxism," asks Ellie who, as a first-year, is definitely lost through parts of what is a highly theoretical text. In response, Kenneth suggests that Newton might be doing this deliberately since he is "at a university where students are studying these things." Once again the connection between the text and the present moment is mentioned. Arthur pushes the students to describe "the distinctive argument Newton is making." All the students begin to take turns sketching the ideas.

> He wants to make the process of reasoning and thinking theoretically explicit because it is important.

It's interesting because whereas someone like Du Bois would switch tone and not address the masses in this theoretical language, Newton is involving the people and showing them like, the instruments of reasoning, how to think about the political problem.

"Right. And how are we supposed to think about the problem according to him?" Arthur asks to move the discussion along. Will answers as many nod in agreement: "He's saying, we can adapt better and react better if we clearly understand the situation." At this comment, I recognize that the habit of all these students, including the white students, to speak in the first person to express the perspective of the authors has stuck, and I jot "perspective-taking" in my notes. Arthur agrees and gives them the next question: "How does he diagnose the problem?" Students once again jump into a free-flowing discussion. The discussion is robust, with none of the usual awkward silences. Also, it is not only the usually vocal students who are speaking—everyone is involved. The group is communicating better than ever and I wonder why. Maybe the beautiful weather really did wonders for the class morale, but most likely this is the result of time. It seems reasonable that it takes a group that only meets for about 45 to 50 minutes each week a whole semester to actually get to a place where a robust discussion flows easily.

Constructing their answers to Arthur's question together, students take turns pulling from the text, like actors at a table reading of a script they have already rehearsed. Each student naturally picks up where the previous leaves off:

He thinks the workers, the lumpen is larger than we thought.

With technology now there is more unemployment, so there are more people who we would call the lumpen than traditionally.

Unemployed people are the majority in the inner city.

But every worker around the world is in jeopardy because with technology people have been kicked out of factories.

He is saying that the lumpen proletariat everywhere and black oppressed people are one community.

So a community could be bound by not just race or ethnicity but by what they are fighting or trying to overcome.

At one point, Jake synthesizes for the group:

Basically the idea is that the US empire makes the idea of nation obsolete, this is how he introduces the international solidarity element. Because the empire makes everyone oppressed. He's moving that drive to self-determination to a bigger scale. We're all oppressed by the empire, so that unifies. So then Marxist nationalism rather than the nationalism based on being a race makes more sense. He's readjusting given changing circumstances, diagnosing the problem correctly.

Students look at their texts, and seem satisfied with their collective work. After allowing time for some quick contemplation, Arthur asks the question that I suspect both he and Stone see as crucial to the discussion: "So can we still say he is a Black Nationalist, here?" It takes a few seconds before anyone volunteers to answer. Isabelle asks to "try it out." She is smiling broadly and her colleagues smile back, supportively. I remember Isabelle reflecting during her interviews that she wished she knew her peers in the class better, that they could be in her words "less strangers," and I wonder if today she feels they are connecting better. She restates briefly Newton's arguments and concludes:

…So while he is building this critique that's moving the ideology like we have been saying towards a more international, Marxist direction, and away from blackness, he's still speaking for the Black Panther Party though so, I think, maybe it is still Black Nationalism?

At this, Arthur replies immediately: "What do you mean by blackness?" The students seem surprised by the question. They now look at Isabelle, eager to hear her answer. I reflect in my notes that it feels as though Arthur asks this question about the whole class,

in a sense. Implicit in his question is an underlying questioning of how or why we call something "black," what is "blackness" or "black political thought" or "black nationalism." How do we construct these designations? Isabelle thinks for a bit then answers, her answer sounding a bit like a revelation: "I don't know, exactly." Her comment coincides with the end of the class time, and Arthur seams pleased to dismiss the group on such an open-ended note.

In his remarks on the first day of class, Stone told his students that a goal of the course was to expose them to the vastness and diversity of the black intellectual tradition. In their last discussion section, that learning crystalized for students, as something experienced and understood, as they wrestled with the creativity of Newton's ideas. That discussion also allowed them to probe the entirety of their semester and ask, what characterizes black political thought, per se? Thomas's students engaged with Fields' article and, together, concluded that while race was a social construction, it was an entrenched, almost intractable organizing principle in American life—not easily transformed. Nonetheless, they also considered that meaningful transformation of their own orientations towards race and racism were immediately possible, in their own lives. Thomas's students walked away on the last day with an academically grounded, extensively debated, open-ended set of understandings about race and the possibility of undoing racism. Both examples illustrate how the collective learning in the course allowed students to gain a deep and concrete understanding of race as a constructed thing, a complex thing, an ever-changing thing. In both instances, students' developing understanding of race came alive and was put to practice during the class discussion. These moments from both courses illustrate well the way in which students'

understanding of race was constructed collectively. Below, I turn to how students constructed understanding individually.

Part II: Complex Race Frames

The experience of white students wrestling with black people's alienation and sometimes violent resistance to whites is one of the more powerful illustrations of the development of complex race frames in the data. This does not mean that only white students experienced an increase in the complexity. Indeed, the data show that this was true of all the students who were interviewed and observed (see Appendix B). The legitimacy of racial separatism or segregation and of violence as a form of resistance and self-defense were important themes in both courses. These were generally difficult issues to confront for all students, who overwhelmingly upheld anti-violent and integrationist positions. The experience of white students that I highlight is illustrative in that it shows students wrestling with these ideas over the course of the semester—finding them initially abhorrent and then gradually coming to understand or even support them. In Thomas's class, as we saw in the previous chapter, the students wrestled with the moral and political implications of Nat Turner's violent uprising in ways that tested the classroom dynamic. In Stone's class, Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* and various readings on Black Power provided instances where white students had to confront anti-white sentiment.

These ideas were particularly challenging for white students, of course. In order to engage with the possibility that separatism or even violence could be legitimate responses, white students had to adopt the perspective of the authors or of their peers of

color who, in discussion, were sympathetic to these ideas in the texts. My observation of

discussions and my analysis of their interviews indicated that in having to do so, they had

to develop more complex race frames. They had to consider the legitimacy of violent

resistance and racial separatism not in vacuum, and not from their vantage point as

whites, but considering arguments by black people—authors or peers--regarding how to

resist racial oppression. This process was profound and often surprising for them.

Through the class, Jake (w) came to understand the separatist tenets of Black Nationalism

that earlier had "turned him off" given his lifelong commitment to racial integration and

to the ideal of a multiracial democracy.

> It seems that Black Nationalism is a pretty rational response to problems. It's not
> like as a set of ideas it doesn't have flaws. But it felt like the spirit behind it could
> be, somebody could have written about what is happening in Baltimore. And say
> you know, we're part of a society that's failing us and we need to create an
> economic [structure] that can help improve the Baltimore [inner city] because
> American society as a whole is not doing its part. Any of these arguments we
> were reading, seemed to me like they weren't just of an era for an era. They could
> have been written about conditions that are still around today.

Like Jake, and indeed like many white Americans, Isabelle grew up rejecting any notion

that people of color should seek separate spaces and exclude white people from antiracist

struggle. For her, this was a clearly problematic idea insofar as racial integration and

collaboration were the ultimate goals. She reflected on how the class texts and

discussions helped her complicate her understanding.

> Same with Fanon's ideas about the effect of racism and how white culture can be
> toxic. I understand it now but a couple years ago I would have whole-heartedly
> been like, "No!" (laughs). But now I felt, "Wait, I'm not alarmed, that's interesting,
> I would have been really alarmed by this before." Yeah, that is strange I guess. I
> think that was originally my response to a lot of things, my first reaction used to
> always be "That's self-defeating and I wanna help", you know? But I think there's
> been a process, through the class, to try and see it through others' eyes. And
> listening to those kinds of arguments, and saying ok, that makes sense to me.

Like Jake and Isabelle, Will also developed, through the class, a more complex

understanding of the idea that black people might be right to resist, even violently. When

discussing the Fanon readings and lamenting that the class did not probe them more

deeply, "because this idea of violence seems very important," Will thoughtfully

elaborated on the difficulty and necessity of confronting the issue of violence.

> There are a few different claims that people make about how African Americans
> should go about getting justice. Integration claims, separatism claims in different
> ways and then sort of, 'no we just have to kill them' claims (laughs). I remember
> when we were finishing Fanon in section I felt, wait we should talk about this a
> bit more. That idea to me seems very important and provoking. It does seem to be
> the case that it is very hard for any minority group to create equal terms without
> power and how do you gain power? Maybe through violence. Following the logic
> on that for a bit is important. If you follow the logic it does seem kind of right.
> And the implications for that are like, weird, because it's violence. But it might be
> in some sense, justified.

Will had already laughed at his own "we just have to kill them claims" phrase, and here

he laughed again, at the irony that, as a white person, he was arguing that violent

resistance to whites might be a legitimate means for black people to assert their rights. I

asked him if Stone's class had brought him to these realizations.

> Yeah, I think it has changed how I see things. The perspective, the historical
> perspective gives you insights we are reluctant to have about ourselves, right?

> *--How?*

> I think we can see conditions in the past that always feel somewhat removed from
> us, particularly on the subject of race. It's inescapable as a white person to sort of
> believe we've gotten better and that creates a distance between how people in the
> past were and how we operate today. I feel I have different beliefs and values than
> white people [in the past] so it's easier for me to not just condemn them but
> separate myself from them. What this class allows you to do is think more clearly
> about people who have different positions and beliefs like Fanon. That is easier
> than it is to take that on if there's some sort of contemporary call for violence,
> because we feel insecure about that. It's like, [the class] gives us freedom to think

about whether Fanon was right or wrong. The stakes are diminished because they already played out. Whereas contemporarily the stakes are unclear, they are our own, and it is our future.

Will's comments reminded me of Stone's insistence that his students be able to assess the arguments made in the texts "on their own terms." Will was certainly doing that, but he was also remarking on how the class allowed him some distance from the topic, and that this distance gave him a way to consider Fanon's thinking such that it appeared "justified." Thinking about violence as directed at white people at some historical distance, in Fanon's text, allowed Will to have "insights about himself" that he would be generally reluctant to have. This more complex framing influenced how Will saw the contemporary context as well. In his mid-term paper he predicted:

> As the racial condition of America again appears untenable, as black people die at the hands of police and cities burn, pan-Africanism surely will surface again. The conditions have changed, but the terms of control and possession of land remain the same.

Isabelle confronted these issues on a more personal level as well. Like most students, both students of color and white students, during her interview Isabelle remarked on the racial segregation of campus life. The students of color, with the exception of Evans, did not mention this as problematic, but white students lamented it. For white students, classes about race, or specifically African American studies classes, were rare spaces where they could connect with peers of color substantively and be in racially diverse spaces. Yet, for Isabelle, the experience in Stone's class was not quite one of connection. Speaking of the students of color in the class she said: "I don't feel super connected to them which is a little disappointing for me. Because I was sort of hoping that there would be more connection." When I asked Isabelle to explain what she

meant, and why she needed more connection, she blushed a little. She told me she was not uncomfortable, but simply felt "put on the spot" with that question. She answered very slowly, and chose her words carefully.

> I am really curious for people who are black who are in the class, I am really curious about their experience at Gable. I'm not sure why I was expecting that to be more part of the class but I was hoping. I don't know if it's because I have this really close friend, her name is Aaliyah. She is one of my closest friends from high school and when she was leaving for college, she went to UNC, she said she wanted to be in an all-black community there. She told me she just wanted to be in a very, all-black community.

She paused, seeming to remember what must have been a difficult conversation with her close friend.

> We had become really close friends in our last two years of high school, and now being here I think of her a lot. Because I live with international students but they're all white. Most of all my classes are all white or almost. Most of my interactions are all white in a weird way. It's weirdly so white.
>
> -- *Is that disappointing, or how does that feel?*
>
> Both sad and confusing.

Here she paused again, and then sounded philosophical in a way that I thought might make Stone proud:

> It feels like, I know I'm missing something but I don't know what yet. I feel like I'm contributing to some problem in some capacity as I am going through my day. It feels like there's a moral question there.

In the second half of Stone's class, students read the *SNCC Position Paper*. Written in 1966, the essay outlined SNCC's ideological move from civil rights to black power. It argued that whatever role white people could play in the movement would be limited and would be directed by black people.

> *One white person can come into a meeting of black people and change the complexion of that meeting… People would immediately start talking about "brotherhood," "love," etc.; race would not be discussed. A climate has to be created whereby blacks can express themselves. The reasons that whites must be excluded is not that one is anti-white, but because the effects that one is trying to achieve cannot succeed because whites have an intimidating effect. Oft times, the intimidating effect is in direct proportion to the amount of degradation that black people have suffered at the hands of white people…SNCC, by allowing the whites to remain in the organization, can have its efforts subverted… These facts do not mean that whites cannot help. They can participate on a voluntary basis. We can contract work out to them, but in no way can they participate on a policy-making level...Our organization (SNCC) should be black-staffed, black-controlled, and black-financed. (SNCC Position Paper, 1966).*

Reflecting on the discussion of that text in her final interview, Isabelle resurfaced the personal questions about cross-racial solidarity she had raised before.

> I remember that discussion well. I really enjoyed hearing what people had to say, particularly the African American kids in our section. I appreciated hearing what they had to say about the importance of predominantly or entirely black groups. I think that was the type of learning experience in this class that I would have wanted more of. I felt like I got a sense of their experience with these issues and that is what I wanted to hear more about.

Isabelle said that the discussion of the SNCC paper, particularly the opinions of her black peers, helped her understand that there could be "a toxicity to being around white people" that, she now understood, motivated the desire to cultivate all-black spaces. She also connected that insight to her friend Aaliyah's choice to seek an all-black community in college. There was great affection and care in how Isabelle discussed her friendship with Aaliyah, and the fact that she had no friendships with black students at Gable. It felt to me as though Isabelle's genuine desire to connect with her black peers related to Aaliyah and to her own ambivalence about her friend's desire to distance herself from white people in college. The class helped Isabelle develop a more complex understanding of why the SNCC leaders and her black peers in the class argued for the

need for all-black spaces. This more complex framing allowed her to better understand her friend's choices as well.

Consistent through all these reflections is a sense that students gained, through the courses, opportunities to broaden their perspective with that of others—both their peers and the authors whose ideas they were reading. As Isabelle put it, the class allowed them to "see for themselves" how black people—whether the authors or their peers—thought about their relationship to whites in a context of racial oppression. This, in turn, required them to adopt a different perspective, emerging from a different standpoint. This process gave more nuance and complexity to their framing which, in turn, deepened their understanding. Choices by black people, in the past or the contemporary, to isolate from or even violently resist whites, while not easy to accept, became less difficult to understand.

Part III: Self-Authored Race Frames

The race thinking that students do is conditioned by discourses on race that dominated their upbringing, their previous education and their previous experiences. Much of that race thinking is inherited, and this is also the case in classrooms, where students are learning ideas and theories about race from their professors and from the authors that they read (Morning, 2011). Given this reality, moments where students shared original, self-constructed insights about race with me were particularly important. Students did this in two ways. Some of them connected what they were learning in the classroom with aspects of their own experiences, and with questions and issues that were

personally resonant. Some were inspired to exercise greater intellectual autonomy and react against some of the received ideas from the class. I identified these emerging understandings as self-authored race frames to highlight both their personal and autonomous character.

Personal Resonances

For Kenneth, Stone's class connected with long-standing concerns about the meaning of his identity. In our first interview, he relayed a familiar story, of feeling isolated and alienated as the lone, academically gifted black kid in an all-white high school. His white peers repeatedly told him that his academic prowess and personality meant he was "not really black." This created a great dissonance within him during his formative years, that he now described to me somewhat humorously, but which I understood—and could hear from the emotion in his voice—had been very painful.

> Obviously I was always black (laughs, pointing at his own face). But being black in the mindset I guess is different? Which was really strange to me because my family is very black. My mom is always talking about the racism that we have experienced, or my grandmother who grew up during civil rights, always talking about it. So I had this weird dichotomy where all through high school I'm being told I'm not black, but I go home to this black family, this black church. All the things are black around me. But I felt… Well, if you spend 8 hours a day at school being told you're not black, that you're an Oreo, that's 8 hours a day, growing up, that's your whole life.

Kenneth struggled to reconcile his own subjective experience with expectations, painted in broad strokes by family and community, of him as a young "black intellectual" headed to Gable University: "In my experience of being black, my parents always instilled that being black you have a sense of responsibility to other black people." Kenneth had a sense that "being black at Gable means something," and carried a responsibility "to help other black people, a sense of obligation." Yet he struggled with the open-endedness of

that proposition. For Kenneth, the class connected on a personal level in that it showed

the diverse, wide-ranging, dynamic ways in which black thinkers had thought of this

question. By extension, Kenneth felt that the class was also showing him that being black

could mean many things, and that the myriad possibilities in black political thought were

his possibilities as well. He began, "The ideas in the class have been so important for

me…" and then he paused. His voice softened and his eyes moistened almost

unperceivably.

> I have not had a good exposure to the African diaspora before. Being African American today, I feel like I understand we have a responsibility to progress forward but also a responsibility to know where we come from. I needed to have a better understanding of that. Taking classes like this allows you to see the full extent of what it means to be black in America. Because it is such a mammoth thing to think about, what does it mean to be black? And I had been taught so much that being black American is just one thing. You're the one who plays basketball and can rap. Because I was in a white suburb that's what people told me. That's what they thought black people were so if you're not that, then you're not black. I understood black was more than that because I identify as black but I really wanted to see what it really is, the scope, the different experiences, the complexity of it. I think this class really shows you how complex, how being black is many things.

While he had started his comments in a soft tone, a bit overwhelmed emotionally, now

Kenneth was sounding almost exhilarated by the sense he was making, and he was

smiling broadly.

> People need to recognize that the Black experience is so diverse! People think Black Nationalism is not even sophisticated. They think it's like, "we're black people and we hate all white people" plus the Afro and the fist in the air (laughs). But in this class you see so many serious thinkers, not just thinkers who are important to black political thought but they're important for all American thought. You look at Du Bois, and he's not just a black intellectual, he is an intellectual for America and should stand out as one of the great ones in America. It's important for people to understand that the whitewashed version in high school is wrong, to see that it's complex. If they don't learn anything else about race, if their opinions don't change, just the fact that they understand that the

> black experience is complex and black intellectual thought throughout history has been so complex, that's really necessary.

I could directly trace what Kenneth was saying from Stone's explicit direction, early on, that students appreciate and engage with the vast diversity and sophistication of ideas inherent in the black political thinkers students were reading. Yet Kenneth also extrapolated meaning from connecting the class with core questions in his own life, in uniquely personal ways.

Tessa (b) never struck me as shy because her enthusiasm for the class was palpable in her interviews, but she was one of the more quiet students in the discussion section. To me she just seemed appropriately thoughtful and considered—which made the rapid fire of the discussion section a bit of a challenge. I was always impressed with her ability to stick to her own time: she only spoke when she really had something to say, and she took her time expressing herself precisely. She had great presence, a real weight to her person and I enjoyed watching how that power was likely unbeknownst to her. In her own mind, she was just shy and "always behind in the discussion."

That presence and gravitas heightened the poignancy of what she shared when she reflected on what she took away from Stone's class. In both her interviews, Tessa elaborated on how the course was "validating." In the first interview, she focused on Stone himself, and became emotional when trying to explain what she meant: "I guess, wait...Hold on… This is actually kind of hard to explain." Her emotional reaction surprised her. She smiled and composed herself before continuing.

> I think there is something intangible about having a black professor when you have not had one at all. I don't know if I can put it in words actually. I want to say, "validating" but I don't know if that's the right word. It's not like I felt like I couldn't be a professor because both my parents are professors so that's not what it

was. But there is something powerful about having him up there, having a black professor especially at here at Gable. Just having a black person in that role in the institution. It's a feeling that's just… it just feels good. I don't really know how to put it into words.

In our final interview, Tessa returned to the idea of validation, this time as related to the authors she read in the class. They too provided her with a somewhat "intangible" good feeling:

> The experiences of the different writers, the continuity in it, and how it's very shared. Double consciousness, you can see that literally in every one of them and then it is here, literally today, with us. So I think a lot of the topics, they are still so relevant today. You'd think times change, laws were passed but it's still the same, the same struggle with maybe details changing.
>
> *--Is that a new idea from this class that you did not have before?*
>
> Yeah! Because you learn about history but in my high school, we did but we didn't go into the experiences as much. The continuity in experience, the shared experience across time, I feel like for me it is another form of validation. It's not that I need the validation all the time but sometimes you want to know yeah, this is a real thing, these experiences are continuing to happen, this is still a problem. Everything is not where it should be and that's not right. I personally get validation.

Both of these students were moved by the experience of learning about—being exposed to, being critically engaged with—the subjective experience of black people, their own people. It was meaningful to them, as young black people, to encounter evidence of the humanity and diversity of black people, both in the texts they read and in their actual experiences at Gable, whether through connecting with peers or, as Tessa shared, with black professors like Isaac Stone. Black people often share this particular aspect of Tessa's and Kenneth's educational journeys. Many black people endure an early education, through the end of high school, defined by an erasure of the history and culture of black people. In what is often a profound moment during college—if they are

fortunate to have it happen--they finally see themselves reflected in texts and in black

professors. The experience is edifying and as Kenneth and Tessa expressed to me during

their interviews, it can be profoundly moving. Beyond the specifics of their individual

stories, Tessa and Kenneth both illustrate how they and other students connected the

learning from the courses to personal issues in their lives.

Intellectual Autonomy

Jessica (b), Evans (a/w) and Keli'i (n) illustrate well the intellectual autonomy

inherent in self-authored frames. As discussed earlier, Jessica wrote her final paper about

slave owning black families in the South precisely because that was part of her own

family heritage. She considered this a risky but worthwhile step.

> I wrote my thesis in that way and it was a huge risk because that's not the way you write a history thesis. But it was important to me and I developed the tools in that class to do it my way. But I know that it was a risk and that people don't approach scholarly work in that way but it would be really powerful if we did.
>
> --*How did the class give you the tools?*
>
> It showed you can become really intimate with history in a way that distancing doesn't allow you. We talk about the gaze all the time and I think I spent a lot of time gazing at history and gazing at literature and my thesis wasn't like that. I was in it and holding myself accountable. I think you can have intimacy with a text and it doesn't make you too close to be critical. So that was the tension that I was navigating. Do you become too close to be able to write about this in a scholarly way? And I found no, there's a brilliant sense of closeness that positioned me to write a thesis that nobody else could.
>
> --*So that kind of learning, what is it like?*
>
> I think it's life-changing, period. I really do. I don't think you can write something that is close to you and not be changed by it.

While Jessica explicitly discussed academic writing, I felt she was also describing her

self-constructed understanding or rejection of norms regarding what academic work should do, how personal it should be. She felt confident to do so because of "tools" she gained in the class. These tools emerged out of a kind of intimate or personal engagement with history that she experienced in the class. Her self-authored race frame held that, when it comes to the history of slavery, drawing from personal connections and personal emotions was not only acceptable but an integral part of the scholarly project. And she wrote her final paper accordingly.

In some ways, Evans showed an intellectual independence all along. From the beginning, he tended to critically deconstruct the knowledge he was receiving, as well as the knowledge that he and his peers were constructing together, in Thomas's class. For Evans, the class often fell into groupthink in terms of how it framed race and this frustrated him. He also felt it was ironic that for all the discussion of Barbara Fields' text, the class never self-examined the ideological assumptions it was making.

> We were saying and examining how race is socially constructed but unable or unwilling to admit and explore that we ourselves were doing the social constructing! We didn't look at how ok, you are constructing Kevin as privileged white male as you read his comments always with hostility, then you are constructing yourself as some kind of ethnic curious person when you construct or present yourself as the authority. We never looked at any of that.

When we met for the last interview, Evans had returned from working abroad, in Germany, in a refugee camp where he helped with translation and education of Middle Eastern youth displaced by war. This experience suited his inclination to consider race in a broader, more global way. When he told me he was moving "in the direction of postcolonial studies," I was not surprised.

The class gave me an excellent base for my postcolonial studies, looking at South Asia and elsewhere, situations where race was often something built up, deployed and then dumped because it wasn't needed anymore. I think here we've assigned race permanence. We say it's a construct but if it's a construct then it can also be deconstructed, you know? If something is socially constructed it can also be peeled away in some way. But we don't say that and I'm trying to look for people who think about how that happens in the American context.

After a transformative experience in Thomas's course, Evans continued to feel like engaging with issues of race narrowly, without deconstructing and self-reflecting on the implications of that, was insufficient and, taking up Fields' ideas, worked to reinforce the intractability of race. His self-authored understanding was that such inquiry was not enough, that he needed to take up another disciplinary orientation.

The student who most embodied the necessity and value of self-authored race was Keli'i. I met Keli'i for a final interview a year after the class. The main goal of the last interview was to talk to students about whether the course had come up subsequently in their lives. The interview was centered on a checklist that students completed, outlining possible ways in which the course had come up. They could select from 13 options, such as "in discussions with friends, in discussions with families, in how I think about events in the news, in how I think about my own identity," and so on. They could also suggest their own topics. Like all the students interviewed from both courses, Keli'i checked most options, and enthusiastically let me know that the course had continued to resonate "in a big way." Before we delved further into that discussion, I asked him about life in general, and about his challenges around finding classes that focused on Native American and indigenous peoples. He answered, beginning with a heavy sigh: "It's the same, same bullshit is still going on. Last year I could find one Native American history class, one! And there's nothing this year."

While he was clearly weary, he also laughed out loud. He saw the irony in a university that understands itself as liberal and exceptional like Gable operating in this way in the 21st century. I was reminded in that moment that Keli'i is someone who laughed often, even when recounting difficult things in his interviews. He seamlessly shifted between an almost contagious lightheartedness and his deeply serious engagement with the world. He communicated with his tone that while the absence of course content on a whole segment of American people and culture at a prominent university like Gable was personally painful, it was also absurd. I noticed, as he sat and jumped right into the interview, that he exuded the confidence that undergraduate students gain vertiginously in college. The first semester they are like high school seniors, and by the end of the first year, they are young adult scholars in the making: widely read, well informed, drawing references from different classes, and assertive.

During our first interview, Keli'i had been cautious when he raised his concerns about the invisibility of Native peoples in the curriculum and on campus. He had been sure to mention his deep appreciation for the opportunity to be at Gable and for Thomas's class in particular. Keli'i showed a willingness—and great capacity—to draw meaning from Thomas's course, and connect it, albeit indirectly, to the Native contexts he wanted to learn about. But now he told me without such reservations that he had come to feel that, "Sometimes you want to learn about yourself too." As he spoke frankly, any hesitation or caution was gone. Keli'i recounted with conviction and clarity how the previous months had been a process of embracing a new perspective. This was a "more radical" perspective that centered his experience as a Native person. As a first example, he told me he had quit the Africana Choir.

139

> As powerful as drawing parallels between struggles is, as powerful as that is, it is extremely exhausting. And as powerful as my experiences in the African Choir community was, you got to talk about yourself once in a while, you have to be in community. It makes more sense to be on the Native Student Council.

He also told me he experienced disappointment at the lack of solidarity from the wider community of students of color. To illustrate that point, he talked about "Margins Magazine," a campus newsletter that had emerged as a vehicle for students of color. At first, he had been excited at the prospect of such a vehicle for a coalition of students of color to express themselves. Unfortunately, however, he experienced some of the same isolation there as he had on campus and in classes. The main issue was the intention of Margins editors to play up the confrontational and angry tone of their publication. As he explained to me, this did not consider the implications of such positioning for him and other Native students.

> For Native people, to be seen as confrontational, for us that "warrior-savage" stereotype has meant genocide. So there is no desire to have a public facing voice or presentation of self that is one dimensionally just angry and confrontational. On the contrary. We just have a different sensibility about how we want to represent ourselves.

Keli'i recounted also being asked to contribute through a "Native Column," which inadvertently felt ostracizing as well: "There was no need for a Black or Latino column, so what's up?" These "misunderstandings." as he described them, forced him to "distance" himself from the newsletter, and illustrated the lack of solidarity that made him feel more "distant" from the broader student of color community. According to him, invisibility was exponentially more painful when experienced within that community.

> I often say this: explaining the indigenous struggle to a white person is not that different from explaining that to a black person and that's... crazy. That hurts.

> That lack of understanding is the colonial process itself. It's hard. There is no Native American history class here. It is completely absent and that plays out in our experience as students so profoundly. There is the "myth of the Vanishing Indian" but it doesn't just play out in the massacres in 1850 but in the history. It happens in classes too. And on campus.

I imagined that for Keli'i these experiences all spoke to the limitations of always being the one bridging the gap, being the ally, showing up for other people of color causes without adequate responses in return. All of these experiences, he told me, had culminated in a commitment to construct a different educational experience for himself at Gable.

> You can say I am getting more radical, a little bit. I kind of took that, and am trying to reinvent the wheel here at Gable. In the history department I'm technically focused on America, American focus. But they have a proposal, where you can make can redefine the geography and the chronology of your focus. I kind of flipped it and said I would be focused on the "Pacific World" and they liked it! They said yeah we understand that, we know what we've given you so far has been through the lens of US Imperialism so let's try and shake that lens off. So I ended up building a focus [that's original].

Keli'i resolved to frame race in a way that put the experience of Native peoples at the center quite concretely, even at the geographic and historic level. As I heard him proudly tell me of his innovation in recreating the terminology around his major, I could see a thread, beginning with the critical tools he credits Thomas's class for giving him, and moving through his experiences navigating student of color politics on campus, and finally grounding him in his self-made field of study. In this way, he illustrated clearly the construction of self-authored race frames. I was reminded of a discussion we had in an earlier interview, about his relationship to history and his sense of the utility of intellectual work.

The reason I am so drawn to history or even literature is that I was an informal historian by birth almost. Stories are such a real part of our culture. Elders have told me all we really are are our stories. What we are now and what we are going to be forever are those same stories. We construct ourselves off of stories and you don't know who you are until you know who you've been, who your ancestors have been. I was born into that idea that without history you don't exist.

In our last interview, these same themes returned, when I asked him to reprise the word association game.

--*Let's update the word association from the first interview. Now what would you say comes to mind when I say "classroom discussions of race"?*

I don't know if it's because so much time with the texts in Thomas's class but now when you say that, I immediately think of the slave narratives, the texts, the stories, of course. It's weird, but that experience was really powerful. For other classes I read for the class. Everything I read is in preparation for the class and I get there and dump all my thoughts and walk away and read for the next class. His is the only class I have taken so far where I read for the class, then I internalized the materials so much that I left the class and I still carry it with me. These are texts that never leave you, that you don't put down and leave on the classroom table. So when you say "classroom discussions of race", now I think of how the separation between the classroom and the outside of the classroom has completely broken down, doesn't exist anymore for me... What these texts, how they have affected me, is told me that we don't deserve to only be on the classroom table because our story is constantly being told outside the classroom too.

Perhaps more than any other student that I was lucky to meet, Keli'i illustrated for me not only the importance of students developing self-authored, critical understandings of race, but more importantly, the incredible power that such understanding can have in propelling a student to push beyond our racial status quo. Whereas Jessica, Evans and other students had a choice in whether they challenged the very knowledge they were given, and the curricular content of most courses at Gable, Keli'i and other Native students had to undertake this interventionist intellectual work as a matter of course. As I listened to him, it was clear that Keli'i would not tolerate invisibility any longer, and I

was proud of him for that.

Part IV. "These Classes Equip Me"

--*Do you think a class like Thomas's would be valuable to everyone's education? Generally?*

Yes, absolutely, I mean yes! Gable is a liberal arts school. It is not even about building a better student, it is about building a better person, building a better contributor in society. It's almost ridiculous that Gable would think a class like this is not as important as say, a class on say the Vietnam War. Or that they think doing a math and science requirement is more important than a real course on race. Absolutely this should be experienced, or something similar, should be experienced by every student at Gable.

Like Kenneth, above, all the students I interviewed, from both courses, felt that Gable and other universities should require that all their students take a course on race in America. They found it frustrating that Gable University had general requirements—demanding that their students take up to eight general education courses--but did not require that a course on race in America. When asked, students described specific ways they felt the course benefitted them. Their overall consensus was that learning about race better equipped them for their lives in a multiracial, complex and conflicted society. The many ways in which they defined "being equipped" were as distinct as the students themselves.

Keli'i (n) felt learning about race as he had in Thomas's course gave him a sense of obligation toward his community; it "forced" him to take leadership and put the insights he gained in the service of others.

--*What do you get out of taking this class, in the end?*

I guess it forces me, it forces you to assume, I hesitate to say, leadership. I have to understand that I am in a place that I can think about things in ways a lot of

people aren't. But I think I've become more aware of the massive space between the academy and the ground level. And you know a lot of the way I try to bridge the gap is academically. So we can talk about these things [theoretically] and then go to a community rally and then, acting like a messenger or translator of these important ideas. That's the kind of learning you don't do in classrooms. You have to become more conversant in academic rhetoric but personally I am at the point where I have to also make these complexities that are so critical to the movement, the nuances you know, the move away from simple, dichotomous ways that sometimes we think about race on the ground level. I try to translate those complexities that I can like go home and tell my little sister.

For Will (w), Stone's class provided him with a perspective about how a long racial inequality has persisted and been resisted in America. It also allowed him an opportunity to engage with Black intellectuals directly, in a way that was unprecedented. Will felt that the benefit he derived from Stone's class, what he called "my thinking, my lens," would influence his future actions:

The conversations we've had have been really enriching and challenging and provocative on something, race, that remains very crucial, I think maybe it's the core question of this country. So I think it's influenced my thinking and the lens through which I'll see things in the future and in that sense it's been really important. I probably never would have read the older black thinkers or even more contemporary black power thinkers. I maybe would have read a book about it but not primary sources, their own voices. I'm really glad I read them because being able to think about that tradition and being able to trace what is usually presented in the sixties as some kind of sudden, violent turn, to present that as being rooted in a much longer discussion, where it's consistently been there, that makes a huge difference.

Will also recognized that most people he encounters lack the perspective he had gained through the course: "Maybe I will be able to intervene in a future conversation and point that out to someone and that can be productive." Kenneth (b) also felt that "learning about race academically" in Stone's class filled gaps in understanding created by his high school education:

I think it provides context. A lot of the academic courses on race provide historical context that I did not have. Especially coming from a public school system that does not value African American history or history about race. I don't know what public school system does. I took a US history that went over the idea that slavery was a thing, then civil war, but no really academic scholarly conversation about race. Stone's class opened my eyes to see the complexity of race in America. It makes me a lot more cynical about the idea of reaching post-racial society. Is that even possible? Learning about race academically has allowed me to see how deep the roots are and how intertwined racism and race is into every system, political, social, in America. And even in the world. It's hard to fathom how we undo that, at least in the next 50 years, you know? I guess it opens my eyes to see that more clearly.

While students reflected on the benefits of learning about race in the courses, they also discussed how this learning was challenging and took a toll. Students felt that the challenge inherent in the learning was appropriate and worth their while however. Jessica (b) highlighted both the challenge and the benefit of learning about race when she first discussed never feeling safe or comfortable in academic discussions of race. No matter, she felt: "I was not raised to be comfortable in the classroom, I was raised to be excellent." When I asked at the end of the course what engaging with race academically in Thomas's class had done for her, her answer comprised this duality of gain and loss.

--What did the academic engagement with race do for you?
It gave me a calm. I think I am better at not getting angry because I understand that these are not random acts of violence and this is not chaos even if it feels like it is. I think being able to ground it with a historical lens gives the most frustrating sense of peace. There is something rational about being able to find a root somewhere.

Deyanira (b) also spoke extensively about the difficulties she encountered in Thomas's course and in courses on race in general. She lamented that such courses were not always places where the voices of students of color took primacy, necessarily. She thought they should. She also struggled with what she perceived as a tendency of some

people to resort to abstraction when discussing race.

> Also, people here have an obsession with talking in the abstract so they'll say "the trauma of the black body" and that phrase gets tossed around all the time. And I'm like, you don't even have a black body so what are you talking about? "Something-something, the black body, something-something." I'm in the classroom and I'm thinking, what are you talking about, you know? So for me that's a challenge.

While she elaborated about her frustration and resentment, Deyanira started to sound tired and I asked her why she would invite such challenge into her academic life.

> It's tough. Some weeks I leave Thomas's class feeling really good but some days I leave and I'm just pissed for a good amount of time and I have to go do self-care and remind myself that it's part of it. I just think some people have the luxury of leaving the class feeling better than others. And that's just to do with how the world is set up.

> --*So what do you get out of it? Why take the class?*

> Because I think that my voice needs to be in there! They say problematic stuff when I'm in there, imagine if I wasn't (laughs)! And also, I just want to learn, you know? I've thought about race a lot. I think the more nuanced ways I've thought about it started in high school but then I remember, in middle school, we had to write a big 8th grade essay and I wrote it on how the American Dream doesn't exist and America is just racist. I've been thinking about this for a long time but I haven't always had the language. I've had like, the gut.

Deyanira's comment about finding the academic language to validate her "gut" is reminiscent of Tessa's (b) sense that Stone's course gave her validation by confirming the continuity and anger and pain in the experience of black people. This was also the sentiment expressed by Jessica, when she spoke of "a calming" effect. These students seemed to all come to the same conclusion about the experience of engaging with race in academic classrooms: while this learning could prove taxing, it was learning that edified and empowered them. Echoing his peers who spoke of gaining validation, comfort, or a theoretical vocabulary, Kenneth talked about gaining "credibility."

Learning about it, knowing more allows me to be more comfortable because I feel like I have more to say. More than just my own personal experience--you can quote other people, people who say things more eloquently and thought about it more than I did, who provide different perspectives. I feel like at Gable, in college, it's very much a thing to be able to provide context, you gain credibility in the eyes of a lot of people. Versus "oh this is some black person talking about how bad white people are." No, here is someone who is educated, has context, and has stuff to back it up. It gives me more credibility.

The fact that students felt equipped and empowered by learning about race in the two courses is to me the most important implication of the study. American society, as former Attorney General Eric Holder famously suggested by admonishing us as a "nation of cowards", is not inclined to be brave when it comes to issues of race. As has become particularly clear in the last few years, when it comes to race, the American modus operandi is often to avoid hard questions and hard answers. The facts of racism, both past and contemporary are often denied or misconstrued, in favor of an optimistic narrative of racial progress. Many people trust inherited, often incorrect ideas about race, and suspect anything that challenges those ideas. Many seek the comfort of communities of people that share their ideas about race. In this context, we learn to rarely risk empathy in cross-racial discussions which we sometimes consider unsafe. This broader social reality means that young people come of age in a racialized world but without the adequate personal or intellectual capacity to make sense of that world.

For this reason, many college students find opportunities to engage with race in the classroom—to actually be "allowed" to do so, as Adina reflected—to be compelling and worthwhile. Given the challenges of racial inequality that we face as a society, it is understandable that students enter Gable and other colleges eager to learn about race. Too often, they lack opportunities to do this productively or at all. What students expressed to

me was that Thomas's and Stone's classrooms were ideal opportunities. While they felt

that the learning was often challenging, they embraced those challenges. My

observations and students own recollections of those classrooms were that they neither

capitulated to the pervasive view that learning about race must always be safe, nor did

they uphold the opposing popular view that learning about race must involve harm.

Instead, Thomas's and Stone's classrooms were a third space where their students could

understand themselves—recast themselves--as intellectually resilient and empathetic

interrogators of the concept of race. As they did this, students equipped themselves with

not only an understanding of the history of race in America but with a capacity to mount

a robust critique of our dire status quo. Deyanira expressed these sentiments eloquently.

> You have a feeling and then you read Fields and now when I am discussing with someone I don't just have to go into my feelings. I can also hand them her critical work. People always want evidence, right? I can say "there is a war on black men" all day and people are just like, "where are you getting that from?" You always have to have the knowledge to say "more black men are in prison now than were enslaved." These classes equip me.

Chapter 5

Brave Community: From Theory to Practice

What kind of learning experience in college courses on race do students need? How can a classroom environment or a certain pedagogical move best support students in having those experiences? How can a professor avoid unpleasant or unproductive moments in courses on race? When academic discussions about race work well, as well as those in this study worked, what is contributing to that? What is the relationship between classroom experiences—that intersubjective, complex process that connects students, their professor, and the content—and students' understanding of race? Starting in early 2016, after I had concluded my study and the data analysis, I was asked versions of these questions whenever I presented my work, whether at research conferences or at my own institution. People seemed to appreciate the study but it seemed to trigger, especially for those who were involved in teaching about race-related topics, a set of practical, more immediate questions. They wanted to know what I thought worked well. These are perennial questions: for as long as teaching and learning about race has happened, it has presented pedagogical challenges as well as benefits, and teachers have sought a productive balance between the two. Numerous and important works in theory, research and practice have proposed solutions to those challenges. This body of work comprises pedagogical approaches, studies of the sources of classroom conflict and microaggressions, and proposed revisions of curricula. In my own experience, I believe those persistent questions relate to the current climate. The Black Lives Matter movement, and the police brutality that brought it on, as well as the divisive presidential

election have all served to make campuses more racially charged. By extension, the prospect of engaging with race in college classrooms feels even more daunting.

To answer those practice-oriented questions, this chapter moves from brave community as theory to brave community as teaching strategy. As a theory, brave community links academic grounding to the development of empathy and a certain intellectual bravery among students, qualities that in turn support productive, sometimes transformative, learning about race. By theory I simply mean a plausible, testable explanation for what occurred in the classrooms I observed. Mario Luis Small (2009) argues that emergent knowledge of this kind is one of the possible advantages of ethnographic work: "A well-executed single-case can justifiably state that a particular process, phenomenon, mechanism, tendency, type, relationship, dynamic, or practice exists. This, in fact, remains one of the advantages of ethnographic work, the possibility of truly emergent knowledge." Brave community is that emergent knowledge.

I define brave community as the process through which students rely on academic grounding to develop the intellectual courage and interpersonal empathy that, in turn, supports productive and often challenging learning about race. The foundational role of academic grounding distinguishes brave community within the important and vast body of knowledge on race and higher education that it builds on and complements. I named the theory brave community for two reasons. First, the phrase was inspired by Jessica's comments describing Thomas's course. When she reflected on how the group developed a sense that intellectual risks and deep personal investment was allowed, the word she thought of was "brave." Second and more importantly, the simple phrase

suggests the connection between the classroom as an academically grounded community and the emerging student qualities of bravery.

So how does a teacher orient herself to achieve a brave community classroom? I propose that the first step is the establishment of academic grounding. Academic grounding will then afford the students common ground, insofar as students have specific course content on which to focus their learning, or a common learning objective. It also will provide students with solid ground, insofar as students feel that they are allowed and encouraged to question, probe and engage one another. This clarity around being allowed to engage one another, and being supported in doing so, strikes students as powerful and unusual according to them. They feel encouraged to ask harder questions and push themselves beyond "comfort" or "safe" zones. They also show increased empathy towards one another, especially through challenging learning moments. These empathetic and resilient stances allow students to have more deep and engaging experiences learning about race.

Below, I elaborate on brave community practice by reflecting back on illustrative moments in Prof. Thomas' course. I distill what I observed during the study into a strategy for teaching. Experienced teachers of race-related content may find this to be a resonant (or even familiar) description of their well-honed pedagogical approaches. For others who may be less experienced, brave community may prove a useful and adaptable strategy for teaching about race.

Becoming Brave through Academic Grounding

When I asked students at the end of the course what made Professor Thomas's class "work," they most often started with their recollection of his words on that first day.

For them, this setting of the stage determined the course of the semester. Thomas let them know about the expectations for the classroom and, importantly, he grounded those expectations in the learning goals and the content of the class. Students referenced the "vibe" of the class and its "culture," a class culture where there was "buy in" from everyone and everyone "brought their A game," as Thomas requested.

This foundational work is the first step taken by the professor in brave community classrooms. Professors employ explicit or implicit ways to signal to students that the classroom is a distinctive place, one requiring them to act in distinct "academic ways" to support the learning goals. Thomas did this by not only stressing mutual respect and engagement, but by connecting those ideas directly to the serious and challenging nature of the topic of slavery. Some professors set the stage through an early discussion of class norms. Others ask students to share what they believe they need to achieve the goals listed on the syllabus. While the specific way in which a professor does this foundational work may vary, there are non-negotiables: it must be done early, it must be done in a way that is authentic to the professor, and it must be done in a way that explicitly tells students that learning about race brings particular requirements for their behavior and for classroom culture.

I call this foundation the academic grounding. Academic grounding is the interrelation between academic content and academic culture that characterizes a brave community classroom. Academic content includes not only course materials themselves, but also whatever information the professor imparts, and whatever knowledge students produce together. It is, essentially, both the increased content mastery that students gain from the course and the productive ways of being that students adopt in the classroom:

engagement, listening actively, being patient and being respectful. Thomas's introductory remarks are a great illustration of connecting academic culture to academic content on the very first day and in a meaningful way.

Academic grounding is essential because it provides both solid and common ground. When students engage in discussions of race, the ground can shift beneath them at the drop of a comment. In an academically grounded classroom, students are on solid ground: they know exactly where they stand as students, they know their learning goals, they know their professor's expectations. Students feel both encouraged and allowed to discuss the issues before them. Often discussions of race can also be difficult because students feel divided along racial lines (Tatum, 2007). Academic grounding mitigates those tensions by providing students with momentary common ground. Every student in Thomas's course understood that they shared the responsibility to read and discuss the texts. They knew they were expected to meet one another in a shared intellectual space. Academic grounding alleviates potential tensions by identifying the learning as a shared space, where racially diverse students not only can but also are expected to engage one another intellectually "in an academic way."

My argument is not that academic grounding inoculates a classroom from the complications that arise when students are learning about race--quite to the contrary. Rather, I am suggesting that academic grounding helps a classroom community to prioritize academic learning, even as it incorporates emotions and tension. This is crucially important because, as I will discuss below, students must feel empowered and motivated to do the work. Or, as Adina(b) puts it, they must feel allowed.

> We are allowed to push ourselves. To take risks and ask questions. Class has these tensions—always does—but I enjoy it because that is how I learn. If you feel scared to say what you think, you don't get the same impact. Just being able to say it is a learning process in itself.

Warner (w) reflected that it was only after taking subsequent classes where deep and more taxing discussions were avoided that he fully appreciated Prof. Thomas's guidance.

> When I was in his class though, I didn't realize how much he was guiding that. Because his style felt more like, let me lay it all out on the table and now you go, you talk, you figure it out. So he wasn't heavy handed ever. I'm actually not sure how he did it.

Warner's comments speak to the way academic grounding becomes integral to student experience through practice; it becomes the way things work in the class. And, as Kenneth explains, academic grounding—in his example, the focus on an academic text-- is what leads a course on race to meet its full potential.

> If done in the right way, as we talked about, I think classes about race have the potential to be fruitful, engaging, and enlightening. If there is that academic text or work it can aid in disarming people of the timidity and hesitation they often bring to conversations about race.

The experience of being in an academically grounded community supports students to develop intellectual courage around engaging race, a topic broadly considered to be the third rail in our society. Students gain increased academic knowledge about race but, importantly, they do so in a community that supports and respects rigorous engagement and discussion about that content. Students note that despite the difficulty of the topic, productive dialogue can happen. They feel increasingly confident about what

questions they can ask, what answers they can give one another, what challenges they can raise to the professor or to the authors of the texts that they read.

Students notice that this experience of pushing themselves, of being more open with one another, is unusual and amounts, as Jessica (b) stated it, to a kind of bravery:

> I think I would say "brave." I think a lot of risks were taken. I think at the beginning of the class I was very critical. I came in with this sort of the critical eye on, who's going to say something that sounds crazy? And I think a lot of the tension was coming from people not knowing what to say and not to say, and feeling scared to say the wrong thing. And I think throughout the class we've sort of landed on this feeling that there isn't a wrong thing to say. Because a lot of us said things we wouldn't have said in other spaces. And I think that's what I'm most proud of.

All of Thomas's students whom I interviewed spoke about becoming more intellectually courageous, in terms similar to the ones Jessica used.

Modeling Bravery

To sustain brave community in challenging learning moments, the professor has one primary responsibility: to model bravery. During the Nat Turner class (chapter 3), when students felt a bit overwhelmed by the tension, Thomas did this by taking the responsibility to redirect them. He intervened because he saw "tensions building that were not going to be productive." His was not a dramatic intervention; modeling bravery in his case simply meant naming the discomfort in the room, saying that it was acceptable, and reminding students that it was necessary to move past it. Once Thomas did that, and implicitly reaffirmed for students that theirs was an academically grounded community that was willing and able to probe tough questions, students felt comfortable re-engaging the discussion. Lyor's comment reframed the discussion towards the broader considerations of the role of violence, essentially depersonalizing it. Kevin's clarification

of his use of "sociopath" also helped others reconsider his comment in a different light, reducing interpersonal tension in the room. Jessica, Evans, Adina, as well as others, took turns exploring what exactly was challenging them in the text. A consistent gesture in all these moves on the part of students was their approach to difficult emotions in the context of academic work. Together, and directed by their professor's modeling, the students performed a kind of resuscitation of the academic register of their own discussion. They explored where the tension was, and what ideas were producing it. Slowly, ideas that had been at an impasse were rehabilitated for collective inquiry and the discussion moved again.

Beyond arguing that they should model bravery, I do not reference specific teaching moves or best practices. I believe that classrooms are dynamic, rich and complicated contexts. To model bravery in one instance might mean to name the discomfort in the room and redirect discussion, as Thomas did in the example above. In another setting, however, it might mean intervening when a student seems unwilling to engage in the learning and is lashing out at colleagues inappropriately. In yet another situation, modeling bravery might mean that a professor who is tempted to shut down a difficult dialogue, nonetheless allows her students to proceed, despite her own discomfort. To give specific teaching moves could obscure the critical complexity and richness of possibility that define a classroom environment. Worse, it might inadvertently discourage individual professors from developing the authentic and context-specific moves that create and sustain brave community. The core ideas in brave community are a

compass and not a roadmap;[19] they are meant to orient but not prescribe, the many

creative ways in which professors develop their practice.

Resilient Empathy

Aside from following the lead when their professor models bravery, the most

critical way that students themselves sustain brave community is by showing one another

resilient empathy. Resilient empathy is what is at play when students choose to hear a

challenging or difficult idea that arises in the classroom, either from a peer or from a text,

in a spirit that sustains, rather than shuts down, learning. It is present when students

choose to withstand discomfort, anger, or other emotions, in order to see a difficult

learning moment through. During the Nat Turner class, the idea that revolutionary

violence might be justified, as well as the counterargument that violence must be

immoral, were both difficult notions to engage. They would be in any situation but were

extremely so at the particular time, when violence was all around, in the form of police

killings of Black citizens. Despite that heightened tension, these difficult ideas had to be

allowed for a productive academic discussion of the text, and of the historical occurrence

of racist and antiracist violence generally to occur. As Lyor described so well, students

were willing and able to give one another space to learn.

> You respect people. You let them say what they want to say and you take it…
> there's a task of taking it in less of an emotional way, in more of a rational way…
> You want to try and analyze on that [intellectual] level. It creates a level of
> comfort where you can misspeak like Kevin misspeaks and I don't think anybody
> thinks he's a racist because he misspoke. Whereas if he said things in a different
> context it could be more problematic.

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[19] Dr. Karen Mapp uses this helpful "compass/roadmap" distinction that I borrow, in her lectures
introducing her Dual Capacity Framework for Family Engagement.

Lyor is describing how he and his peers choose to regard the sometimes challenging but necessary exchange of ideas "on that less emotional, intellectual" level precisely because they are working in a classroom. Students draw from the foundation of academic grounding, from their sense of being in brave community to develop greater capacity for resilient empathy.

Empathy is generally understood as one's ability to understand the feelings of another. It is considered integral to learning, in part because it is what allows us to consider and then learn from points of view other than our own. I modify it with the word "resilient" to emphasize that, in the case of learning about race, empathy requires hard work. As with my discussion of academic grounding, this is not an argument about the end of difficulty or the disappearance of emotion. Rather, resilient empathy describes the choice to manage one's emotional response in a way that distinctively supports learning, by "creating a level of comfort" that this learning necessitates. For Kevin (w), this makes all the difference.

> One, you have a bond with people and at the end of the day you trust that they're not out to get you. And that these things are well thought out, the readings, what we're doing. Two, you have a professor there, that matters. I don't care what anyone says. When you are talking these things you need someone who can steer, steer away what needs to be steered away, make it go deeper when they need to.

The challenges of empathy in classrooms where students are learning about race are foremost in our minds when we consider the cross-racial interaction of students. Students of color often express impatience or even anger toward white students who say racist or insensitive things. A crucially important concern centers on the risk for students

of color to experience microaggressions. Increasingly central to these discussions, microaggressions are defined as "the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership" (Sue, 2010). There is widespread concern that, especially when it comes to learning about race, one student's "brave" comment or "risky" question might be offensive. Indeed, the apprehension many students feel about speaking up in courses on race often rests on a fear that they might inadvertently harm others. This apprehension also leads many professors to avoid a frank engagement with race in the classroom altogether. Many students of color are also impatient at the notion that it is "their job to teach white people" about race. White students express anxiety about the very same; they fear they will say the wrong, racist thing, and be judged harshly for it or unfairly burden their peers of color.

There is no question that the terrain where we teach and learn about race presents a particular challenge for empathy. There are two obvious reasons for this. One, to learn about race, we must enter into a space where racism is present for us. Racism, the systematic and longstanding injury of people of color for the advantage of white people, is a grave and painful injustice. Empathy towards white people is particularly hard when the learning task is essentially to probe the facts of racism, as was the case in Thomas's course. Also, given that the experiences of living in a racist society are radically different for whites and students of color, students of color often experience the ignorance of their white peers regarding race and racism as personally hurtful. One critique that I often hear

is that it is an undue burden to ask students of color to be empathetic. I find this problematic on two fronts. At a fundamental level, anticipating what "all students of color" in the abstract might or might not be able or willing to do is problematic and essentialist. Additionally, resilient empathy is a requirement for learning. If learning is the goal of a course on race, it is untenable to exclude students of color from what said learning requires. In other words, while I am not ignoring the importance of the individual student's identity, including their racial or ethnic background, I am insisting that, within the bounds of the brave community classroom, students see themselves as equals. Equals in duties and burdens, in resiliency and in resolve; equally fit to do the hard work they have signed up to do.

I believe that race is both a concept ripe for academic inquiry and a lived experience. As such, race essentially lives exactly where our intellect and our emotions meet. Resilient empathy is what allows students to manage that complicated interaction of thought and feeling, so as to give each other room to learn. As demonstrated in the Nat Turner class, highly emotional moments, if managed, can be openings towards deeper engagement instead of disengagement. When resilient empathy is present, and students let each other "say what they want to say," in a context of an academic community, challenging moments can teach students about their colleagues and about their own intellectual resilience. This is what I heard when Deyanira described her surprise that "such a raw discussion" could happen during the Nat Turner class; this is what I think she found to be "beautiful."

In brave community classrooms like Thomas's, students become empathetically resilient because they feel the benefit of being listened to and treated empathetically

themselves. As Lyor eloquently stated, in the context of brave community, resilient empathy is not experienced as a superimposed burden but as an act of deliberate participation: *"You let them* say what they want to say" and "*you take it* in less of an emotional way" (my emphasis). Lyor is describing choices students make, not impositions made on students. Resilient empathy, then, edifies and empowers the student who extends it to her colleague, as much as it sustains the colleague who benefits from it. Through listening bravely to one another, students develop and assert their capacity to be intellectually resilient, even when learning about race gets hard. They open up the space for deep learning about race, difficult though it may be, to occur.

Brave Community Beyond the Classroom

As mentioned previously, students were asked in the first interview to do a word association. They had to tell me, without overthinking, what came to mind when I said "classroom discussions of race." For Lyor (w), the word was, on the first occasion, "tokenism." By the end of Thomas's class however, when we revisited the word association question, his response had changed: "Now, I associate that with real life application, I think." "Real life application" can in fact be said to be a distinguishing feature of frames. Brave community has implications beyond the classroom because through the "real life application" of their more complex and self-authored race frames, students are better able to see and navigate the racialized aspects of their lives.

Students understandably drew from their emerging race frames to interpret their world and better navigate it. Lyor was in New York City, working for Teach for America, when I conducted his final interview via telephone. He was working in an all-black, low-income public school. He told me his presence there had become highly problematic in

his own eyes, in light of the learning from the class.

> There is the tension between not being racist and then just like the pervasiveness of race being something that you might not be consciously aware of in how you regard it. I think [the class] helped me come to terms with the degree to which racism is engrained in culture and society and ourselves. And that is meaningful not only to make sense of your own role in the present situation but also how to ameliorate conditions that exist now and things like that. So at this job, all the students are black and all the authority figures, including me, that they see every day are white. And that's not acceptable. So I want to be here to help but I look around and think wait, this is not okay.

Kevin's interest in education arose mostly from his upbringing and the example of his parents but he told me that the class had reinforced his commitment to pursue education as a professional goal.

> There are these big currents of history but all it takes are people to change that current so slightly. That matters and changes the narrative. I don't have the ability to be one of those people but I have the skills to help foster one of those people and I guess that's where I land. I can help change the world not because I will but because I could teach someone who could really change the world. I love to learn, I love to read, and I love to write. But I'm not changing the world; I'm not that smart, I'm not all that you know (laughs)? But I want to help find the people who can. And if there is one, I want to make it 5. And if there are five, I want to make it 25.

The "real life" application of students' more developed race frames also was visible as students applied them to controversial racial issues on campus. During the course of the study, many college campuses were overtaken with student activism inspired by the broader Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. As I described it in the first chapter, Gable was no exception. At Gable, as well as other institutions, race-related issues were longstanding and not easily resolved and surfaced in what were tense times nationally. As often highlighted by student activists in the forms of letters demanding change, Gable and its peer institutions were deemed inadequate in terms of: the

underrepresentation of people of color in the faculty and students, the mishandling of

racial harassment incidents, the lack of racial diversity in curricula, and the institution's

ties to slavery. Across the country and the national media, university faculty,

administrators, student activists and the broader public faced-off and struggled to find

common ground. During these controversies, dialogue was often impossibly fraught, as

people stuck to their starkly defined positions on either side of the arguments.

Reflecting on these campus controversies in their last interviews, students often

shared that their opinions, thanks to the courses, were distinct from that of most of their

peers. They reflected that their ability to approach these questions with a fuller view of

their complexity emanated from their learning experiences in the Thomas's and Stone's

classes, respectively. As Jessica put it, these more sophisticated and nuanced perspectives

often put them "in the minority." There is, of course, a marked difference between the

kind of complex argument a student might make about any issue in a classroom or in an

interview, and the discourse that animates activist circles, or shows up on Facebook

posts. The latter will necessarily veer towards simpler, less elaboration and nuance than

the former. There is also the reality that the students were self-reporting that they were, in

a way, more nuanced in their views than most—I did not interview or study Gable

students in general. That said, all the students with whom I spoke were engaged with

their campus politics on some level, and some were activists themselves. They were

therefore good barometers for the difference in sophistication and complexity between

their views and that of many of their peers, as they were conversant in the shorthand of

activist talk or Facebook talk. Ultimately, I interpreted them as feeling as though they had

become, by virtue of the knowledge gained in the class, less inclined to resort to such

shorthand.

One of the most salient issues students discussed with me in this context was the role of white students or "white allies" in the BLM movement. In our final interview, Kenneth (b) reflected on how his perspective on this had shifted after Stone's class.

> I guess, based on the class, I am more aware of Black Nationalist rhetoric when it comes up again especially with BLM movement. And really having conversations about the role of people who aren't black within race relations. In Black Nationalism those discussions happen: what space should white people have. I feel like recently that's been in the conversation--what is an ally, what should they say, what shouldn't they say? How much solidarity should we have? Really thinking about Malcolm's ideas about "the coffee and the cream"--makes a lot of sense. But also seeing how camaraderie between Blacks and whites really helped. How you have to have white people in seats of power advocate for you. You shouldn't rely on them for your liberation but they have to have some role in it. The class also helped with really thinking about that, because I feel that's a big conversation now--what role do you have as someone who is not black?

Kenneth certainly understood the inclination for people of color to close ranks. But his own upbringing in a mostly white suburb, where his closest friends were white, made him feel that this issue was complicated. While Kenneth knew his position put him in the minority among his black friends, he felt that Stone's class provided him context and support for his nuanced point of view.

> It makes me a little bit conflicted about the frustration some black people have with educating people who are white--like "you should know and educate yourself." I understand how you could not be educated. Even though no one educated me, I learned by being around people who are black and woke. These people who are white on campus may never be around people who are black and woke so they definitely don't know. How are they supposed to be educated? That is why I think it's important. I fear for a movement for Black liberation if we regress to the idea that "I'm not gonna teach you." Because if you're not gonna do it, who's gonna do it? And mine's not the popular idea. There's a lot of people whom I know in the black community who feel isolated because they can't say that to anybody without being told "Whoa, you're not down with the cause, it's not our job to educate white people, what are you doing?" It seems from what I have seen [in the class] is that the loss of nuance to the race thing is like, a recent thing. You saw white people in civil rights movement marching. Even Malcolm X

would go on national television to educate white people, like, "get it together
white people." Now us saying we're just going to keep stuff just for us, I feel
like maybe my generation has no nuance at all.

Lyor (w) had similar frustrations with campus discussions about the role of white

students. At first, he expressed deep dismay at how white students, like him, who were

engaged in BLM and wanted to remain so, and who counted students of color among

their close friends, were made to feel dismissed by rhetoric appearing on Facebook:

On Facebook posts there's very liberal use of "white allies" and like, "our white
peers," clumping a lot of people together. And someone I know, on an internal
email of a student of color group, they disparaged all white people. And when
someone called them on it they said when you're part of the oppressed group there
are different dynamics. But I think ok, but you still don't say that, why would you
attack everyone? It's hard for white people to figure out where to fit themselves
into it. Obviously it's not as hard as what's happening to black people. But it's
hard to try and navigate that because it's very sensitive. So to hear people clump
people together when you are honestly trying to contribute something without
being paternalistic, you just want to be there for your friends, that's hard.

By the end of the class, in discussing the "real life application" of what he had learned,

Lyor brought up the controversies around the role of white people once again. Thomas's

class, he felt, had caused him to rethink a lot of his initial frustration.

Rethinking the role that white people play in trying to shift what race is, in
America. The realization that there are things that you can do in an attempt to help
people that have other connotations and implications. There is a certain way to go
about [helping] that is productive and one that is not.

I asked him to elaborate on how the class helped him rethink that exactly, and he turned

to the issue of authorship. Many of the authors who were enslaved people had white

editors or co-authors to vouch for them and facilitate publication. Or even, as in the case

of Nat Turner, whites who spoke for them. Lyor connected that with the contemporary

controversies around representation.

A lot of it is seeing how the black authors were having their work funneled through this channel of white editors and publishers. It manifests differently now but I feel like this still happens. The idea that a message can and sometimes has to be filtered through something that might not be empathetic of that message or totally cognizant of what the message is. Even if motivated by good intentions. Whenever that shows up, where a white person wants to speak for black people, like somebody white at a BLM protest, I now get that you have to really know what role you're playing there.

Lyor stuck with this idea of "voice," as he learned to consider it in the class, and took it further, to arrive at his own complex framing of his own role as a white person engaged with an antiracist movement.

There are voices that need to be heard and those voices have historically been, what's the word, excluded but also when they have been heard they have been filtered and made palatable. So now with everything that's going on, I'm realizing it's important to let people say whatever they want to say. You know? Let's say someone wants to say "f_ the police." That's something that now is relevant because [of police brutality]. But at the same time for me it's an extremely problematic thing to say. Same as talking about all white people on Facebook statuses dismissively. And part of me used to want to be say, "You can't say that, it's not helping." But part of me now wants to say, "You can say whatever you want because who am I to tell you what to say"?

Unsurprisingly, Lyor was not done figuring this out: "There's still stuff to work out for me. But I try to remember that however hard it is for me it is harder for them. Not to make people a them, but." At that last "not to make people a them," comment we both smiled. It seemed to suggest that the self-critique would have to be on going for Lyor. He clearly did not have a final resolution to this issue. Rather, he was able to frame it in all its complexity.

Campus debates about white allies were not the only defining campus controversies students discussed. Several prominent campuses, including Yale,

Princeton, Georgetown and Harvard, became embroiled in controversies regarding the

legacy of slavery within their histories. At Yale and Harvard, students debated the

appropriateness of the term "master" and "housemaster" as a designation for faculty

living in residence hall. Still at Harvard, students called for the replacement of the Law

School seal, honoring the slave-holding Royall family. Students at Princeton criticized

the Woodrow Wilson School of Public Affairs, while students at Yale objected to

Calhoun College, claiming in both cases that naming buildings after men who had

expressed racist views was inappropriate. In my final interviews with students, these

issues offered me opportunities to observe how students made use of their increasingly

complex and sophisticated understanding—or framing—to make sense of them. While

Jessica and Kevin had been at odds during Thomas's class, they had very similar

perspectives when I discussed the issue of renaming buildings with them. Kevin (w) put

it this way:

> I'm in total support of people of color at all these universities and their right to be
> heard, valued and feel equal in the community. That is first and foremost. Talking
> to my friends of color at Gable I know that should be a priority at all these
> institutions. Goes without saying. That being said, I have a lot of criticism about
> how people have gone about this. I am not a fan of whitewashing history. I am
> never a fan of that because that gets you Orwellian groupthink. So this notion that
> we should rename Calhoun college. I understand it but I am also uneasy about it.
> Will there come a time when anyone who had anything to do with global warming
> will be washed out of history? I have a hard time going down that road.

Jessica (b) argued along similar lines, and expressed a concern about historical erasure,

and attributed her "minority" opinion to her learning in the class and her training in

history more broadly.

> [The class] really impacted me in terms of all the name changes debates on
> campuses like Gable. Because I fall in the minority view and did not support the
> change of "house master" they are debating at Yale, and did not support the

change of the university seal they debated at Harvard and similar discussions about building names. I fall into the camp of thinking that there is something really important about acknowledging that [universities] were built on this history of slavery. So if Harvard has to change the seal then Gable needs to change the name of Jefferson House and Washington Hall. And all the universities need to wipe out their endowments (laughs). So it's a strange process of erasure that I am not comfortable with because even though I am here at a time when we're having this debate and talking about [this], but in 100 years, there's going to be no memory of the fact that slaveholders founded [Gable]? I think that might be really damaging.

When I mentioned to Jessica that she was ironically, "one hundred percent in agreement with Kevin" on these issues, she laughed but was unsurprised.

Kevin and I have had really interesting, fascinating follow up conversations since Thomas's class. I think in very different ways our academic lives were changed by the class. It's been fascinating to hear the ways in which he describes that. It made a huge impact on him and on me.

To be changed by the class in "similar ways" clearly did not mean to be made to agree but rather, as Jessica, Kevin, and the other students show, it meant to gain a complex and sophisticated understanding of issues of race. It also meant to be encouraged to cultivate and use that complex understanding to make sense of the world and of controversies and dilemmas, personal and political, like the ones highlighted above. Kevin and Jessica had very similar reactions to the on-going campus controversies at Gable and other prominent universities because they shared an awareness, emphasized in Thomas's class, of the value of confronting and inquiring into, rather than erasing, the painful history of slavery. Students like Lyor and Kenneth added dimension to their own understanding of the complicated role of white people in antiracist struggle by integrating what they learned in the classroom with their understanding of the contemporary moment. Difficult ideas like violent resistance against whites or the exclusion of whites

became more accessible to Jake, Will and Isabelle when they approached them through the perspectives of black authors that they accessed through the class. Through learning about race in brave community, the students were not moved to the same ,s, but they were encouraged to construct, for themselves, a more critical and sophisticated perspective on race.

Conclusion

This study builds upon and complements an extensive body of research,

theory and practice knowledge[20]. Multiple studies reviewed in chapter two show the

positive influence of race-related content and classroom racial diversity on college

students. Scholars explore the impact of classroom discussion of race, or "race talk," on

student learning. Others provide protocols for supporting classroom discussions of race.

Scholars also continue to produce research and theory to promote culturally sustaining,

race-related curricula. Taken together, this body of research resonates with the central

tenets of brave community: pedagogical leadership by professors and intellectual courage

and empathy by students are essential for productive learning to occur in courses on race.

Whether explicitly stated in Arao & Clemens's article on "From Safe Spaces to Brave

Spaces," or implied in Singleton's "Courageous Conversations" framework, the

connection between intellectual bravery and learning about race is widely resonant. If we

recall the success of Mellody Hobson's widely circulated TED talk, "Colorbrave," or the

impact of former Attorney General Eric Holder's "nation of cowards" speech, we

recognize that this resonance extends beyond scholarly work into our public sphere. In

his farewell address in January 2017, Barack Obama evoked the ideas of bravery and

empathy.

> If we're going to be serious about race going forward, we need to uphold laws against discrimination -- in hiring, and in housing, and in education, and in the criminal justice system. That is what our Constitution and our highest ideals require. But laws alone won't be enough. Hearts must change. It won't change overnight. Social attitudes oftentimes take generations to change. But if our democracy is to work in this increasingly diverse nation, then each one of us need to try to heed the advice of a great character in American fiction -- Atticus Finch, who said, "You never really understand a person until you consider things from

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[20] See the literature review in chapter 2 for specific studies.

his point of view, until you climb into his skin and walk around in it."

Yet, like most proponents of greater interpersonal empathy and courage around issues of race, either in the public sphere or in education research and practice, Obama did not offer a clear prescription for *how* people might develop these desirable, democratic qualities. With Brave Community, I argue that college courses on race can support students in acquiring content knowledge about race while also developing these crucial habits of mind and social practices. While the centrality of academic grounding is clear in the concept of Brave Community, important questions remain as I conclude this first study. For instance, what are the contours and parameters of academic grounding? Does it depend on defined specificities of class format and size? Is there an ideal amount of classroom discussion that is required for Brave Community? Do specific scholarly disciplines lead to certain academically grounded classrooms? While I will continue to explore those questions and further mature the concept of Brave Community, here I want to discuss the important contributions that this study already makes.

Learning About Race in Brave Community

The "diversity rationale" research in higher education first elicited the questions that inspired this study. How are the educational benefits of learning about race accrued? What classrooms experiences are contributing to those gains and how? Could these educational gains be made in academic courses, as they are in specialized and controlled courses, such as intergroup dialogues or diversity trainings? Brave Community answers those key questions. It is the process by which students in academic courses on race draw from academic grounding to develop more resilient, empathetic and intellectually brave

learning stances that, in turn, support a deeper and more sophisticated understanding of race to emerge.

What distinguishes Brave Community, within the vast body of knowledge on learning about race that it complements, is the centrality of academic learning. Academic grounding—the blending of academic content and culture that learning about race requires—is both foundation and motivation for the development of important qualities in professors and students alike. It becomes the culture of the classroom, the organizing principle for how both professors and students orient towards working and being together in the classroom. It provides students with the solid and common ground on which to stand up and be brave: a common academic content to inquire into, and a common understanding of the desirable ways in which to approach that content. It is academic grounding that allows students to be more interpersonally resilient and empathetic: students give one another room to learn, misspeak or make mistakes, as they too need the same space for their own growth. Importantly, it is also academic grounding and, specifically, its implicit focus on what learning requires, that orients the professor to model bravery when moments of tension arise. Brave community is, at heart, a theory about what makes a classroom a particularly empowering space for learning about race. In their own words, students reflected with me on the experience of being in academically grounded classrooms as one of reliance on "the concrete basis" for engagement, on "the lifting" and on the "grounding" that the classroom provided. Brave community is distinctive because it shows students' bravery around learning about race as not just an aspiration but also a reliable expectation, given certain classroom conditions.

The focus on ordinary academic classrooms is important as it makes this study more widely applicable to the experiences of most professors and their students. I want to stress that there is nothing "ordinary" about the powerful classroom communities created by Thomas, Stone and their students. By "ordinary," I simply mean that Thomas and Stone did not teach courses that were engineered specifically towards promoting cross-racial dialogue or diversity dialogues among students—they taught academic content. As outlined earlier, research too often focuses in more specialized or narrow courses or approaches. While these types of courses and pedagogical interventions are important and produce great benefits, they are not commonly offered or widely available to most students. However, academic courses on race across a range of disciplines like the two I studied are available across higher education institutions. While the students I followed self-selected into the courses, they did so to learn the content and not specifically to learn to engage in productive cross-racial discussion. Professors Thomas and Stone also focused their pedagogy on teaching the material—history in one case, and philosophy in the other. They did not employ what I consider specialized pedagogies, like culturally sustaining pedagogy or critical race theory pedagogy. As with the case of specialized courses, specialized pedagogies are crucial interventions in intellectual life; however, only certain students and certain professors will engage them. In contrast, I show that Brave Community can be possible in any academic course on race and is potentially beneficial to any student, provided certain classroom dynamics are present.

Brave Community offers an explanation of how academically rigorous engagement with the concept of race, *as it is already done* in a variety of disciplines, from African American Studies to Sociology and beyond, becomes transformative for

student learning about race. In the courses I studied, qualities like bravery and empathy did not have to be pursued separately, through trainings or protocols. Rather, they evolved as an integral part of the students' classroom experience. Therefore, Brave Community shows that a wider range of classrooms can become important sites for meaningful learning about race. This is important for practice, as colleges and universities are more likely to offer race studies courses—ranging across the disciplines—than intergroup dialogues or other specialized diversity training courses. In addition, in the current climate, many criticize mandatory diversity trainings as misguided efforts to coddle overly sensitive, liberal millennials. Yet, critics might find it easier to denounce an intergroup dialogue as overly "politically correct," than to argue the same about an African American studies seminar, a history course on slavery, or a sociology seminar on race and culture. Therefore, from a standpoint of political expediency, higher education institutions might have an easier time justifying academic content courses on race than diversity trainings.

Informing Learning and Development Theories through a Sociological Lens on Learning about Race

As a cultural process, Brave Community integrates dimensions of learning about race that education research often treats as separate: pedagogy, discussion and content. As we saw, especially in terms of students' developing race frames, it also bridges the individual, social and structural dimensions of our racialized social life. This sociological lens on learning also allows for productive insights into how students' race frames develop in academic courses on race and ways that, as Lyor put it, apply to every day life.

Frame analysis is essentially the study of how individuals make meaning of their experience and then use that meaning to inform subsequent action. The very point of teaching students about race, a point that students themselves appreciate and stressed in their interviews, is to better equip them for their lives in our racially pluralistic and contentious democracy. The students reflected on not only gaining new knowledge but on doing new things—being equipped to do new things—with that knowledge.

The complex and self-authored race frames that emerged in Thomas' and Stone's courses also displayed students' ability to challenge received structures of thought and create their own. Essentially, what I am describing are ways in which students used the understanding gained from the courses to move intellectually and change their minds about race. Changing one's mind about race—how it works in society and in one's own life—is a potentially impactful intervention because racism depends, in part, on the unchallenged reproduction of racist ideas. In constructing their complex and self-authored frames in myriad ways, the students disturbed that process.

Learning about race in Brave Community emerges because students integrate what they are thinking with who they are, not despite of it. For the students in the study, race is a unique kind of content because it is both a concept for academic inquiry and a lived experience. Therefore, it is entirely coherent that, given classroom conditions that support this, the learning is meaningful and even transformative. The notion that an integration of the cognitive and affective dimensions is at the core of meaningful learning and, by extension, drives adult development, is central to Kegan's theories of subject-object and self-authorship, as well as to deeper learning theory (Kegan, 1994; Mehta & Fine, 2015). For Kegan, adults develop primarily through a process of increasingly

complex meaning making that responds to the ever-increasing cognitive demands of modern life. Deeper learning theorists argue that students learn deeply when they are allowed to gain expertise while staying connected to their intrinsic motivations and creative impulses. While neither set of theories addresses race content distinctively, I believe it will be productive to do so. As we know, two of the most persistent challenges in higher education are the challenges of racial diversity on campus and the difficulty of engaging students in deep learning. These challenges are not often considered in tandem but this study suggests that Brave Community courses on race might address both issues at once, and that meaningful learning about race might always be deep learning of the sort that supports important adult development.

Learning About Race to Unlearn Racism

For the students who shared their learning experience with me, to learn about race meant to learn about the history, cultures and experiences of people whose humanity had been racialized so that it could be diminished; people who nonetheless marshaled their history, culture and experience in a perennial effort to restore their full humanity. For the students in Thomas's course on narratives of slavery, and Stone's course on black political thought, to learn about race meant to be in dialogue with Black people, their testimonies, and their critiques. I believe that the learning that took place in the courses I studied mattered most for that reason—because it offered students the opportunity to engage a body of knowledge that is as constitutive of American democracy as the founding documents.

In this sense, learning about race does not principally matter because it produces

cognitive and socioemotional gains for students, or because it prepares them for life and work in a multiracial, globalized world. Those—the benefits foregrounded in the "diversity rationale"—are secondary reasons. The reason to teach and learn about race in college in our time is to commit to the notion that individuals must unlearn the racism that has plagued the past two centuries. The existence of a body of evidence that attests to both the oppression of Black people and their defiant humanity in the face of said oppression necessitates that we bear witness. Through their courses, Thomas and Stone offered students an opportunity to bear witness.

To become post-racist, society has to be given opportunities to learn how to do so.

In a racist society, people must be given educational opportunities to learn "to climb into someone's skin and walk around in it," in order to consider things from their point of view and understand them. It becomes increasingly clear that the civic and moral health of this democracy depends on that. This study argues that college courses on race can be those opportunities, that students come to college seeking those opportunities, and that those opportunities contribute greatly to their cognitive and socioemotional development. While racism is sustained by a system of structures perpetuating race-based inequalities in all facets of social life, racism is also socially reproduced as a system of ideas. The kind of learning about race in which Thomas, Stone and their students engaged destabilizes that reproductive process. It accomplishes this by affording students opportunities to inquire about race, construct their own understanding of it, and develop a sense of expertise about it. Students made this visible to me as I observed them integrating the perspectives of the authors, the ideas of their peers, and the productive questions posed by their professors. They made this concrete in how they shared with me

understandings of race that bridged their individual preconceptions and the emergent

knowledge constructed in class. They illustrated the utility of this learning as they

brought the context of the courses to bear on our contemporary reality. The

transformative nature of these experiences was not just explicit in students' reframing of

race. It was also implicit in the way students lit up during their interviews, fueled and

moved by their own ability to make better sense of race.

As this study came to a close, college campuses exploded in racial unrest, spurred

by the broader Black Lives Matter movement. In a majority of the lists of demands that

student activists put forth, there was a wide range of grievances and requested solutions.

Among other things, student activists asked for free tuition for Native students and

descendants of enslaved people, for mandatory diversity training for all faculty, staff and

students, for changes to curricula, and for increased representation of people of color in

the student and faculty bodies. They boldly demanded these things immediately. I think

that fundamentally, through their comprehensive and ambitious demands, the students,

often in multiracial coalitions led by Black and Latino activists, were asking to be

educated on a campus where students of color were full citizens. When I read those long

lists of bold demands I discerned that students were asking for the end of racism. In

doing so, they were joining a centuries-old tradition.

Universities cannot end racism. What they can do is make every effort to ensure

that the students they educate are best positioned to confront racism because they have

been given educational opportunities to acquire the knowledge, skills and inclination to

do so. In courses like "Slavery Stories," "Black Political Thought," and countless others,

students both study race and reckon with its meaning in their own lives. In this

entanglement of the cognitive and the affective is the risk of teaching and learning about race—the microaggressions, the tensions, the conflicts, the political correctness debates, and the protests. But as I hope to have shown in this study, in that entanglement of intellect and feeling lays also reward: that deep and transformative learning about race that is essential to the development of citizens who understand that racial justice is essential to any democracy.

Appendix A

Interview Guides

Student Interview 1
Quick notes before we begin:
--the first part of the interview will ask about you in general and the second, longer part will be more about the course itself.
--you can stop or redirect the interview at any time, especially if you don't want to answer a particular question.
--you can ask questions anytime.
--I want to remind you that the study is about me learning about the classroom dynamic and in no way is it evaluating you or your colleagues.
 (Hand out Consent Form)
--any questions about the consent form or in general, before we start?

Part A: Let's Talk About You

Tell me a bit about yourself. Where did you grow up?

Would you say that your neighborhood was racially diverse?

What about your schools—were those racially diverse?

Before this course, was thinking about race something you did a lot?
> Say more about that.

Before we get into discussing the class, let's do a quick word association exercise.
If I say, "discussing race in the classroom," what's the first word that comes to mind?
> Why do you say that?

Part B: Let's Talk About the Class
Since being in college, have you had many opportunities to think about race-related issues, either in or outside of class?
> Say more about that.

Why did you register for the course? What did you hope to gain from the course when you enrolled?

So far, what stands out the most in terms of the course (you can pick a moment, an idea that's come up in discussion, a reading, anything)?
> Why do you say that?
> [Elaborate with follow-up questions]

Has anything surprised you?

Had you experienced that before?

Has anything challenged you?
        Had you experienced that before?

One of the advantages of my being present during class is that I can focus a bit on the classroom dynamic and the flow of the discussion. Are there moments in the discussion that stand out for you?
        Why do you say that?

Overall how do you think the class is going?

I'm going to end with a big picture question: *Do you think this course can influence your understanding of race?*
        Why do you say that?

Anything else you'd like to bring up or questions you have for me?
                                …
Student Interview 2 (after the course is over)

Overall how do you think the class went?

What worked well? Why do you say that?

Is there something that you feel did not work well for you?

If you had to describe the "recipe" for how the class "worked"—what would be the ingredients?

In our first interview you said your intention with taking this course was….Did the course meet those expectations?

The course was a seminar, so was driven by discussion. Do you think that was effective?
        Say more about that.

Are there moments in the discussion, or in the class in general, that stand out for you?

Did your peers have a role in your learning?
        Say more about that.

What did you write about in your paper(s)?

In our first interview, when I said what does "classroom discussion of race" make you think of, you said… How would you answer that question today?

Did any key insights or ideas emerge in the course for you?
        (If yes) Is that a new way of thinking about that for you?
        (If no) Is there anything new that emerged for you from the course?

        Do you consider the content of the course to be important to your own education?
        Why/Why not?

Do you think others would benefit from the course? Why/Why not?

Ok, last one! I will read a statement and you have to agree or disagree.
This course can make students rethink their understandings of race.
        Agree or disagree?
        Tell me why you [agree/disagree]
        [If agree] Do you have a sense of what it was about the course that contributed to
that?
                                        …
Student Interview 3: Checklist
*Below are some common ways in which content from course could "pop up" in your life.
Please check any and all that resonate with you. If none resonate me you—which is
perfectly fine—just check off the last box.*

        Conversations with friends and/or family

        Discussions in other classes

        My choices of classes going forward

        My ideas about my identity

        My ideas about where and how I grew up

        My ideas about race

        How I think about race-related issues that are in the news

        How I feel about my friends and/or family

        My future plans in terms of extra-curricular activities
        My future plans in terms of courses I will take
        Other_____
        I don't see the course content having an influence in my life.

Faculty Interview

What are your aims for the course?

How will you know that you have succeeded?

If you have taught this course in the past, have you made adjustments to it over the years?
     Why?
Why do you teach this course—meaning, what about your own life and trajectory and work inspires you to teach this course?

Over the years, are there patterns you recognize in how students experience the course? (To clarify, are there consistent challenges, consistent high points, do some students struggle more, do some struggle less?)

In your opinion, what is the benefit of a seminar format?

Walk me through how you see your role as facilitator of the class discussion.

     Do you find that discussions in this course can be challenging?

Now let's focus on this particular class.

So far what moments in the discussion stand out for you? Why?

Has anything been challenging?

How typical or atypical would you say that this group of students is, compared to other groups?

Ok, last one. I will read a statement and you have to agree or disagree.
This course can influence students' understandings of race.
          Agree or disagree?
          Tell me why you [agree/disagree]

Appendix B: Additional Data Tables

Table 3. Comparing Two Cases

	THOMAS	STONE (Arthur's Section)
Academic Grounding	✓✓	✓✓
Resilient Empathy	✓ ✓	✓
Intellectual Bravery	✓✓	
Community	✓✓	
	Brave COMMUNITY	Academically Grounded COMMUNITY

Table 4. Evidence of Complex and Self-Authored Race Frames.

	Complex	Self-Authored (Autonomy)	Self-Authored (Personal)
Thomas's Students			
Adina	✓	✓	✓
Amy			
Deyanira	✓		✓
Evans	✓	✓	
Eva			
Jessica	✓	✓	✓
Kate			
Laura			
Keli'i	✓	✓	
Kevin	✓	✓	✓
Lyor	✓	✓	✓
Warner	✓	✓	
Stone's Students			
Ellie	✓		✓
Isabelle	✓		✓
Jake	✓		
Kenneth	✓		✓
Tessa	✓		✓
Will	✓		

Table 5. Main Questions

Thomas's Students	A. Are there benefits to academic engagement with race?	B. Should course should be required of all students?	C. Has course come up in your life?
Adina	yes	yes	yes
Amy	yes	yes	n/a
Deyanira	yes	yes	n/a
Evans	yes	yes	yes
Eva	yes	yes	yes
Jessica	yes	yes	yes
Kate	yes	yes	yes
Laura	yes	yes	n/a
Keli'i	yes	yes	yes
Kevin	yes	yes	yes
Lyor	yes	yes	yes
Warner	yes	yes	n/a
Stone's Students			
Ellie	yes	maybe	yes
Isabelle	yes	yes	yes
Jake	yes	yes	yes
Kenneth	yes	yes	yes
Tessa	yes	yes	yes
Will	yes	yes	yes

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