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The journal publishes a particular type of academic writing in which teacher-practioners critically reflect on their teaching practice—surfacing their assumptions, analyzing their pedagogical intentions, reflecting on the effectiveness of their learning designs, and diagnosing challenges to student learning.

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GUEST EDITOR'S NOTE

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Special Issue : The View from Late Antiquity

Engaging the Political in the Religious Studies Classroom: Lessons from Studying Religion in Late Antiquity

Authors' Note: The articles and contributions in this issue are designed to provide a framework for responsibly incorporating politics into the religious studies classroom. In the eventful months since this Issue has been in production, many new resources have emerged—on accessible pedagogy, anti-racist education, and citational ethics—that can help facilitate this incorporation. For a list of resources that the authors recommend, please see: https://www.engaging-politics-in-religious-studies-classroom.com/.

We are living in times marked by rapid change, where long-held assumptions—about identity, history, politics, the environment, and religion, to name a few—are being questioned, upended, and reasserted by turns. Global markets and the internet have made the world seem both smaller and more vast, as people encounter one another across varying axes of difference and otherness, finding fellowship and antagonism in equal measure. Boundless ambition is valorized and habitually on display, while staggering inequality increases by leaps and bounds both globally and within individual countries.

Many of these same claims can be made about late antiquity, the period from approximately 250 CE–800 CE in the Mediterranean and Europe. What had once been termed the "dark ages" and dismissed as the wilderness years during which classical civilization unraveled and the Roman Empire collapsed has now been recognized as a vibrant, productive, and distinctive social and cultural era that saw not decline so much as transition, transformation, and an interplay of continuity and change fueled by the same types of dynamics we are seeing today. Late antiquity was marked by new forms of ambition as new means of acquiring power, wealth, and prestige emerged via military, imperial, or ecclesiastical service (among other avenues); it featured shifting concepts of government and theories of rule, of empire and commonwealth; it oversaw expanding understandings of divine power as monotheism spread; and, most spectacularly, it saw the diversification of influential voices, languages, and economies as the influence of Rome diminished.[1] All of these shifts have had lasting (but long-unacknowledged) effects.

Given these legacies and the resonances between the era we study and our own, scholars of religion in late antiquity who teach in the United States find that the college classroom in 2020 presents a particular challenge. This challenge arises, primarily, from the various disconnects between what our research shows us and what the public often thinks of our time period, our material, and us. The general public often regards late antiquity (when they consider it at all) as either a monolith of benightedness or a chaos of collapse whose primary feature was the progressive disintegration of Roman "civilization." For other observers, the story of late antiquity is indeed one of growth, expansion, and development, but it is nonetheless a narrow and teleological story, centered on the timeline of how various orthodoxies—Christian, Jewish, and Muslim, primarily—emerged as "winners."[2] From both of these perspectives, scholars of late antiquity would have little reason to engage in politics in the classroom or to teach classes with contemporary political relevance; on these views, our materials are settled, their interpretations largely fixed, and our role as teachers is to serve, apolitically, as guides to static and clearly visible historical tableaux.

1 For helpful introductions to late antiquity, see Johnson (2012), Bowersock, Brown, and Grabar (2001), Rousseau (2012), and Boin (2018). See also the classic Brown (1971, 1996), Cameron (1993a, 1993b), and Fowden (1993).

2 For a problematization of this, along with this model of historical winners and losers, see Gibbons and Fruchtman (2020).

As scholars of the period, we know this not to be true. Our research, as scholars of history, philology, and religious studies, reveals a dynamic period of refreshing polyvocality, a time when concepts of "center" and "periphery" were in constant flux, an era that richly rewards explorations into concepts of gender, ethnicity, class, and ecology, and whose fullest possible portrayal in fact requires those very explorations. We know that the past is not unproblematically retrievable; that the historical record is ambiguous (as are, typically, the composition and transmission histories of the sources on which it is grounded) and its interpretation contested; and that even the categories that draw students to our classes—"religion," "late antiquity," "Christian," and "pagan," for example—are themselves on shaky definitional ground and, in the case of identity categories, may never have been as firm, fixed, or exclusive as their surviving proponents have made them out to be. All of this knowledge has contemporary political consequences, as it problematizes many of the narratives that we, as humans, tell ourselves about ourselves as we formulate our own political and politicized identities. Destabilizing the supposedly settled historical and interpretational foundations of these identities is a profoundly political activity.

This is undoubtedly even more the case when we are destabilizing the historical and interpretational foundations of supremacist ideologies—white supremacist, western supremacist, and Christian supremacist in particular. This is something that scholars who teach late ancient religion are confronted with regularly in the classroom and daily in public discourse: each of these ideologies depends upon misunderstandings of or ignorance of late antiquity. For example, the Christian supremacist who wants to argue that certain forms of Christianity "won out" because they were in some way "better" than alternative traditions will be, upon studying late antiquity, surprised to find the lines between traditions to be fuzzy, ambiguous, and sometimes simply nonexistent (more extensively discussed in Gibbons and Fruchtman [2020]). And those who would seek to ground triumphalist views of whiteness or western civilization in the classical period (like many of those noted by Zuckerberg [2018]) are stymied by the interpellation of late antique readers and curators into their historical fictions. That texts typically only survived from classical antiquity due to the copying choices of subsequent generations (rendering classical literature subject to late ancient selection bias) is not something that figures into the historical assessments of alt-right influencers who want to claim a connection to the legacies of Greece and Rome. Indeed, while the nineteenth-century poet Percy Bysshe Shelley claimed affinity with the ancient Greeks by noting that "our laws, our literature, our religion, our arts, have their roots in Greece" (1886 [1822]), our experience of those roots has been irrevocably shaped by late antiquity. To return to Bowersock, Brown, and Grabar:

> It is, for instance, from late antiquity, and not from any earlier period of Roman history, that we have inherited the codifications of Roman law that are the root of the judicial systems of so many states in Europe and the Americas. The forms of Judaism associated with the emergence of the rabbinate and the codification of the Talmud emerged from late antique Roman Palestine and from the distinctive society of Sassanian Mesopotamia. The basic structures and dogmatic formulations of the Christian church, both in Latin Catholicism and in the many forms of Eastern Christianity, came from this time, as did the first, triumphant expression of the Muslim faith. Even our access to the earlier classics of the ancient world, in Latin and Greek, was made possible only through the copying activities of late antique Christians and their early medieval successors, locked in an endless, unresolved dialogue with their own pagan past. (2001, ix-x)

Any account of classical history that does not acknowledge the late ancient filter is inaccurate and, more than that, irresponsible.

And so teachers who deal with this material in our classrooms cannot be apolitical. One might suggest that the difference between politicizing and not politicizing our classrooms lies in what our learning objectives are. Is our goal merely to impart knowledge about late antiquity and hope that our students, on their own, will use it to problematize supremacist narratives? Or is our goal, baked into our classes and their learning objectives, to have our students realize that their conceptions of the present will have to be reconsidered in light of the late ancient past?[3] But such a suggestion operates on the misguided assumption that *not* expressly engaging contemporary takeaways is an apolitical stance. Our classrooms (and public discourse) are already politicized, having been shaped by and dominated by these triumphalist narratives. Failing to explicitly undercut them is, in itself, a political act that bolsters the status quo and furthers the naturalization of ideas that we should, with attention to our material, be destroying.

To respond to this challenge, then, we must engage responsibly with politics in the classroom. But how? That is what this special issue seeks to explore. It is one of several fruits of a workshop, held in November 2017 (and described in Upson-Saia and Doerfler [2020]), in which scholars of late ancient religions gathered to collaboratively address what we felt to be a newly intensified need for intellectually and socially responsible approaches to engaging politics in our classrooms. The challenge described above had become more pronounced in the lead-up to the 2016 U.S. election, and the urgency only escalated in its aftermath, as it became increasingly acceptable in public discourse to weaponize identity categories and use them as rejection-enabling shorthand or,

3 See, for example, the discussion of (and subsequent dispute over) whether medievalists must explicitly identify themselves to their students as *not* being white supremacists (Kim 2018).

worse, as buffers against acknowledging the humanity of those placed within those categories. Many of us felt compelled to do something to more effectively push against the widespread understanding of traditions and identities as discrete, timeless, and unchanging; additionally, we felt compelled to learn how we could best serve our students in this fraught political environment as we helped them build toward similar insights.

This special issue, then, seeks to help scholars of late antiquity (and others) rise to this challenge—to give scholars of religion in this period and in other pre-modern settings some additional tools with which to engage politics in the classroom (and encouragement as they embark on or continue the endeavor). We also hope to share with colleagues outside of this special area, in both religious studies and theology departments, some of the myriad ways that late ancient and pre-modern materials can be deployed to address politics in a variety of classrooms. The contributions in this issue are all by scholars of late ancient religion and make extensive use of late ancient materials, but the ideas and tactics here collected are broadly applicable even outside this area of specialization. Our hope is that we can support colleagues across the academy in incorporating politics responsibly into their classrooms in the future.

Notes on Contributions and Commitments

All of the contributions in this special issue are by scholars of religion in late antiquity either working in or trained in religious studies, even though not all of the examples they employ are late ancient and not all of their pieces are centered on content. The rationale behind using authorial specialization (rather than content) as our metric of inclusion is three-fold. First, it reflects the reality of our roles as instructors in the contemporary college classroom. Although we teach at a wide range of institutions—state flagships, small liberal arts colleges (SLACs), Ivies, and regional campuses of state systems—and although we include scholars with tenure, scholars on the tenure track, scholars teaching within the precariat, and graduate students, none of us is able to teach entirely within our area of specialization: we also teach service classes, surveys, and seminars with broad appeal; thus, religion in late antiquity is often only a fraction of the content we teach. Second, the decision to include pedagogues by virtue of their research expertise and not their choice of content is aspirational: we are seeking to claim our position as experts, to use what we have learned in our research and our training in every aspect of what we do, including politically-engaged pedagogy. Third, we wanted to be faithful to our experience in the classroom: we know that incorporating politics in the classroom is never solely about content, and that even if we were teaching entirely within late antiquity, we would need to consider things like civic engagement, positionality, and what guidelines to follow for establishing our own sets of best practices in the classroom.[4] An additional benefit of this approach, we hope, is that this collection will appeal to a broader audience and help them make connections between our contributions and their own areas of expertise (pre-modern or otherwise).

As a final introductory note on our contributors, we want to identify two axes on which we are less diverse than we had intended or hoped to be. First, the majority of us are scholars of Judaism and Christianity in late antiquity. There are other traditions, most prominently Islam, whose scholars would certainly have enhanced the offerings here but are not well represented among our authors. Second, we are, for the most part, white. The perspectives of more scholars of color would also have benefited this volume, and we have fallen short on that front, as well. With these two particular shortcomings, we have replicated extant imbalances in the study of late antiquity. We feel it might be illuminating here to pause and examine the process that has culminated in those deficiencies.

Though the November 2017 workshop was broadly advertised, the only people who could easily attend were scholars already attending the AAR/SBL in Boston. Indeed, the Middle East Studies Association, where many scholars of early Islam (in particular) find their primary conversation partners, was running in Washington, D.C. at the very same time. Thus, already, participation was skewed toward scholars of Judaism and Christianity who had access to travel funding (or lived in the Boston area) and a schedule that allowed them to stay past the end of the Annual Meeting.[5] After the workshop, when it became clear that publication might be a fruitful route for using, building on, and publicizing our collaborative findings, some scholars were actively disincentivized from joining the collaboration: many institutions still devalue or even penalize scholarship of teaching and learning in tenure portfolios, for example; in other cases, potential collaborators with minoritized identities and areas of study were discouraged by the threat of retaliation, the heavier workloads that often come with minority status, and even the "diversity fatigue" (Lam 2018) that almost always accompanies minoritization. Even the opportunity to focus our research on politically-engaged pedagogy was afforded to us by layer upon layer of privilege.

4 We also wanted to address ability status and Universal Design

5 These circumstances also explain the centering of U.S. scholarship and the U.S. political context.

The group of seven scholars who joined together to produce academic research on "Politics, Pedagogy, and the Profession" (the authors of the longer articles in this issue) reflected on this situation when we conceived our plans for the articles you see here; we resolved to do the work of "accomplices," which is to educate ourselves and other people of privilege instead of relying solely on

the exploited labor of minoritized and marginalized people. As part of this resolution, we agreed to deal directly with minoritization in all of our articles and to prioritize and use already-published works by scholars of color.

We also write with the hope that the new digital format of *The Wabash Center Journal on Teaching* will facilitate expansive and proliferating conversations by enabling easy navigation between and connection among pieces in separate issues, thus allowing sustained and ongoing trajectories of discussion on this topic. We invite and encourage scholars of religion in late antiquity who can offer different perspectives and ideas to join the conversation by publishing responses and addenda in this venue, or by joining the private Facebook group[6] through which we are sharing resources and discussing classroom strategies.

Most importantly, however, the problem of representation in this issue reveals the work that still needs to be done at the undergraduate level to encourage people who are underrepresented in late ancient studies into the academic pipeline, to make the field itself more diverse. This means showing minoritized students that the material is relevant to their lives and interests, and that their questions, concerns, and insights about late ancient sources and the ways we study them are welcome and, indeed, salutary for the health of the field. And so we hope that this issue can help in this aim.

Process and Products

The articles in this issue developed via a fully collaborative process which has worked well to improve all of our individual thinking and (we hope) the final product (Upson-Saia and Doerfler [2020], Ronis and Proctor [2020], Gibbons and Fruchtman [2020], and Fruchtman and Park [2020]). The seven of us met via Skype (with myself, in the capacity of guest editor, acting as facilitator, rather than a leader or collector of materials), and together discussed what aspects of the problem needed the sustained attention of full-length research articles. We agreed that we needed some historical perspective on the question of engaging politics in the religious studies classroom, an exploration of positionality and how religious studies methodology can help us illuminate a richer account of identity politics, and a framework or set of guidelines to use when expanding one's pedagogy to explicitly incorporate the political into the classroom. We also conceived of an introductory essay that would frame the project and sketch out our reasons for embarking on it. We assigned these articles to teams of two to three people, with team leaders acting as facilitators and primary authors, always working collaboratively via team meetings over Skype and document sharing services (DropBox and GoogleDocs). Using a shared Google Drive folder to collect and categorize relevant research, some for individual articles and some for the whole group,[7] we maintained consistent contact throughout the process. At various points, all seven of us would meet (again via Skype) to share our writings so far and gather comments and suggestions, and each of the articles bears the ghosts of many conversations beyond its margins.

The first article, "Politics and the Pedagogue of Late Antiquity" (Upson-Saia and Doerfler 2020), dives deeper into the necessity for pedagogues of pre-modern religion, particularly those who study late antiquity, to engage politics in the classroom in intellectually responsible ways. It describes the workshop which sparked the collaboration from which this special issue grew, outlines the understanding of politics that runs throughout the contributions, and notes the importance of collaboration for making our fields more inclusive.

The next article, "The Past, Present, and Religious Studies Future of Civic Engagement in American Higher Education" by Sara Ronis and Travis Proctor (2020), details the ways that civic engagement is fundamental to the stated work of the university, the humanities, and the project of religious studies. The article traces the historical connections between civic engagement and higher education in the American context to the present period, highlighting a consistency of focus on civic engagement across diverse university contexts even as educational priorities shift, before exploring the particular role of civic engagement in religious studies pedagogy. The authors contend that the integration of civic engagement in the late antique religion classroom enhances students' ability to understand complex concepts in late ancient religion and underscores the relevance of their study to students' lives. The article concludes by proposing three concrete strategies for incorporating civic engagement into the religious studies

6 You can find the Facebook group, "Politics, Pedagogy, and the Profession," at https://www.facebook.com/groups/760110884387955/.

7 Importantly, at Upson-Saia's urging we all read Killen and Gallagher (2013) prior to our initial discussion, so that we could have a solid understanding of what models of scholarship of teaching and learning in religious studies we would want to follow.

classroom: cultivating naming practices, focusing pedagogical exercises on honing students' civic engagement skills, and, where practicable, engaging in community-based learning.

The theme of political discourse as both a vital aspect of religious studies and a pedagogical partner for the study of pre-modernity is continued in the third article. In their "Politics and Positionality in the Religious Studies Classroom," Kathleen Gibbons and Diane Shane Fruchtman (2020) suggest that examinations of positionality through the lens of religious studies methodologies provide necessary and salutary correctives to the ways that politics is assumed to operate in the classroom. The authors propose that examination of the ways in which relations of power inform imaginative representations of "the other" offers resources for critiquing binary and doctrinal conceptions of the political, including, for example, the notion of politics unfolding along a binary "liberal-conservative" spectrum. The article delineates and critiques different models for bringing positionality to the fore of the classroom, and provides readers with concrete examples for productively interrogating the role of power in knowledge production.

Implicit in these essays is the understanding of the classroom as an inescapably political zone. This claim, once accepted, requires instructors to adapt their pedagogy accordingly, recognizing that choices in the classroom will replicate, reinforce, or resist the political status quo. This is the starting point of the final article, "Accepting the Inevitability of Politics in the Classroom: A Proposal for How to Identify Best Practices in Effective and Inclusive Religious Studies Pedagogy" (Fruchtman and Park 2020). In it, Diane Shane Fruchtman and Chan Sok Park propose guiding principles ("classroom climate considerations") for discerning best practices in developing one's own religious studies pedagogy with attention to the presence of politics in the classroom. The article concludes with suggestions—structural, instructor-focused, and student-focused—that illustrate the types of strategies that can be employed within their proposed parameters.

The subsequent contributions to this issue—each Conversation, Design and Analysis, and Teaching Tactic—was solicited after these longer articles had coalesced: when we proposed the special issue to *The Wabash Center Journal on Teaching*, they graciously offered us the opportunity to expand and invite contributions from a wider group of colleagues studying late ancient religion, who could give examples of the types of pedagogical interventions and guiding principles we discuss in the articles. We solicited these with a general and open-ended call (to workshop participants and others in the field through listservs and social media), as well as with specific invitations to instructors we knew to be active in incorporating politics into their classrooms. While these individually authored pieces were not collaborative in the same way as the articles were, the seven original collaborators made themselves available as sounding boards to the new contributors as they turned their pieces from proposals to reality, in an attempt to further promote collaborative collegiality around this question of how scholars of religion in late antiquity can engage politics in the classroom.

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ARTICLE

Politics and the Pedagogue of Late Antiquity

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ABSTRACT

This essay serves to situate this special issue within its temporal, disciplinary, and pedagogical context. It aims to set out the uniquely inflected challenges and opportunities that the study of late antiquity confronts at the beginning of this new decade. The increasing deployment of pre-modern sources for the construction of political ideologies; students' desire for relevant education; and increasing urgency of confronting both phenomena in an intellectually and pedagogically responsible fashion, provide the impetus for both this issue and the 2017 workshop on politics and pedagogy that initially brought its contributors into conversation. This essay provides readers with background on workshop participants' initial discussions about motivations for teaching politically-relevant (and sometimes politically-charged) courses; the relationship between such courses and the mandates of higher education; and the relevance of both religious studies and late antiquity to political discourse. The essay then charts the conversation's trajectories beyond the workshop, provides definitional clarification of politics and the political, and offers a more focused theorization of the value added by our position as scholars of religion in late antiquity. In the process, this essay, in conjunction with the guest editor's Note, lays the theoretical foundation for the special issue at hand and orients readers to the articles and pedagogical materials gathered therein.

KEYWORDS

politics, pedagogy, religious studies, late antiquity

Encountering 2020 in the Late Ancient Classroom

In the lead-up to the U.S. general election of 2016 and in its aftermath, scholars of religious studies have found ourselves confronted with a particular and newly urgent sense of political relevance and responsibility. The subjects that preoccupy us in our professional and pedagogical capacities have always intruded in the public sphere, but now these intrusions appear to be not only more frequent, but more potent, as they are manifesting within a public discourse marked simultaneously by expanded access to public platforms and extensive fragmentation into partisan polemical echo chambers. A confluence of factors has resulted in a political sphere in which individuals and interest groups have more power than ever before to shape

public awareness of their positions (whatever they might be), and to translate this into real-world activism and public policy.[1] The stakes are high—when our material is used in public discourse we feel more urgently than ever that it needs to be addressed.

Even more than the intrusion of our material into public discourse, many academics have come to experience the political climate in this historical moment as politicizing the way we teach. As educators we strive to ensure that the voices and positionalities of minoritized groups are taught alongside the voices and positionalities of those in power; yet this impulse has been caricatured as left-leaning politics and cast pejoratively as politically correct. As pedagogues, we work to ensure equitable learning opportunities for underrepresented students, which we regard as a straightforward defense of their civil rights; yet this concern has been regarded by some as a political act of coddling or privileging minoritized students. Moreover, the political climate in this historical moment has butted up against not only our pedagogical values, but also some of our central methods. As experts in our fields, we insist on reason- and evidence-based claims; yet this insistence has been discounted by political discourse that regularly trades on emotions (such as fear and hatred) and that carelessly (or maliciously) spreads misinformation. As scholars, our value of deep expertise—and the time and training required to develop expertise—has been undermined by a political discourse that holds equal the views of experts and nonexperts.[2] As members of scholarly communities who strive to set discussions and debates within frames of respectful listening and disagreement we compete with a political discourse structured on antagonism, misrepresentation of others' views, and *ad hominem* arguments.[3] Finally, political views about the religious communities we study—and opposition to those groups—are blending into an increased scrutiny and politicization of the *scholarship* on those communities.[4] In short, academic values, methods, and scholarly production, now more than ever, are either bound up as politically partisan or subverted by new forms of political discourse. As such, instructors and institutions are struggling with how to stand against racist, xenophobic, homophobic, Islamophobic, sexist, ableist, etc. positions; to stand for reason- and evidence-based claims; and to exert our authority as expert facilitators of intellectual discussions without drawing charges of being political activists. Our commitments as academics—and the intellectual values they reflect—have, in our current political climate, become both more controversial and more urgent.

For those of us who are scholars of pre-modernity, we have been distressed by the ways our materials have been introduced into public discourse in service of political positions. When scholars point out the ways in which presentist uses of our materials distort their meanings in their original historical context, our critiques of ahistoricism and our corrections are likewise politicized. For instance, white nationalists have mobilized Greco-Roman marble statues (Bond 2017), and more broadly classical subjects (packaged as "Western Civilization," [Dozier 2019]), to justify the legitimacy of the white ethnostate and to corroborate fear and suppression of racial, religious, sexual, immigrant, and other minorities.[5] When scholars pointed out the inaccuracies in this use of history—such as the failure to recognize that marble statues were originally painted in vibrant colors and have merely lost their paint over time, that most people on the ancient Mediterranean were brown and black-skinned, and that ancient Greeks and Romans did not define race in terms of skin pigmentation (Kennedy et al. 2013)—they become targets of vicious attacks, personal and professional.

It is within this context that our collective of late ancient religion scholars felt an urgent desire to more intentionally enter a conversation taking place in the public square.[6] History and religion have long been sources of fascination for "lay" audiences, and continue to be pressed into service, in the political realm, of what are, at best, naively misleading arguments, and, at worst, consciously conceived strategies of misinformation. Against such efforts at exploitation and revisionism, many of us reject both the alleged isolation of the Ivory Tower and the cognitive dissonance we experience in our lives as scholar-teachers and engaged members of our broader

1 Aspects of these dynamics have been recognized and called out for scholarly consideration already in the preceding decade, as, for example, in the case of the Teagle White Paper (AAR-Teagle Working Group 2008). But as legal developments are a difficult-to-deny bellwether of societal change, it is worth noting that the U.S. Supreme Court has recently considered a striking number of religion-related questions. Over the course of its past three terms, the Court has witnessed arguments concerning the role of religion in shaping the country's immigration policy (*Trump v. Hawaii*); in determining employers' rights to terminate employees on the basis of their gender identity (*Harris Funeral Homes Inc. v. EEOC*) or sexual orientation (*Bostock v. Clayton County, GA*); and the circumstances under which religious symbols can be displayed on public grounds (*American Legion v. American Humanist Association*).

2 As, for example, when expert opinions on topics such as climate change are viewed as merely "political" positions instead of positions based in research.

3 Just seven years ago, these academic values were regarded as suprapolitical. The American Academy of Arts and Sciences were charged by a bipartisan request from Congress to write a report in which they concluded: "As we strive to create a more civil public discourse, a more adaptable and creative workforce, and a more secure nation, the humanities and social sciences are the heart of the matter, the keeper of the republic—a source of national memory and civic vigor, cultural understanding and communication, individual fulfillment and the ideals we hold in common" (American Academy of Arts and Sciences 2013, 9).

4 Take, for instance, the review of Title VI funding to Duke/UNC's Middle East Consortium. The criticisms leveled by Assistant Secretary King suggest a disjuncture between how the government would like religions of the Mediterranean taught and the standard practices of academics. King thus asserts unilateral authority to judge the merit of academic enterprises, without discussions with experts in the field who would be able to explain how the programming fulfill the goals of the Title VI program. Pressures from government-funding sources will certainly exert influence on the future programming of colleges and universities dependent on this funding, with the potential of reshaping the direction of the field (Rose 2019).

5 This work relies both on distortions of the historical record, and plucking selectively from inequitable and inhumane elements of ancient Mediterranean societies, as Rebecca Futo Kennedy demonstrates (2017).

6 This was in order to, as Rebecca Futo Kennedy puts it, not be complicit in the spread of historical inaccuracies and misinformation that have significant social ramifications (2017). For further discussion of the particular features of late antiquity that make this desire more urgent, see Fruchtman (2020).

communities. We wish to publicly claim our position as experts. More pressingly still, by modeling the skillful use of religious history, we aspire to empower the public (just as we seek to empower our students), providing them with the tools to read, analyze, and assess for themselves both primary sources and the arguments structured around them.

We feel an impulse to intervene into political discourse also by designing courses that address issues of current relevance and that model academic methods of analyzing sources. We can take our cues from the pedagogical efforts of scholars and instructors in neighboring disciplines who have developed courses centered on, for example, Hurricane Katrina;[7] the racial injustices and civil unrest in Ferguson, Missouri;[8] Hurricane Maria (Puerto Rico Syllabus 2017; Gonchar 2017); clerical sexual abuses (Daily Theology 2018); and the discourses of race and racism in pre-modernity.[9] These pedagogues have inspired us with their courage to take on politically-charged subject matter, without either ignoring or embracing the specter of universities as sites of political indoctrination. Their work exemplifies how instructors might create intellectually stimulating and methodologically sound syllabi, reading lists, and class exercises.

Such pedagogical projects couple our impulse to respond to current events with a wider range of pre-existing motivations to teach politically-relevant courses. First and foremost, many of our students are expecting a college education that is relevant, engaged in real-world issues, and that prepares them for meaningful work that will "have a positive impact on the world" (Seemiller and Grace 2014, 103-4; cf. Musil 2015, 245). Students push faculty to articulate the relevance of their coursework to students' chosen careers, day-to-day lives, or holistic formation. Moreover, as students take on more activist work, they clamor for tools and skills that serve their social and political ambitions, regardless of their political persuasion. Indeed, even in the absence of student pressure, studies have shown that establishing a link between course content and practical utility makes for more deeply engaged participants (Theall and Franklin 1999; Keller 2008; Chapman 2000).

Additionally, as most of us are acutely aware, enrollment in the humanities in general and religious studies in particular has taken a precarious downturn at many colleges and universities. We observe that courses with clear connections to contemporary concerns attract greater numbers of students. In a time when many departments are striving to justify their place in the academy, these numbers (rightly or wrongly) are leveraged as marks of success. Moreover, universities and colleges increasingly encourage their faculty to assume the role of public intellectuals to bolster public awareness and renown for their institutions. Teaching courses on politically-relevant subjects positions faculty to address these topics beyond the classroom, and being recognized as potentially media-savvy spokespersons for our institutions.

Yet, as our motivations for teaching politically-relevant courses accumulate, we must be intellectually responsible in how we approach this pedagogical task. Those of us who work in different historical periods and regions of the world must think carefully about how to pair our sources with contemporary topics, how we draw parallels and make distinctions, and how we make transparent our methods with respect to how knowledge of other times, places, cultures, and peoples might inform twenty-first-century discourses. At this moment, we find ourselves without theoretical guides beyond our own improvised processes of trial and error. While previous scholars have examined the question of whether and how academics should engage with politics in higher education (see Fish 2012; Smith, Mayer, and Fritschler 2008; Kimball 1990, 2008; and Berg 2005), these general pedagogical studies do not think about the unique methodological tools and content knowledge provided by the discipline of religious studies. And while there is prodigious scholarship on the politics of teaching religious studies in particular,[10] members of our collective wanted to think more specifically about teaching our own subfield—late antique Mediterranean religions—in this particular political climate.

In the remainder of this essay we describe the first meeting of our collective in which we discussed how we might design intellectually responsible courses and pedagogical practices. We list the questions guiding our inquiry and report on our initial findings. We then discuss steps we have taken since our first meeting: further clarification of what we mean by "politics" and further reflection on what our positionality as scholars of late antiquity has to offer. Finally, we discuss the importance of collaboration in pedagogical projects like ours that aim to make a broader cultural impact.

7 See, for example, "New Orleans and Hurricanes: Past, Present, and Future" (Nelson 2015); "Disaster Politics: New Orleans in the Wake of Hurricane Katrina" (Heldman 2007); "The Katrina Practicum" (McDowell, Thompson, and Carmin 2006); "Hurricane Katrina and its Aftermath" (Johnson, Caron, Rodrigue, and O'Connor 2006); and "The Katrina & Disaster Law Seminar" (Van Cleave 2011).

8 See the crowd-sourced "Ferguson Syllabus" (Chatelain 2014) and the Sociologists for Justice's "Ferguson Syllabus" (2020).

9 See, for example, "Race, Racism, and the Middle Ages" (Teaching Association for Medieval Studies 2018) and "Race and Medieval Studies: A Partial Bibliography" (Orlemanski and Orlemanski 2018).

10 See, for example, Westfield (2008), Kwok, González-Andrieu, and Hopkins (2004), Walvoord (2007), Riswold (2015), Teel (2014), Wright (2019), Byron (2012), and Trelstad (2008).

Politics, Pedagogy, and the Profession: Beginning the Conversation

In November 2017, approximately fifty scholars of late antiquity convened in Boston for a two-day workshop, "Politics, Pedagogy, and the Profession."[11] We hoped to think together about how to carefully and responsibly calibrate our teaching to this new context. On the first day we asked: How ought we design a course that enables our historical sources to speak to issues of contemporary significance, while acknowledging the real and incisive differences between twenty-first-century America and the world of the ancient Mediterranean? How do we structure our classes to be relevant, without letting the current discourse set the terms of our discussion and without skewing our material in anachronistic ways? How can our sources—that regularly touch upon social inequities, oppression, and violence; migration and immigration; torture, enslavement, and imprisonment; climate and the environment—and our disciplinary methods equip students wishing to address current social and political concerns? How do we broach politicized topics without playing into the stereotype of universities as hotbeds of liberal brainwashing? How can we connect the sources on which we are expert with contemporary considerations, without presuming or conveying misleading levels of expertise on the latter? What pedagogical strategies can facilitate conversation around politically divisive issues in the classroom? And, finally, what are the intellectually responsible uses of the past in public discourse and what is our responsibility—as scholars—to contribute? In order to answer these questions, we structured our first day's sessions to analyze the ways in which teaching politically-relevant courses fit within our institutional, departmental, and discipline-specific mandates, and then to investigate the disciplinary skills cultivated in religious studies courses that transfer also to the realm of political discourse.

First, we investigated how our institutional structures impel us to design politically-relevant courses. Specifically, since the eighteenth century, one of the stated aims of higher education has been to cultivate a skilled and responsible citizenry.[12] In recent decades, this objective has enjoyed sustained public attention, popularized largely through the work of Martha Nussbaum (1998, 2010).[13] This directive is instantiated most tangibly in institutions' mission and vision statements, wherein many explicitly state their intent to create students whose skills can be applied to pressing national or global challenges. Columbia University's mission, for instance, includes an aim "to advance knowledge and learning, conveying the products of its efforts to the world" (2018); Harvard University "is devoted to . . . developing leaders in many disciplines who make a difference globally" (2020); and Mt. Holyoke College aspires "to [prepare] students, through a liberal education integrating curriculum and careers, for lives of thoughtful, effective, and purposeful engagement in the world" (2020). Other mission statements go further, emphasizing not merely the institution's desire to provide students with the knowledge and skills to contribute to society, but acknowledging the need for academic learning to advance individuals' and society's well-being. Cornell, for instance, "aims to enhance the lives and livelihoods of students, the people of New York, and others around the world" (2020); University of South Carolina acknowledges the "university's responsibility to state and society to promote the dissemination of knowledge, cultural enrichment, and an enhanced quality of life for all" (2020); while Dartmouth "encourages a culture of integrity, self-reliance, and collegiality and instill[s] a sense of responsibility for each other and for the broader world" (2020).[14] Although there are those who wish to change the missions of colleges and universities, excising these aims—such as Governor Scott Walker's attempt to remove from the University of Wisconsin's mission the university's dictate to "search for truth" and "improve the human condition" and to add instead an aim to "meet the state's workforce needs" (Strauss 2015)—for now, participants in the workshop found that most of our institutions provided mandates and authorization to design courses that would nurture students' ability to address contemporary local, national, and global concerns.[15]

11 Participants included graduate students, early career, and senior faculty from public and private institutions. Participants held tenure-track/tenured, instructor, and lecturer positions and a few had yet to teach their own class. Approximately two-thirds of workshop participants identify as women and the majority of participants were white. Most of the participants teach about Jewish or Christian communities in late antiquity, with only a few who work also on late ancient Islam.

Funding for the workshop was provided by a Wabash Center Small Projects Grant and a North American Patristic Society Study Group Initiative award. We are grateful to both organizations, as well as to our hosts at the Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard, for providing the support that made the workshop possible.

12 See Ronis and Proctor (2020) in this issue for additional points about the aims and missions of higher education in the U.S.

13 Nussbaum is not alone in this call. The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement made an argument along similar lines, calling on institutions of higher education to reclaim, rather than to shirk, their missions of civic learning and democratic engagement (2012). Two years later, the *Journal of General Education* published a special issue that included articles on actualizing the civic mission of institutions of higher education (see especially Levine 2014; Lewis 2014; Myers 2014).

14 See also, the University of California at San Diego mission which claims that the institution aims to "transform California and a diverse global society by educating, by generating and disseminating knowledge and creative works, and by engaging in public service" (2020); and Yale's express commitment "to improving the world today and for future generations through outstanding research and scholarship, education, preservation, and practice" (2020).

15 Most of these mission statements are not new, but reflect long-standing commitments of institutions of higher education. On the long legacy of civic development as an aim of higher education, see Musil (2015), Heiland and Huber (2015), and Harper (1905). For a detailed articulation of the ways institutions of higher education educational systems cultivate democratic, global citizens, see Nussbaum (1998, 2010). Nussbaum argues that higher education cultivates citizens: (1) who are capable of engaging in robust critical discourse, possessing the skills to sift and analyze evidence, to articulate well-structured positions, and to evaluate the arguments of others; (2) who are sensitive to the heterogeneity of the nation (and of the world), possessing the ability to identify the structural, socio-cultural, and personal bases for differing perspectives, a willingness to see things from others' points of view, and a recognition of all humans' equality and dignity; and (3) who hold themselves responsible for their ideas and actions—or inaction—which shape human conditions. For a more in-depth discussion of institutional

When turning to our own disciplinary homes, we found that our professional societies expressed similar commitments to cultivating socially engaged citizens. The Society of Biblical Literature, for example, has set itself the goal to "[promote] cooperation across global boundaries," (2020) while the American Academy of Religion asserts: "In a world where religion plays so central a role in social, political, and economic events, as well as in the lives of communities and individuals, there is a critical need for ongoing reflection upon and understanding of religious traditions, issues, questions, and values" (2020). In short, both our academic institutions and our academic discipline provide for us the justification that we *should* be teaching politically-relevant courses.

In light of this strong mandate, workshop participants turned to scrutinizing the field of religious studies in search of tools that would enable us to address these goals in disciplinarily responsible ways. Specifically, we sought to identify the knowledge, skills, and methodologies we aim to instill in students that likewise have a bearing on how well students are able to engage with contemporary global issues and contribute to political discourse. First, we acknowledged the importance of critical empathy to our field.[16] Although religious studies scholars engage in critical analysis, we first aim to understand the position of religious individuals, communities, and societies. We attend to "the life of a religious community within that culture and to its literary, musical, iconic, and architectural expressions; cultic practices; social organization; political strategies; and the like" (AAC&U 1990, 172). From these—often mundane—elements of religiosity, we grasp something of the rhythms of religious peoples' lives, their hopes, their fears, and the manner in which they make meaning, assert agency, and shape their identities. Moreover, by appreciating the ways in which religiosity is situated in a specific context—shaped by the cultures through which it lives and moves, informed by societal interests and constraints, and molded by the historical trajectories when it has developed—we come to better understand the reasonableness and function of religion in people's lives. As such, religious people are thoroughly humanized. And, because the academic study of religion is necessarily multicultural, this humanization extends to religious people who seem to the scholar both familiar and strange.

The empathetic grounding of religious studies thus forces our students to occupy a particular orientation with respect to difference. Students might occasionally study religious people with whom they identify, but they will eventually be exposed to a wide variety of religious communities across the globe and throughout history. They will be required to study people whose ideas, practice, and values appear strange, and sometimes even abhorrent, to them. Yet religious studies (ideally) enables them to become comfortable with difference and primes them to engage with difference in a particular way: seeking to understand people who at first do not seem legible or reasonable.

Cultivating this charitable orientation to the "other" in religious studies classrooms translates neatly to political discourse, especially in cases in which students engage with others who hold different political views. Rather than taking an immediately antagonistic stance, religious studies students have had practice forming habits that mediate such encounters: humanizing those holding different views; they have developed an impulse to attempt to understand the motivations behind others' positions; and they have learned to seek out the contexts that make different—sometimes strange—positions reasonable.

Furthermore, the field of religious studies is grounded in a recognition of heterogeneity. Scholars of religion resist the urge to depict a religious tradition or community through a single perspective.[17] Rather we make visible the multiple instantiations of religiosity within a given community, as well as changes over time. We seek explanations regarding what conditions or contexts gave rise to different religious ideas and practices, and we attempt to ascertain how competing positions coexist (through cooperation, negotiation, competition, and outright hostility). In our classrooms, our materials open space for a variety of experiences and voices that must be held together. As instructors, we rarely ask students to pick sides, but rather to understand why and how this heterogeneity coexists.

Students who are exposed repeatedly to heterogeneity as a characteristic feature of religion enter the field of political discourse also primed to expect and become comfortable with the existence of a multiplicity of viewpoints and positions. As such, they are able to acknowledge others' positions without seeing them as a direct threat to their own stance. In fact, their ability to humanize and contextualize a range of coexisting views results in their ability to form more nuanced and complex positions themselves. Finally, seeing exempla of the ways religious communities have held competing positions in a given society—through cooperation, negotiation, competition, and outright hostility—they glean models of engagement they can seek to avoid or to adopt.

missions, see Ronis and Proctor (2020) (in this issue).

16 There is a place for critique in our field, but the above features of our field underscore the need first to attempt to understand. The authors of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) task force on the field of religious studies write: "If criticism [of scholars of religious studies] is uninformed by an empathetic understanding of the criticized, it chiefly serves to confirm the moral or cultural superiority of the critic. For that, a liberal education scarcely is needed" (AAC&U 1990, 175).

17 See Gibbons and Fruchtman (2020) (in this issue) for more theorization and elaboration on this point.

The insights above proved foundational as workshop participants moved on to our second day of work together. At this point, we split into small groups, each of which devised teaching materials for a late ancient religion course on a politically-relevant topic: (im)migration, refugees, and exile; race, ethnicity, and religion; slaves, strangers, and other marginalized persons; prisons, torture, and punishment; humans and the environment. All of the materials we generated in small groups were shared with members of the collective.[18]

Finally, we created space at the workshop to have frank conversations about the vulnerabilities and risks involved in teaching courses on politically-charged topics and in engaging in contentious public discourse around our sources (Chronicle of Higher Education staff 2017; Flaherty 2017). With the profusion of tactics used by watchdog groups (for example, recording, doctoring, and distributing footage of professors in their classrooms, mobilizing networks through social media, coordinating pressure on institutions of higher education to police the curriculum and speech of its professors), as well as the amplified consequences (such as calls to terminate scholars' employment, threats of personal violence and even death), the stakes can be high. We recognized that not all instructors are equally vulnerable: graduate students, contingent and junior faculty, faculty of color and women faculty, and those who find themselves in unsupportive academic environments run disproportionate risks.

Yet, many of the workshop participants who enjoy a degree of institutional stability or personal privilege remarked on feeling a heightened consciousness of our own complicity and a heightened sense of responsibility to intervene. We note that our heightened consciousness reflects not only the new historical moment in which we live, but also reflects our positions of privilege that have shielded us from politicization up to this point. What we now perceive and experience is nothing new to our minoritized faculty colleagues who have long endured charges of being overly political in their scholarship and teaching.[19] At the workshop—as well as in this special issue, we—especially those of us in positions of privilege—hoped to work through our responsibilities to our students, to the field, and to the public. Relatedly, as we learn from the experiences and strategies of our underrepresented colleagues, we understand ourselves to bear responsibility not to let the burden fall exclusively on them.

Our 2017 workshop could facilitate only the initial steps of our collaboration. Since then, conversations about the foundational principles outlined above have continued, fueling further reflection in sessions dedicated to these topics at our professional associations' annual meetings (the North American Patristics Society, Society of Biblical Literature, and American Society of Church History); the development of a spate of new courses, pedagogical experimentation with readings, media, assignments, in-class exercises, and community-based work; and new scholarship. Some of us have also taken the project to our home institutions, conducting similar workshops with our departments and teaching and learning centers. Thus, the articles in this volume represent one of many steps along our journey of scholarly and pedagogical collaboration.

Next Steps: Clarifying the Terms and Foundations of Our Work

Soon after the workshop, we discovered two important lacunae in our work together. We had not sought to articulate what we meant by "politics"—and what possible differentiations might exist between the "political," the "politicized," the "politically relevant," the "politically charged," and so forth—nor thought about what our specific positionality as scholars of late ancient religion brought to bear on our project. In this section, we offer preliminary considerations of each, considerations that provide grounding for the essays in this special issue.

Politics, Political, Politicized

We convened the workshop on the premise that we wanted to better engage with politics in the late ancient religion classroom with no explicit consensus as to how we defined politics; each of us were moved to attend by our *own* senses of what politics referred to and what it might mean to address it in the classroom. At the workshop, we did not pause at any point to construct a shared definition—reflecting on this omission later, we noted two likely reasons that this had not presented an obstacle to our collaboration:

18 Workshop participants discussed whether we wanted to make this repository of materials public (and thus accessible to all instructors) or closed only to members of the collective. After a discussion of the risks involved for contributors without the security of a job, without tenure, or others for whom the risks involved in making oneself vulnerable to being targeted by watchdog groups, we decided to use a Facebook group (that requires an application to join) as our interface with the collective. In an attempt to ensure commitment among members, we expect all new group members to contribute teaching materials to the repository. For more information, see https://www.facebook.com/groups/760110884387955/.

19 See the essays in Westfield (2008) for some stark reminders of this.

first, we seem to all have found our differing understandings of politics mutually intelligible; second, no matter our definition of politics, we found conversations, ideas, and intellectual tools that were helpful to our varied goals.

As we prepared this special issue, we were helpfully pressed to articulate a definition;[20] rather than generating a singular, shared definition, we chose to identify the assumptions and intersections that had undergirded our discussions and subsequent writings, and in so doing, to honor the multiple different coexisting definitions we had already been working with. In the pieces collected in this issue, then, readers will find a variety of understandings of politics, reflecting the variety of definitions that the workshop participants brought to the table. But all of these understandings of politics are, as they were at the workshop, mutually intelligible, because their diversity is a result of varied focus, rather than contradiction: they do not conflict with one another so much as reflect different vantage points and different objects of concern. While, in some of the pieces, politics refers primarily to governmental power that is exerted through formal civic institutions and, in other pieces, it refers to hot-button issues around which contemporary discourse has anxiously crystallized, *all* of the pieces, concurrently, share a broader understanding of the political as our universal human reality, a feature of our existence as participants in and subjects of various overlapping social and institutional polities. This expansive understanding—in which politics affects every aspect of our lives and comprises the power dynamics that shape us and that we, simultaneously, shape—includes power dynamics broadly speaking, civic engagement of all varieties, ideologies of community and governance, and also, of course, politics as partisan playmaking. These are all connected and interwoven, though rarely in clear or generalizable correspondence.[21]

Our definitional approach immediately anticipates two objections. First, in embracing a wide variety of definitions all grounded in a diffuse and expansive overarching understanding, are we in reality ceding concrete definitional power either to public discourse (as we react to things labeled political) or to scholars in various disciplines who seek to define politics such that it can be excised from educational settings? Second, if politics is "our universal human reality"—if everything is political—what does it even mean to say that some topics are politically charged or politically relevant and how do we apply these labels to some courses more so than others? On our broad understanding of politics, it becomes difficult to see how a classroom could ever be rendered an apolitical space, or how a class could ever hope to avoid being politically relevant and dealing with politically charged topics. In short, why do we name and embrace "the political"?

Our answers to these objections are deeply intertwined. To some extent, we are ceding definitional power to public discourse: the topics we are endeavoring to incorporate in our classes are only controversial because they are emphasized as such in the public discourse of a particular time and place and because they are identified as grounds for policing some courses and not others. Even though we regard everything to be political, not everything is *equally* so at any given moment in time. Public discourse coalesces around various points of contention, bringing those issues to the foreground and thus rendering them more important to address in the classroom. But because of our broad understanding of politics, part of the intent in allowing public discourse to identify issues of political relevance is to nuance, problematize, and challenge that very identification.

By focusing our attention on topics that have been labeled political on these axes—and which are thus received as politically charged, politically relevant, or politically sensitive—we are harnessing the crystallizing power of politics as colloquially defined to problematize that same understanding of politics, and to help our students plumb the complexities and intricacies of our materials and their receptions.[22] As an example, the instructor of religion in late antiquity who chooses to emphasize (im)migration, race, ethnicity, slavery, marginalization, prisons, or ecology (the topics around which we generated materials in our workshop) is taking topics that her students are already thinking about and offering those students new information, new avenues of intellectual and historical approach, and new social paradigms (those modeled in the classroom) with which to complicate any simplistic or binary understanding of the topic at hand, no matter how politically charged.

While it should go without saying, we want to be clear: we are not advocating that instructors indoctrinate students with their own values and party political persuasions. The whole object of the workshop and its offshoots was (and is) to find pedagogically effective

20 We owe a debt of gratitude to our anonymous reviewers for prodding us to be more explicit and for their insights that shaped our subsequent discussions.

21 This understanding is influenced by scholars like Chantal Mouffe (1993), who argue that "the political cannot be restricted to a certain type of institution, or envisaged as constituting a specific sphere or level of society. It must be conceived as a dimension that is inherent to every human society and that determines our very ontological condition" (Mouffe 1993, 3). While Mouffe distinguishes between "the political" and its systematization in "politics" (see Mouffe 2005, 9), not all of our authors found that distinction helpful, given the variability and instability of identities we encounter in our materials and in our classrooms.

22 Indeed, the assumption of neutrality is its own form of politics. Once we begin to understand all human interaction as political—that our topics and the students we teach are all already politicized—we understand that *avoiding* engagement with politically charged topics is as much a political action as overt activism. And, on the contrary, we understand that leaving naturalized systems and discourses unexamined is itself a political act whose consequences mask the operations of power and further entrench existing dynamics. One of those dominant, naturalized ideas (particularly in the United States) is that politics is separable from daily life, that it is focused on promoting political parties and public policy agendas, that it is marked by inherent and dualistic antagonism, and that it is primarily concerned with which party or candidate one votes for.

and intellectually responsible ways of incorporating the political into our classes in such a way that students are free to arrive at different conclusions. Dictating ideologies to our students would contradict almost every tenet of good pedagogy, as we are aiming to enhance our students' ability to think for themselves, even if that means they come to conclusions different from our own.[23]

Tools of Late Ancient Studies

Our next step was to consider what the study of late antiquity had to offer. Whereas our query of religious studies provided us with tools and evaluative premises (critical empathy, comfort with difference, and the recognition of heterogeneity), late ancient studies provides us with a set of sources and research questions that regularly address issues of contemporary relevance, as well as methodological and theoretical approaches that serve as guides to thinking through these topics and provide us a special vantage from which to speak.

The study of late antiquity from its very origins has sought to center the marginal and marginalized, as well as the means of their marginalization. The works of Arnaldo Momigliano, Peter Brown, Elizabeth A. Clark, and those who have succeeded them in the field reverberate with the very constituencies whose presence—or poignant absence—continue to shape political discourse, with questions of gender; of social and physical displacement; ethnic and racial differentiation; slavery, incarceration, violence, war, and natural disaster. Part of the very DNA of the field, in other words, is its attentiveness to voices deemed political in contemporary popular discourse, in large part because they complicate visions of a pristine "classical" past. The process of uncovering these voices entails rereading and reinterpreting established sources with an eye to the nonmajoritarian perspectives they (inadvertently or intentionally) inculcate—a task that has benefited both from the discovery of new source material and from the revalorization of previously disregarded materials as sources.[24] At least equally significant for late antiquity's ability to ask—and, at times, answer—previously unasked questions, however, has been the identification and appropriation of new methodological lenses. Drawing on the resources of other disciplines—of anthropology, sociology, literary and political theory, and an ever-widening array of others—late ancient studies brings to bear tools forged in the study of contemporary social phenomena on premodern texts and artifacts. The resulting give and take between late antiquity and other disciplines has urged scholars towards deeper reflection on both ancient and modern communities, on their disjunctions and points of commonality, and on ways in which each offers the other a mirror by which to discern blind spots, misapprehensions, and facile equivalencies.

In recent decades, both the discipline of late antiquity and its foci have been able to command more intellectual and pedagogical real estate in college and university classrooms.[25] There remain, of course, courses in which history, theology, or religious studies are taught without reference to the "margins." For most instructors, however, the pedagogy of premodernity—including late antiquity—has become ineluctably tied to categories and questions beyond the experience of elites.

Moving Ahead: Collaborative Pedagogies

The articles in this special issue bear in their bylines the names of the scholars and pedagogues who have had a primary hand in their conception, construction, and execution. By the same token, however, these authorial attributions obscure the collaborative nature of this project: just as the original workshop was conceived and designed as a team effort, so too this special issue has been thoroughly collaborative. From the initial idea of a special issue through the final round of editorial comments, the articles in this special issue have been a group effort. The contributors have met regularly, contributed to outlines, read drafts, and supplied scholarly references and research data for more than merely their own pieces.

23 Even if we were inclined to political proselytizing—as many critics of higher education charge—research shows that such "advocacy" is ineffective: the *presumed* political ideology of instructors has less influence on college students' political views than parents, family, and news media (Gross and Simmons 2014; Woessner and Woessner 2009; Mariani and Hewitt 2008).

24 New discoveries that have helped expand our understanding of late ancient heterogeneity include, for example, the discoveries at Nag Hammadi (see Fruchtman and Park 2020) and popular sermons by Augustine of Hippo (354-430) that deal with day-to-day life in late ancient North Africa. Revalorized sources include, for example, hagiographies, the writings of authors judged heterodox or insufficiently insightful by later generations of religious or academic authorities, including those of Evagrius of Pontus and Epiphanius of Salamis, and, not least of all, the relevance of material culture and everyday objects for the study of religion.

25 A sampling of these courses include: "Slaves, Prostitutes, and Convicts: Writing the History of the Outcast" (Bond 2018); "Racial Politics and National Belonging in Early Christianity" (Kotrosits 2019); "Race and Ethnicity in the New Testament" (Krawiec, Luckritz, and Park 2018); "Poverty: From the Bible to Beyoncé" (Dalton 2018); "Immigration and Migration in the Classical World" (Mazurek 2017); "Marginality in the Ancient Greek World" (Weaver 2018); "Early Christians and Incarceration" (Larsen 2020); "Humans and/in/vs. the Environment in the Ancient Mediterranean" (Upson-Saia 2018). In addition to undergraduate courses, collections of scholars are assembling around these topics. For example, Yale University's 2017-2018 Workshop in Ancient Studies' theme "Slavery, Dependency and Genocide in the Ancient and Premodern World" and scholars at the 2018 Classical Association of the Atlantic States hosted a session on teaching the "Ancient Other."

This approach, while common in other parts of the academy, is still sufficiently underutilized in religious studies (and in the humanities more broadly) to require a note of justification. While attribution and attributability are of manifest value in the process of peer-reviewed publication—and, for pragmatic reasons, including the tenure system, unlikely to lose ground—collaborative scholarly efforts like the workshop and this special issue provide both authors and readers with considerable benefits. Among the more obvious boons are the networks these efforts create, connecting instructors (faculty, graduate students, and independent scholars) across disciplinary and institutional boundaries. These networks allow for swift and efficient dissemination of data; word of one successful pedagogical experiment need not necessarily beget dozens like it, but the ability for instructors to share expertise,[26] crowdsource questions, and draw on the counsel of peers in addressing challenges are invaluable for pedagogues at all stages of their professional development.

More than a matter of expediency, however, collaboration on the part of scholars in the humanities is itself also a distinctly political choice. The discomforts it engenders mirror in important ways those of bringing politics into the classroom: they invoke anxiety over polluting something academics have traditionally accepted as pure, the pursuit of knowledge for knowledge's sake, as well as fears of debasing our disciplines, our data, and our expertise.[27] That we have nevertheless embraced both practices reflects our conviction that this collaboration, despite starting as a grassroots effort initiated by teacher-scholars (rather than by a professional organization), has the potential to shape the future of our field. Together we established a vision of learning objectives, curricula, and pedagogical approaches that will focus and shape knowledge production on our sources. From liberal arts colleges to research institutions, these courses we all agree are worth teaching, as well as the manner in which we teach them, will in turn orient a new generation of students (and future scholars) to a particular view of the past and of religion. As such, our collaboration has not only an impact on our immediate concerns, but also has the potential to impact the shape of our fields in the long-term.

Similarly significant, our collaborations have afforded us the opportunity to diversify the experiences on which we were able to draw in constructing courses and in crafting these articles. Authors include scholars at public and private, teaching- and research-intensive, theologically affiliated and unaffiliated institutions, schools in "red" and "blue" states, drawing on student populations from across the ethnic and socioeconomic spectrum. That is not to say that the pool of contributors to this special issue, nor even of workshop participants, has been fully diverse. Our numbers include persons of color, immigrants, and queer scholars; neither individually nor in aggregate, however, do we plumb the range of pedagogical, personal, and interpersonal experiences.[28] As such, we publish this special issue with the hope that it will connect our network with others who are engaged in similar projects, expanding the voices and experiences contributing insights. And, as this special issue will be published in the run-up to the 2020 election, we imagine that the ground will be fertile for such contributions.

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26 When devising syllabi at our workshop, for instance, participants drew on their varied areas of specialization. As a group, our ability to gather readings representing multiple religious communities; varieties of materials (texts, material culture, artistic sources, and so forth); and different theoretical orientations laid the foundation for richer course content overall.

27 None of these concerns are entirely unfounded: destructive collaborations exist, as do harmful approaches to expanding pedagogical discourses, and throughout this volume contributors have sought to be transparent in our wrestling with these challenges.

28 Gibbons and Fruchtman's article, of course, goes some ways towards reminding us that self-disclosure, whether in the classroom or in the pages of an academic journal, is both risky and, in the last instance, impossible (2020).

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ARTICLE

The Past, Present, and Religious Studies Future of Civic Engagement in American Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we argue that civic engagement is fundamental to the stated work of the university, the humanities, and the project of religious studies. We trace the historical connections between civic engagement and higher education in the American context to the present period, highlighting a consistency of focus on civic engagement across diverse university contexts even as educational priorities and instantiations shift. We then explore the particular role of civic engagement in religious studies pedagogy. We contend that being explicit about integrating civic engagement in the late antique religion classroom, rather than dismissing it as either difficult to incorporate or as tangential to our subject areas, actually enhances our students' ability to understand complex concepts in late antique religion and underscores for them how relevant the study of late ancient religion is to students' lives today. We ultimately offer three ways that instructors in religious studies can incorporate civic engagement into their classes: cultivating naming practices, focusing pedagogical exercises on honing students' civic engagement skills, and, where practicable, engaging in community-based learning.

KEYWORDS

U.S. history of community-based learning, religious studies pedagogy, courses on religion in late antiquity, naming practices, community-based learning, civic engagement, mission-statements

According to the Babylonian Talmud, the fourth-century CE sage Rav Hamnuna used to say: "Jerusalem was only destroyed because they neglected the school-age children, as it says, 'Pour it [God's wrath] out on the children in the street' (Jeremiah 6:11, NRSV). What is the reason [God's wrath] poured out? Because [the children] are outside [and not in school]" (b. *Shabbat* 119b). The rabbis of the Babylonian Talmud recognized the importance of education to the continuation of the polity. The rabbis describe its importance not in metaphysical or aspirational terms; according to Rav Hamnuna's reading of the verse from Jeremiah, Jerusalem was literally destroyed because formal education ceased. The connection between education and the physical and intellectual well-being of the community as a whole is an ancient insight, but it is one with important afterlives.

The connection between education and the polity is yet again a subject of discussion as they relate to the college classroom. Unlike in the Babylonian Talmud, this connection is no longer framed as biblical interpretation, but rather as civic engagement. The term "civic engagement" may be popular with university administrators, but its parameters, relevance, and applicability in the religious studies classroom are shifting and subject to debate. In this article, we will argue that civic engagement is fundamental to the stated work of the university, the humanities, and the project of religious studies, and that being explicit in integrating civic engagement in the late antique religion classroom, rather than dismissing it as overly difficult or tangential to our subject, is crucial for our our students' ability to understand complex concepts in late antique religion as well as their relevance to our students' own lives today.

We first trace the historical connections between civic engagement and higher education in the American context to the present period, highlighting a consistency of focus on civic engagement across diverse university contexts even as educational priorities and instantiations shift. Civic engagement has been defined as part of broader political movements and notions of the polity, and it is crucial to the educational project; it also shifting, malleable, and deeply political. We then explore the particular role of civic engagement in religious studies pedagogy. We contend that being explicit about integrating civic engagement in the late antique religion classroom, rather than dismissing it as either difficult to incorporate or as tangential to our subject areas, actually enhances our students' ability to understand complex concepts in late antique religion and underscores for them how relevant the study of late ancient religion is to students' lives today. We ultimately offer three ways that instructors in religious studies can incorporate civic engagement into their classes: cultivating naming practices, focusing pedagogical exercises on honing students' civic engagement skills, and, where practicable, engaging in community-based learning.

Civic Engagement: One Aim, But Many Definitions Across History

Civic engagement and higher education have been intertwined from the very beginning of colonial settlement in America. The earliest colonial colleges were founded with the express purpose of training clergy and the future leaders of first a colonial government, and then the fledgling American republic.[1] Both Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin championed education as essential for training a new generation of (white, male, upper-class, Christian, [see discussion below]) leaders to carry on democratic ideals (Woolard 2017, 45; Jacoby 2009, 10; Musil 2015, 240). These colonial and revolutionary leaders understood education to provide these civic services through the transmission of culture and training in habits of civic politesse. In imitation of British educational systems of the time, the curricula of colonial and post-revolutionary colleges focused on classical languages, literature, and history alongside training in logic, rhetoric, ethics, theology, and philosophy (Musil 2015, 240; Smith, Mayer, and Fritschler 2008, 25). It was believed that familiarity with particular cultural and philosophical traditions would mold the next generation of leaders into good stewards of the new republic. The belief that familiarity with particular cultural and philosophical traditions would shape the next generation of leaders into good stewards of the new republic was eventually adopted into law. Article 3 of the Congress Land Ordinance of 1787, which regulated schooling in what were then the Northwest Territories, identified "religion, morality, and knowledge" as "necessary to good government and the happiness of [hu]mankind" (Musil 2015, 241). Colleges also promoted their civic formation through the formation of particular scholastic habits:

> The organizing idea of the old system was that the students should study a fixed set of courses, memorize and recite their lessons, study ancient languages, and observe discipline and rigid rules of dress and decorum (teachers often lived in the student quarters and acted as proctors). Students would thus acquire the strength of character and mental toughness needed to thrive in their chosen profession. Students would, as a byproduct or sometimes as a central goal of their education, become good Christians and good citizens. (Smith, Mayer, and Fritschler 2008, 30)

In the mid-late nineteenth century, political and social movements began to broaden the scope of higher education in America beyond the upper-class, while continuing to insist on the link between higher education and proper civic engagement. The Morrill Act of 1862 inaugurated land grant colleges, while Gilded Age philanthropy led to the opening of many private universities (Jacoby 2009, 10-11). The trustees of the Ohio Agricultural and Mechanical College (later Ohio State University) asserted that the school aimed to train students "fitted by education and attainments for the greater usefulness and higher duties of citizenship" (Boyte and Kari 2000, 47; Hartley 2011, 28). In similar fashion, the "Wisconsin Idea," inaugurated in 1903 by the University of Wisconsin President Charles Van Hise and the state Governor, Robert La Follette, conceived of higher education as working hand-in-hand with the state legislature for the promotion of general societal flourishing; Van Hise declared in a 1905 address that he would "never be content until the beneficent influence of the University reaches every family of the state" (University of Wisconsin 2020). Many educational leaders in the early twentieth century drew upon the philosophy of the reformer John Dewey, who insisted that American education should have as its

1 Yale's 1701 charter, for example, described its mission as training "youth" such that they may be "fitted for public employment, both in Church and civil state" (Yale University 2020). For more on the history and evolution of educational mission statements in America, see discussion below.

primary goal the promotion of democracy, to be accomplished through direct community engagement, a focus on problem-solving, and an emphasis on collaboration between faculty and students (Woolard 2017, 47; Jacoby 2009, 11).

In the mid-late nineteenth century, the ways in which educational leaders conceptualized the civic benefit of higher education also began to change in important ways as American educational institutions increasingly modeled themselves on German universities with their amplified focus on disciplinary specialization and scientific research (Hartley 2011, 28). Instructors began to see their contributions to society primarily through their ability to use their expertise for the public good, rather than through their instructional "molding" of citizens (Peters 2010, 28). Thus strict codes of decorum, formerly seen as a key aspect in creating responsible citizens, were deemphasized, while intensified instruction in the natural sciences displaced subjects (for example, theology, classical literature) that formerly held a central place in higher education (Smith, Mayer, and Fritschler 2008, 30). This reorganization of priorities can be seen in the Wisconsin Idea, discussed above, where administrators positioned the key role of the university as the principal resource of information, analysis, and technical expertise for the governor and state legislature (Smith, Mayer, and Fritschler 2008, 38). As a result, modes of civic engagement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were framed largely in terms of providing technical and scientific expertise through governmental bureaucracies, while "direct" civic contributions (such as teaching and political activism) were subordinated.

The lofty ideals of America's early colleges and higher education in America's first hundred and fifty years were almost exclusively for white Christian men of European descent. Owing to the systematic exclusion of women and persons of color from early American "democratic" government, as well as various quotas on admittance of religious minorities, white Christian men comprised almost the entirety of those understood to be "citizens," and thus the potential civic leaders who required appropriate training. Barbara Jacoby has noted how this history proves problematic for those who might champion a focus on "citizenship" as part of civic engagement endeavors, a term that has historically functioned to exclude certain groups from mechanisms of political power and self-determination (Jacoby 2009, 9–10).

The founding of women's and historically black colleges in the nineteenth century, as well as Native American tribal colleges in the twentieth, began to make higher education accessible to a higher proportion of historically marginalized groups (Woody 1929; Solomon 1986; Stein 1992; Brooks and Starks 2011; Boyer 2015; Lovett 2015; Reyhner and Eder 2017; Nash 2018), but the civic engagement efforts of mainstream educational institutions continued to be restricted to a limited cross-section of the American polity. Thus, while colleges and universities held civic engagement as an ideal, they inherently limited the "civic" at which their lessons were aimed by narrowing the range of voices and perspectives that could be part of a broader project of creating an educated citizenry in a successful democratic country. This move continues to be significant in the contemporary American context, where the rights of citizenship and educational opportunities for undocumented American residents remain a hotly contested topic in American public discourse. Any contemporary efforts at the promotion of productive "citizenship" or civic "participation," then, will need to attend to the inequalities that have plagued historical definitions of citizenships and define clearly how their efforts address the contested boundaries of who constitutes the American "public."

Perhaps ironically, while increasingly narrow research expertise brought many benefits to American society, the universities' amplified focus on technocratic expertise stood in the way of or actively discouraged more direct forms of political or civic engagement. Many university administrators (not to mention political commentators) dissuaded instructors from engaging in direct political action, a fact underscored by the firing of many professors for engaging in political activism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Smith, Mayer, and Fritschler 2008, 34-37; Lippmann 1932; Peters 2010, 48).

World War II and its aftermath led to major upheavals in American higher education. The United States government delivered large-scale federal support for the nation's universities, beginning with support for the nation's scientists as part of the war effort but continuing in the post-war periods through initiatives such as the G.I. Bill and the National Defense Education Act (Smith, Mayer, and Fritschler 2008, 42). Thanks in part to this increased support, colleges began to serve much broader cross-sections of American society. In 1910, only about 4 percent of young adults (age eighteen to twenty-four) attended college; by the mid-twentieth century, that number was up to over 30 percent, and it would rise still higher to about 70 percent by 2005 (Smith, Mayer, and Fritschler 2008, 42). In response to fears regarding the spread of fascism in Europe, many leaders in American higher education renewed the call for education in civic leadership, with an express focus on training a new generation of leaders who would preserve America's democratic ideals (Musil 2015, 241). Thus *Harvard's General Education in a Free Society* (1945) and the Truman Commission's *Higher Education for American Democracy* (1947), both called for a renewed focus on fields such as history, art, literature, and philosophy in order to provide intellectual bulwarks against the ideologies that had undermined democratic governance in other parts of the world (Musil 2015, 242-43). These mid-century reform efforts led to important changes in higher education, as seen especially in general education curricula that emphasized interdisciplinary exposure to the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities. And yet, despite stated

ideals that remained in favor of civic engagement, many universities in practice downplayed this element of their mission (for example, by discouraging direct political activism, or by emphasizing research expertise with little expectation of civic application [Jacoby 2009, 11]).

In the 1960s, the Civil Rights and Vietnam War protests combined to create a robust atmosphere for direct political and civic engagement among students on campus across America (Lewis 2014, 58). Conservative backlash against campus activism, however,—as seen especially with the successful gubernatorial run of future President Ronald Reagan in California—resulted in a heightened sensitivity by leaders in higher education to anti-activism critiques, which had the effect of creating an apolitical quiescence in many post-1960s universities (Smith, Mayer, and Fritschler 2008, 14, 67-68). The increasing disengagement of universities and colleges from civic purposes was exacerbated by changing demands from students; students in the 1970s and 1980s were increasingly viewing college chiefly in terms of career preparation, rather than civic or political engagement (Hartley 2011, 30).

Modern Civic Engagement: Popularization, Pushback, and Persistence

The late twentieth-century civic engagement movement was a response to this perceived lack of civic purpose among students in higher education. Taking their cue from 1960s-era organizations such as the Peace Corps and Volunteers in Service to America, many schools and universities in the 1980s interpreted their commitment to civic engagement as community service, with programs designed to provide nonpartisan, largely nonacademic volunteer service opportunities for students (Lewis 2014, 58). At the same time, "a small group of educators began to emphasize a combination of community service and learning they called 'service-learning'" (Jacoby 2009, 11–12; Hartley 2011, 30-32; Woolard 2017, 18).

Yet, while community service and service learning have remained popular fixtures on many American college campuses, some educators have noted that service opportunities are inherently conservative: they rarely challenge colleges, universities, or local communities "to fundamentally change the ways in which they operate, thus preserving underlying assumptions and institutional behaviors" (Saltmarsh and Hartley 2011b, 10). Moreover, Peter Levine points out that community service does not necessarily train students in the types of deliberation, collaboration, and coalition building that are essential to communal flourishing and problem-solving (Levine 2014, 49).

As a result, some educational theorists have called for more direct forms of civic engagement. One such form is the the "liberative" approach championed by Paulo Freire and bell hooks (Pippin 2016; Posman 2016, 11; Myers et al., 2019). In her landmark work *Teaching to Transgress*, hooks draws upon critical feminist theory and her own teaching background in order to advocate for education as a "practice of freedom" that encourages students to "transgress" traditional social, cultural, and pedagogical boundaries (hooks 1994, 207). hooks calls on instructors to perform a non-hierarchical and participation-focused "engaged pedagogy" that empowers students to interrogate and challenge racial, social, and gender inequalities (hooks 1994, 15). In this way, hooks explicitly frames teaching and learning in higher education as a "counter-hegemonic act," or, "a fundamental way to resist every strategy of White racist colonization" (hooks 1994, 4, 171). hooks notes that her pedagogical approach "is an expression of political activism," which aims to "teach against the grain" of prevailing pedagogical approaches and cultural norms and "self-actualize" both students and instructors (hooks 1994, 15, 203). hooks' contribution to pedagogical theory lays bare the diversity of approaches to civic engagement in American educational history: hooks' emphasis on countering European colonial ideologies, for example, is a far cry from the early colonial colleges' emphasis on *affirming* such traditions.

Such calls for more "radical" engagement, however, have at times encountered extensive opposition from educators and governmental leaders. Some professors and political commentators have decried the supposed partisan politicization of the university and pushed for the disengagement of higher education from its civic-minded missions (Lippmann 1932; Bloom 1987; Kimball 1990; Fish 2008; Horowitz 2009; Horowitz and Laksin 2009; Horowitz 2010).[2]

This de-emphasis on civic value has often gone hand-in-hand with a push to make higher education more focused on providing "market-centered," rather than civic-minded, educational offerings. Business-focused education has a long history in America; the founders of Brown University (est. 1764) explicitly stated that the college would "be a means of bringing great quantities of money" into the surrounding area (Hartley 2011, 28). The most recent focus on the economic impact of higher education can be traced to the 1980s, when the intense fiscal pressures of the late 1970s and early 1980s, combined with the increased accessibility of higher education to lower-income students, led to a surge in pre-professional training and degrees. This strand of educational thought has continued to the present day. E. Sparks and M.J. Waits' *Degrees for What Jobs?* (2011), for example, recommends that higher education's funding

2 For further discussion of "politics" and "partisanship" in the academy, see discussion in Upson-Saia and Doerfler (2020).

should depend on "economic goals," "workforce preparation," and "competitive advantage" (Sparks and Waits 2011, 3; Musil 2015, 244). Politicians have often championed similar lines of reasoning both in order to justify cuts to higher education funding and to propose their own educational "reforms." Scott Walker, governor of Wisconsin from 2011 to 2018, proposed removing the phrases "the search for truth" and "improve the human condition" from the charter of the University system of Wisconsin, which draws its language from the famous Wisconsin Idea (see above) (Musil 2015, 244). Various state Governors have proposed eliminating programs such as women's studies and anthropology (Musil 2015, 244), while former President Barack Obama used market-based logics to question the value of an art history degree in comparison to skills training (Jaschik 2014). These critiques do not necessarily represent the views of a majority of American citizens or students, as survey results have often shown high demand for broad-based curricula that feature a diverse range of subjects (Musil 2015, 245). And yet, as a response to these trends, many educational administrators softened their promotion of the (non-monetary) civic values of higher education, even while those values remained central and explicit features of college and university mission statements (Hartley 2011, 29).

University and college mission statements provide important institutional contexts for contemporary articulations of civic engagements. Mission statements, at least theoretically, are the product of collective discussion about the purpose of the university, and they are one important way that universities communicate to a broader audience. A brief survey of a diverse range of mission statements from four-year colleges highlights the ways that university leaderships explicitly name and explain the university's role in creating an educated citizenry and contributing to society at large. We have chosen to highlight universities in two states with very different political and economic cultures: Texas and California. And within these states, we have chosen to examine an elite private research university, a private religious university, and two large public universities offering a range of approaches produced by different stakeholders for different constituencies. In this discussion of the history of civic engagement, we have traced the ebbs and flows of the prioritization of civic engagement, and the range of ways that it has been enacted in university curricula, and yet, as the mission statements of these four very different universities demonstrate, the aim of cultivating a responsible and engaged citizenry is perhaps surprisingly consistent.

Stanford University, a private research university in Palo Alto, California, offers an articulation of each of its schools' missions in their respective *About* pages. Stanford's School of Humanities and Sciences' *About* page focuses on forming engaged members of a dynamic society rooted not only in the past but the present and future: "All undergraduates take a range of courses in H&S that challenge them to think critically about the world and their roles in it. Graduate students work alongside world-renowned faculty to pursue and shape foundational research that leads to breakthroughs and discoveries that shed new light on the past, influence the present, and shape the future" (Stanford University 2020). Stanford's mission statement explicitly articulates preparing students to engage with the present and future world, not by relaxing classroom standards or minimizing content but through critical thinking and research.

Where Stanford is unaffiliated with a religious denomination, St. Mary's University is a small Catholic and Marianist liberal arts university and a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI). St. Mary's focuses on forming students as engaged members of their local and global communities, and roots that focus in its religious identity: "St. Mary's University, as a Catholic Marianist University, fosters the formation of people in faith and educates leaders for the common good through community, integrated liberal arts and professional education, and academic excellence" (St. Mary's University 2020a). The Marianist charism includes the goals of educating for service, justice, and peace, and educating for adaptation and change, emphasizing both dynamism and community activism.

Small private universities are not the only ones which emphasize civic engagement as one goal of an excellent education. Both the University of California and Texas A&M, large public-research university systems and land-grant universities, frame their missions in terms of service and adaptability. Texas A&M "is dedicated to the discovery, development, communication, and application of knowledge in a wide range of academic and professional fields. . . .It prepares students to assume roles in leadership, responsibility and service to society . . .it addresses the needs of an increasingly diverse population and a global economy" (Texas A&M University 2020). The UC system promises that "instructional programs at the undergraduate level transmit knowledge and skills to students, . . .Education for professional careers, grounded in understanding of relevant sciences, literature, and research methods, provides individuals with the tools to continue intellectual development over a lifetime and to contribute to the needs of a changing society" (University of California 2020). That students need to be able to contribute to a diverse and dynamic world is assumed in both of these mission statements.

Though California and Texas are states with rather different cultures, and though public and private universities have distinct challenges and roles within their communities, all four of the university mission statements' surveyed emphasize the goal of preparing students to serve and lead a dynamic society with diverse populations and many possible futures. Their framings are certainly different: two are rooted in their histories as land-grant universities meant to serve their local communities, one is rooted in a faith identity, and

one is both rooted in its industrialist and assimilationist past and explicitly moving beyond it. And yet, in all four cases it is clear that a commitment to civic engagement is integral to the ways that universities present their mission and role to the public through official university websites. Further, the commitment expressed in the various mission statements moves beyond words; all four universities have university offices and full-time staff whose job it is to support civic engagement in and out of the classroom.[3]

While so often faculty and administrators perceive engaging with modern political issues and frameworks as antithetical to a traditional education, marked as either crucially or dangerously transgressive, at its core, this contemporary engagement is the fulfillment of the promise that universities themselves lay out in their statements of identity and mission. Civic engagement is fundamental to how universities communicate who they are to their own community and to outsiders. Consistent with the chronology discussed above, these articulations of civic engagement are also fundamentally political, advocating for constructive engagement in the polity. To engage thoughtfully with the world, one must understand both the present and the narratives of the past that have created it.

Despite the consistency of stated university commitments to civic engagement, the critics of this educational aim are still loud. American philosopher Martha Nussbaum has responded to these debates by suggesting that profit-focused educational approaches are shifting American higher education away from its intended purpose, which is the training of "complete citizens who can think for themselves, criticize tradition, and understand the significance of another person's suffering and achievements" (Nussbaum 2010, 2). According to Nussbaum, America is in an "educational crisis" that could precipitate major threats to American democratic ideals (Nussbaum 2010, 2). In response, Nussbaum argues that higher education should return to its humanistic and liberal arts roots in order to promote more inclusive forms of citizenship, with a particular focus on cultivating skills in empathy, accountability, and critical thought (Nussbaum 2010, 7, 43-44). For Nussbaum, this entails appropriate curricular emphases (for example, global literacy, foreign languages, history, geography, philosophy) and pedagogical methods (for example, "Socratic pedagogy") (Nussbaum 2010, 54, 86-90). Nussbaum highlights an "understanding of the world's many religious traditions" as a particularly important subject area, noting, "There is no area (except, perhaps, sexuality) where people are more likely to form demeaning stereotypes of the other that impede mutual respect and productive discussion" (Nussbaum 2010, 83).

Nussbaum's treatment represents a forceful argument for the renewal of civic-minded approaches in higher education. And yet, it also serves as a reminder of the complex and contested history of civic engagement in America, as well as its long-standing imbrication in broader political structures and movements. Any argument for or against particular modes of civic engagement, therefore, is an historically-situated and inherently political enterprise. In advocating for or contesting against certain forms of civic engagement, or in making strategic choices in civic engagement planning, participants are inevitably assigning, choosing, interpreting, reproducing, and contesting particular civic values, interests, missions, and goals that have ramifications for a diverse range of peoples and communities (Peters 2010, 7; cf. hooks 1994, 203). This is not to say, of course, that civic engagement is inherently *partisan*—although some iterations will certainly correlate to the aims of certain political parties or constituencies—but to argue that recent calls for the "divorcing" of the political from education are inherently self-contradictory, illusory, and ultimately impossible. The history of civic engagement in America demonstrates that even supposed apolitical education—for example, an exclusive focus on service-learning, or the championing of purely economic gains—effectively acts as a political choice by privileging certain kinds of political engagements (or lack thereof) over others. The task for educators today, then, is not to choose whether or not their classrooms will be political (see Fruchtman and Park 2020). Rather, the choice before us is what *form* of political engagement our courses will undertake.

Civic Engagement and Religious Studies

Especially in light of the contested political terrain surrounding higher education. some instructors in religions of antiquity may worry about explicitly integrating civic engagement into their own course planning. Does such teaching run the risk of politicizing the "apolitical"? Or promoting anachronistic readings of historical cultures? What do contemporary politics have to do with antiquity, anyway? Despite such challenges, mindful incorporation of civic engagement pedagogy provides important opportunities to demonstrate that religious studies are fulfilling the key missions of our respective institutions.

Incorporating civic engagement into our pedagogy also fulfills the key missions of religious studies. What is the point of taking a course in religious studies? What is the point of taking a religious studies course focusing on late antiquity? Religious studies offers the context that students need to understand how and why our current world looks the way it does, and to explore alternative

3 See Stanford University Haas Center (2020) and St. Mary's University's Office of Civic Engagement (2020b). Each campus in the Texas A&M and University of California system has its own office which offers civic engagement opportunities.

possibilities. Beyond the explicitly religious, the interdisciplinary nature of religious studies offers tools and strategies to understand wider societies, cultures, and interactions. Religious studies explores the narratives that communities tell in order to make meaning of their world, and the ways that those narratives are interpreted and adapted to respond to new successes or challenges. It explores the questions that individuals and communities have asked about their lives and worlds in different cultures, continents, and historical periods, and examines the different answers they have each offered, contextually. At its core, religious studies prepares students to be critical thinkers who understand the structures, texts, and histories which continuously create the world in which we live. We aim to familiarize students with the worldviews, practices, and values of religious communities. Without asking students to subscribe to any form of religiosity, we do expect them to appreciate the grounds on which peoples' religiosity enables them to make meaning of the world and to make sense of their place in the world.[4]

As scholars of religion in late antiquity, we are ideally positioned to guide students in exploring such issues. We teach courses that, on the one hand, often explore traditions with which many students in the United States have personal familiarity or investments (for example, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, among others), thus creating natural points of entry by which to engage students with such inquiries. On the other hand, our focus on a time period relatively distant from our own, and which is not organized around a scriptural canon, provides opportunities for encountering what many students may perceive as religious "otherness," even within otherwise-familiar traditions. The dual familiarity and foreignness of late antique religion creates distinctive opportunities for developing cultural and historical literacy alongside a kind of critical empathy.

Those of us who focus on the late antique world attempt to instill in students knowledge about the past, but we also aim to develop students' ability to situate textual and material evidence within its context. In so doing, students discern how an individual's or a community's worldviews, practices, values, priorities, and anxieties are informed by their circumstances. Contextualization enables students to better understand how different views and behaviors could emerge within a society, particularly with respect to where one stood in the society's power structures. Additionally, students are asked to cultivate their historical imagination by filling in the plausible reasoning of subjects for whom we have little extant evidence in the historical record. In short, scholars of religion in late antiquity aim to instill in students an ability to charitably inhabit the experience of others—across time and culture—and to understand why their positions were reasonable within their context and their station in society (Educational Resources Information Center 1991, 175-176).

Professional organizations of religious studies and history frame these shared aims in terms of the social good. The American Historical Association, for instance, argues that practices in historical thinking are "central to engaged citizenship." Students' "engage[ment with] a diversity of viewpoints in a civil and constructive fashion" are transferable skills: not only across historical distance, but also across cultural divides (American Historical Association 2016). In religious studies, as students gain practice in familiarizing themselves with unfamiliar others, their aversion to (sometimes frightening and threatening) encounters with difference softens, giving way to an aspiration to understand people unlike themselves (Educational Resources Information Center 1991, 175-176). As such, the academic study of history and religion form orientations and habits of deliberation that serve students well when they encounter difference in our pluralistic world, in turn enriching their ability to engage in society characterized by diversity.[5]

Beyond these disciplinary aims, faculty often also bring more nebulous, attitudinal aims into the classroom: a desire for students to be engaged in a subject that the professor believes is important, a desire for students to become interested enough to sign up for another course in the discipline, a desire for students to take what they are learning in the classroom and continue to reflect upon it outside of the course, a desire for students to be able to apply —and be interested in applying—what they are learning to new texts and contexts. These are attitude-based student learning objectives. While these learning objectives may be difficult if not impossible to measure, they often underlie the goals that engaged and committed faculty bring to a course. And for students to be engaged and interested in applying what they learn to new contexts, for students to believe that the work in our classrooms is relevant to new contexts, we have to make the connections between what we teach—religion in late antiquity—and the world we live in explicit.

4 On this central tension within religious studies and its impact on the classroom, see Pearson (2016). For more on the distinctive contributions of religious studies courses to civic engagement, see Posman and Locklin (2016).

5 Student learning objectives clarify for both faculty and students what knowledge and skills they will be mastering in a given course, and offer criteria for what successful mastery will look like (Mager 1997; Faulconer 2017). Many universities now require student learning objectives to be articulated in syllabi; degree programs and schools may also develop curricular student learning objectives. Indeed, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) has articulated its own "Essential Learning Outcomes" that it believes are the hallmarks of a twenty-first-century liberal education (AACU 2020). Among the learning outcomes that the AACU articulates are: "inquiry and analysis," "critical and creative thinking," "information literacy," both local and global "civic knowledge and engagement," and "ethical reasoning and action" (AACU 2020). What are these outcomes if not civic engagement? For more on student learning outcomes, with specific reference to biblical studies, see Webster et al. (2012). For courses or pedagogical strategies directly engaging with themes of difference and diversity in a global religious context, see Ramye (2006), Eilers (2014), DeTemple (2012), Corrie (2013), King (2016), Wiersma (2016), Derris and Runions (2016).

As was noted in Upson-Saia and Doerfler's (2020) essay, these outcomes are not only the goals or objectives of a faculty disconnected from the needs and experiences of their students. Surveys of current high school and college students suggest that today's incoming students are expecting a college education that is engaged in real-world issues and that prepares them for meaningful careers that will "have a positive impact on the world" (Seemiller and Grace 2014, 103-104). And indeed, studies have shown that students were more engaged, and thus learned better, "when they thought the curriculum was relevant to real-life issues" (Engstrom 2008, 11, quoted in Gabriel 2018, 38).

If civic engagement is embedded in the mission of the university as a whole as well as in the field of religious studies, how can religious studies faculty integrate it more explicitly into our pedagogies? We offer here three models for consideration: explicit naming, civic skill-building, and community-based learning. These models are ordered from lowest to highest in terms of professor and student effort.

Naming

At the most basic level, a professor can foster civic engagement in the classroom by naming the ways that the texts and topics explored already engage with broader issues of societal relevance. This strategy can be as simple as noting the ways race, class, gender, power, enslavement, or state-sanctioned violence are described in an ancient text, or the ways that concerns about race, class, gender, power, enslavement, or state-sanctioned violence have shaped the ways that ancient texts have been interpreted, prioritized, and taught.[6] It can also include calling attention to the diversity of voices included on your syllabus, and the range of racial and religious backgrounds of those who produce the scholarship of our respective fields.[7] And if that is impossible because our syllabi are predominantly or exclusively made up of the scholarship of white men, it should include thinking seriously about what important scholarly voices and perspectives we are keeping from our students.

The authors of this set of articles all participated in a workshop on "Politics, Pedagogy, and the Profession," which took place immediately after the 2017 AAR/SBL annual meeting. In the spirit of naming, the present authors want to name the fact that the majority of participants who were interested in writing articles based on our initial conversations and ongoing research are white. Yet fostering civic engagement is particularly important for white faculty. This identity comes with significant privilege but also, ideally, great responsibility. Koritha Mitchell has described her own experience as a black, female tenured professor: "My very presence makes some of my students uncomfortable because I do not fit any picture society has given them of an expert. My students, after all, have grown up bombarded with the message that people who belong in authority—especially authority based on intellectual accomplishments and expertise—are men, usually white men" (Mitchell 2015). The invisible labor that faculty of color, faculty from working-class backgrounds, and queer faculty do—in mentoring minority students, in serving on diversity-themed committees, and in diversifying a range of campus communities—is important but it is also exhausting and unsustainable (Matthew 2016; Social Sciences Feminist Network Research Interest Group 2017). White faculty may be able to avoid complex classroom discussions about race, class, gender, and other issues important to both ancient and modern life, but must not, because it puts an undue burden on faculty of color, and inherently impoverishes student and faculty understanding of the ancient world and the processes of knowledge that have led to modern understandings of it (see also Upson-Saia and Doerfler 2020).

One participant in the workshop, Timothy Luckritz Marquis, taught a seminary course called "Ethnicity, Race, and New Testament Interpretation" at Moravian Theological Seminary, which named and explored these ideas in a range of historical contexts. His course learning objectives included discussions of "themes of ethnicity and race in early Christian writings, in large part by contextualizing them within Greek and Roman (including Jewish/Judean) ethnic discourses" as well as examinations of "how biblical themes of ethnicity were interpreted throughout Christian history as a part of developing Western concepts of ethnicity and race" (Luckritz Marquis 2018b, 1). Students read extensively from Greek and Roman writers, biblical texts, and modern scholars working to understand the complicating cultural constructions of ethnicity and race in the ancient world, and integrated them through class discussions and activities.[8] These readings were directly tied both to the history of biblical interpretation, and to the work that the seminarians would do doing upon graduation. Students engaged with these texts and ideas, and reported that course materials were "very useful" (private correspondence, 8/28/2018).

6 For specific explorations of pedagogical approaches to racial justice, see Teel (2014).

7 For broader explorations of inclusive pedagogies, see Dallalfar, Kingston-Mann, and Seiber (2011). Broaching such subjects, of course, does not come without its own challenges. On these issues, see especially Byron (2012) and Scheid and Vasko (2014). For an example of interrogating the inclusion of particular "voices" in graduate-level classrooms, see Wright (2019).

8 For a description of one classroom activity that Luckritz Marquiz used, see Luckritz Marquis (2018a).

Even faculty who do not want to offer an entire course on one of these topics can name where race, ethnicity, gender, personal status, and class appear in the texts that we assign—naming Philemon's status as an enslaved person, articulating the Mishnah's complicated understanding of gender and sex, or communicating the ways that early Church Fathers associated Blackness and the demonic (Shanks-Alexander 2013; Brakke 2009, 157-181). Turning the students' attention to scholarship itself, we might also articulate those areas of research and teaching where minoritized or marginalized identities have too often been neglected. For her course on early Christian gospels, for example, Gay Byron forefronts discussion of the oft-ignored Axumite Empire, drawing attention both to scholarly lacunae as well as the distorting effects of the "mono-optic" lenses through which teachers and students typically encounter ancient cultures (Byron 2012, 110). Byron begins class by showing her students maps that might be used to contextualize the New Testament and early Christian literature, juxtaposing those that focus exclusively on the Roman Empire with alternatives that incorporate its Axumite neighbor, thus creating for students a visual representation of the cultures and knowledges that are typically neglected within historical contextualizations of early Christianity (Byron 2012, 2010). As showcased by Byron, forefronting marginalized identities might take the form of a single class activity, but these activities can frame a semester's encounter with the ancient world. Many of our students are not yet trained to see these elements in the "classical texts" that they read; modeling how to do so—on both a small and large scale—is an important pedagogical task we can undertake. This is an equally important pedagogical task for students who are attuned to seeing these elements in classical texts; our silence on these issues may be read by some students as approval.

Building Skills In Civic Engagement

In addition to naming issues related to cultural literacy, it is essential to train students in skills that will enable their civic engagement and participation even beyond their undergraduate experience.[9] Many skills could be highlighted here as important, but one area that is certainly essential is media literacy and criticism. Our focus here on skills reflects our belief that in order to form a more perfect civil society, it will not just be important to communicate particular types of content, but also to expose students to the processes of critical thinking, criticism, coalition-building, collaborative decision-making, and problem-solving which are so fundamental to a liberal arts education. A focus on process, moreover, has the potential to promote political engagement without necessarily promoting a particular political end.[10] This approach, of course, is not apolitical, but inherently political in its championing of the thinking that promotes democratic decision-making and empowerment.

In today's ever-changing media landscape, skills in media literacy and criticism are essential. The forms and methods by which citizens (including students) access information is rapidly expanding and challenging the traditional media landscape in numerous ways. As was made especially clear by the controversial role of social media outlets like Facebook in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, the proliferation of media outlets across the internet has allowed misleading, unverified, or empirically false news stories to proliferate with little resistance. This propagation of "fake news," has, in turn, been ripe for manipulation by opportunistic politicians, who have used the uncertainty of new media landscapes to discredit unfavorable media coverage. Problems regarding falsified or misleading news stories will only become worse: advancing technologies in voice and video manipulation will soon make fabricated audio and video clips of important figures nearly indistinguishable from their authentic counterparts.[11] This represents a direct challenge to civil action and democracy, as an informed public and voting citizenry is essential to the operations of a healthy democratic government. Important endeavors such as The News Literacy Project (2020) have already been launched to combat misinformation in the media, but it will be essential for future liberal arts classes to train students in the skills of discerning reliable sources of information, including fact-checking, source comparison, discerning of source provenance, and authorial attribution, among others.

Scholars of religion and antiquity have a distinctive set of perspectives and skills to bring to this conversation, as the fields of ancient history, biblical studies, and religious studies have long engaged in debates over the authenticity and reliability of their primary source documents.[12] One needs only to peruse a commentary on the Book of Acts, any monograph on the Deutero-Pauline Epistles, or the recent debates over the so-called *Gospel of Jesus' Wife* to realize that issues of authorship, sources, provenance, and reliability inevitably bubble to the surface in nearly every discussion of ancient texts. With this as a backdrop, scholars of antiquity—and especially religious texts of antiquity, whose provenance has often been a source of significant debate within and out of the communities that hold them dear—have a unique opportunity to bring their skills to bear on the challenges facing students and other citizens in our ever-evolving media landscape. Instructors have the opportunity to lead their students in informed and engaging discussions of questions of both ancient and contemporary relevance: how do you determine where a source came from? Who

9 For additional reflection on civic engagement and religious studies pedagogy, see especially Stewart (2016).

10 On this point, see especially Bhattacharyya and Clingerman (2016).

11 On this, see the *Radiolab* podcast episode, "Breaking News" (Adler 2017).

12 For a guide to helping students engage with primary source documents, see Scott (2014).

authored this treatise or article? How can we compare sources to determine which is reliable? What differentiates a reliable source from an unreliable one? How can you tell if a source is "forged," or contains mistaken information? How do you "synthesize" sources in order to reconstruct a historical event? What constitutes "proof"?

Scholars of antiquity here can introduce students to the methods we have developed or co-opted in answering such questions, including source criticism, redaction criticism, literary-historical criticism, stylometry, paleography, handwriting analysis, and radiocarbon dating, among others. The recent controversy over the *Gospel of Jesus' Wife* provides an opportunity, for example, to explore how tools such as stylometry, paleography, and redaction criticism played integral roles in scholarly disputes over the text's provenance. Sonja Anderson of Carleton College has created a handout with tips for reading ancient texts, which she has shared with her students in several of her classes. The tips she enumerates there—familiarize yourself with the author and history, do not assume that today's "common sense" was common in ancient texts, read slowly, determine the genre of the text and be aware of its conventions, watch for implicit and explicit polemic, map the argument, assume particularity in each text, draw connections, annotate—are skills that are important in understanding ancient texts and are equally crucial in understanding modern texts. In a course on women and gender in the Hebrew Bible, Sara Ronis pairs Anderson's handout with a writing assignment in which students choose several of the strategies listed, and then write reflections about their reading experience using these strategies on assigned texts. By becoming familiar with these methods of analysis through case studies of ancient texts, students are better prepared to adapt or invent methodologies for critically interpreting contemporary media.

In-class activities can also be an important part of promoting heightened media literacy. Scholarly debates over ancient "forgeries," for example, provide prime opportunities for collaborative in-class team debates, where teams of two to four students form opposing sides and, through a set of structured components (for example, Opening Statement, Rebuttal, Class Q&A, Closing Statement), dispute a shared prompt. In the case of ancient forgeries, students can debate the pseudepigraphic status of ancient texts of contested authenticity (for example, 2 Thessalonians, Secret Gospel of Mark, 1 Timothy, and so forth), and over the course of a class period, can learn from their own debates as well as from those of their classmates. Requiring students to conduct such debates encourages many skills that are conducive for democratic civic processes—including evidence analysis, collaborative problem-solving, public presentation, understanding opposing arguments, persuasive speech, and deliberative discourse.[13] Travis Proctor has conducted numerous debates as part of courses on Christian origins, and student evaluations have frequently commended this aspect of courses as one of the most challenging yet rewarding course units. These are activities and assessment activities that take up one to two class periods, and yet their educational pay-off is much larger. Student learning improves, their critical reading and thinking skills are strengthened, and their senses of expertise and ownership of the ancient materials is enhanced. Such activities take on added importance in a contested media landscape, as students' ability to analyze (and perhaps defend) particular media outlets will be of paramount importance for solving problems of common concern.

Community-based Learning

Instructors promote civic engagement not only within the classroom, but also by integrating the classroom with the wider community. Community-based learning is an umbrella term for "any pedagogical tool in which the community becomes a partner in the learning process" (Mooney and Edwards 2001, 181 n. 2). It is not identical to civic engagement, but it is one form of civic engagement. At its core, community-based learning is based on two premises: first, that student learning is enhanced when students are asked to apply what they are learning to non-university communities and contexts, and second, that "all communities have intrinsic educational assets and resources" with much to offer students, faculty, and curricula (Great Schools Partnership 2014; see also Garoutte 2018). Community-based learning "includes but is not limited to community-based or action research (research done in partnership with the community), direct service (students provide assistance to community members), and advocacy work both on and off campus" (Garoutte 2018, 149). Community-based learning is usually a substantial part of a course's structure and organization, coheres with a course's general themes, and is often integrated in course lectures and class discussions, as well as writing assignments and other forms of assessment.

Community-based learning can enable students to develop their critical thinking and problem-solving skills, synthesize "information from class and the 'real world,'" build awareness of the structures and systems that create particular community realities, and apply the "discipline-specific theory and methodological skills" they are learning in the classroom to new experiences outside the classroom

13 It is important to note that an overemphasis on public speaking or deliberative discourse can sometimes privilege those from social groups that have traditionally been accorded greater freedom of expression within American public spaces, while discouraging contributions from historical dispossessed groups (for example, women, people of color). As such, we encourage instructors to supplement deliberative discourse with reflection on the historical circumstances that have contributed either to the centralization or marginalization of particular voices within democratic processes (or governance more generally).

(Mooney and Edwards 2001, 189). It can also improve student understanding and engagement within the classroom itself (Morton 2009, Garoutte 2018). Community-based learning is relatively common in the social sciences, and in college capstone courses (Mooney and Edwards 2001, Morton 2009, Garoutte 2018, Arthur and Newton-Calvert 2015). However, it also has significant potential to be used in the religious studies classroom.

Indeed, some religious studies and theology faculty are already integrating community-based learning into their courses.[14] For example, Ronis integrated community-based learning into a course she taught in Fall 2017 called "Home, Exile, and Diaspora in the Hebrew Bible." The course examined the development of the Israelite states, forced migration and the Babylonian exile, and finally the internal crises that emerged when the Babylonian exiles returned to Jerusalem. The student learning objectives for the course included the goals that students "be familiar with major stories and texts about home, exile, and diaspora in the Hebrew Bible," "understand how experiences of immigration and exile shaped the formation of the Hebrew Bible," and "be able to make connections (including both similarities and differences) between the biblical experience of exile and migration and the experiences of modern immigrants."

To achieve these objectives, and with the support of her university's office of civic engagement, Ronis required students to spend nine to twelve hours over the course of the semester working with one of several organizations offering services to immigrants in San Antonio. Her students tutored elementary and high school students, assisted ESL classes for adults, and watched infants and toddlers so that their parents could attend meetings and classes. Students reflected on their experiences and encounters, analyzed relevant biblical texts, and applied their new knowledge both to new texts and new areas of engagement through journaling, discussions in class and on the class discussion board, and a take-home final exam. In light of these experiences, they analyzed letters to the editor about immigration and refugees and assessed the ways that texts from the Hebrew Bible are deployed across the political spectrum in debates about immigration. Rather than essentializing or conflating all experiences of being an immigrant, these experiences enabled students to reflect on the systemic reasons that very different immigration experiences exist.[15] Community-based learning did not replace classroom lecture or discussion but enhanced it; students developed their skills of critical reading and thinking, both with the biblical texts and with the diverse ways that those texts continue to be interpreted.

Other fruitful areas for community-based learning relating to ancient texts and traditions might include work within a local prison in a course on martyrdom and/or the Pauline letters, working with LGBTQIA+ organizations in a class on gender and sex in the ancient world, and working with public relations officers and speechwriters for local political candidates in a course on ancient religious rhetoric. When instructors connect these experiences to relevant course materials, and give students multiple ways to reflect on the experience and its connections to course content, instructors enhance both student learning in their subject area and civic engagement more broadly.

Community-based learning must be approached with an awareness of the ethics of partnering with community organizations, potential imbalances of power and resources, a commitment to listening "to what the community partners' needs are and to balance that with student learning and curricular needs," (Kerrigan, Reitenauer, and Arevalo-Meier 2015; Garoutte 2018, 156-157), and a commitment to make sure that programming and students are not simply "exploiting community partners, who are made to give time and energy to helping college students rather than working toward their own institutional and community goals," for their own learning or resume-building (Garoutte 2018, 157).[16] University offices of civic engagement can help faculty and community partners create a learning experience that is productive, and respectful for students and the community as a whole. External organizations such as CIRCLE (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement) and Campus Compact can offer additional support for faculty at institutions where offices of civic engagement are absent or under-resourced.

Conclusion

For as long as American universities have existed, they have fostered and prioritized civic engagement in some form. The term itself is dynamic, and offers multiple points of entry for the scholar-teacher. As scholars and teachers of religious studies, we are well-situated to prepare our students to engage in the dynamic and complex world in which we and they live. This work is important—to

14 For additional examples of courses in religious studies engaging in civically-engaged or community-based learning, see Runions (2012), Vasko (2017), Patterson et al. (2015), Wingeier-Rayo (2016), and Rademacher (2016).

15 For comparable reflections on incorporation themes of the "stranger" and "hospitality" into the religious studies classroom, see Delaporte (2016).

16 For additional reflections on the challenges inherent in this kind of community-based learning, especially with regard to race, see Reed-Bouley and Kyle (2015) and Perkinson (2012).

the university, to us, and to our students. And this work is doable, with a range of ways of doing it that require more or less effort on the part of a teacher. What was true to fourth-century Babylonian rabbis is perhaps even more true today—education is key to the survival of the polity.

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ARTICLE

Positionality and Disclosure in the Religious Studies Classroom

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ABSTRACT

Responsible academic inquiry depends upon our willingness to examine critically the ways in which experience informs scholarly work. In the classroom, however, introducing such examination through direct disclosure poses risk to all students and instructors, especially those of marginalized identities. We argue that the academic study of late antique religions, in its literature and methods, provides opportunities for investigating positionality while circumventing the requirement of such disclosures by classroom participants.

KEYWORDS

religious studies, politics, positionality, disclosure, identity

Introduction

One of the most pervasive and contentious questions that instructors are confronted by is the role of experience in the classroom. Inquiry simply does not happen in the absence of experience. The avenues of investigation that strike us as the most pressing, the data that presents itself to us as relevant, and the inferences and justifications that appeal to our intuitions as more or less plausible than others are all informed by what we, as individuals and as members of wider social groups, have been exposed to, have accessed, and have been shielded from. Such experience does not, moreover, occur outside of the power dynamics that shape our communities and society more broadly, but is conditioned by our location within a nexus of social relations—that is, by our positionality. While responsible teaching and critical investigation depend upon our willingness and ability to scrutinize these power relations and the consequences they bring to bear on our intellectual endeavors, the fact that our experience is inherently political entails that this scrutiny is risky, and more so for some members of our classroom and learning communities than others (see Upson-Saia and Doerfler 2020).

It is imperative to our teaching, then, that we find ways of introducing discussions of experience and identity without requiring any direct disclosures from class participants, student and instructor alike. As teachers and researchers of late

antique religion, we propose that the content and scholarship of our field offers promising lines of exploration for this purpose. Because "religious identity" refracts through so many other aspects of our lives, the methods and literatures of our discipline have a contribution to make to the examination of positionality and its relationship to epistemology and subject formation. The fact that our objects of study are located in the ancient past can provide a measure of distance that mitigates some of the potential for harm embedded in such examination; yet the ancient world resonates enough with our contemporary environments and communities that its investigation might afford any number of analogues illuminating for our own historical situations. Drawing upon the teaching experiences of participants in our workshop, we offer a series of activities for the classroom that facilitate discussion of the significance of positionality and its role in contouring cognition for inquiry without requiring direct disclosures by instructors or students.

Religious Studies and the Critical Examination of Politics and Positionality

In the context of a religious studies classroom, or more broadly a classroom for which the academic study of religion makes up a significant component (for example, a classics course incorporating the study of ancient religions), we have the opportunity to consider how the arguments used for critiquing certain popular conceptions of what it means to be "religious," "non-religious," and "secular" might be used to problematize conceptions of "neutrality," "objectivity," "politics," and "the political." That is, just as methods from religious studies problematize the notion that an individual can be entirely divested of "religiosity," so too can these methods facilitate a critique of the idea that an individual of any given identity or combination of identities or experiential backgrounds is free from political, moral, or epistemological bias.[1]

When teaching about late ancient religion we must ask our students to interrogate what religious identity signified at that time: How do we (and how did people of that time) identify discrete communities and defining trajectories of thought or practice? The answer, as it is so often in religious studies, is, "It depends." The reality on the ground, as far as we can gather from the available evidence, was hardly clear or unproblematic. For instance, the earliest surviving list of canonical New Testament books that matches what Christians generally agree on today was drafted only in 367 CE, by the Alexandrian bishop Athanasius (Brakke 1994, 2010b).[2] If Christians, to the best of our knowledge, could not unanimously agree on a canon of sacred scriptures for three centuries after Paul's death, what was it that defined them as Christians? And what other diversities existed within what would come to be called "Christianity"?[3] Certainly there was no broad uniformity of practice or doctrine, as clerics jockeyed for doctrinal and ecclesiastical victories at ecumenical councils (Kelly [1958] 2006; Ayres 2004), as leading figures in the church debated what constituted the ethical demands of Christian life (Iosif 2013; Hunter 2009; Wilhite 2007; Upson-Saia 2011; Upson-Saia, Daniel-Hughes, and Batten 2014), and as practicing Christians found no contradiction in participating in activities we now judge as being "pagan" or "Jewish" (as an example, John Chrysostom felt compelled to instruct his Antiochene parishioners in 386/387 CE that they did not, in fact, need to attend synagogue) (see Drake 2013, 79; Sandwell 2010). In short, among those who identified themselves as Christians in late antiquity, there was no clear consensus about what that label meant—either in terms of what they, as self-identified Christians, should do or believe to perform their Christianity, or about what differentiated them from other identity groups (including Jews and adherents of Hellenistic religions, whose internal heterogeneity is similarly complex) (Boyarin 2006).

Further complicating any attempt to establish a singular concept of religious identity is the larger problem of human identity and its "internal plurality" (Lahire 2001, 36-41).[4] Even if we were to come to some universal definition of what comprises a religious affiliation, religious identity would rarely if ever be a person's only operative identity. The world is simply too complicated and uncontrollable for that to be the case. Our existence as embodied beings, the various demands of our interpersonal relationships and societal structures—in other words, our physical needs (e.g. our particular desires and physical challenges), our human connections (e.g. our familial roles), and the labor by which we survive (e.g. our professional identities)—all prompt identity claims of their own. These various identities often stand in tension with one another, and are rarely able to be thoroughly reconciled by subordinating all competing identities to a singular one through which all others are filtered and by which they are judged—what Handelman terms

1 For critical studies of the concept of "religion," see Campany (2003) and Masuzawa (2005); in late antique scholarship, see King (2008), Brakke (2010a, 1-28), and Schott (2008, 1-14).

2 Not only is the late date of an asserted list of canonized texts that might otherwise be taken as immutable or universal an important data point for students, but in a class that has time to focus on the circumstances of the letter's composition, students learn that the letter was written by a man now canonized but deeply controversial during his lifetime, who was writing not strictly for descriptive purposes but as part of a polemic to navigate factions within the Alexandrian church. Indeed, at the time of his writing Festal Letter 39, Athanasius had only recently returned from his fifth exile from Alexandria. This is a good example of how our narratives can mask real-life complexity.

3 Or, as most scholars of the period prefer, in acknowledgement of the diversity of late ancient definitions, "Christianities." For discussion of this terminology, see Brakke (2010a, 7-11).

4 The following discussion of identity is largely inspired by Rebillard (2012) and inquiries into role ethics like those of Cottine (2016). For a critical discussion of the concept of identity, see Berzon (2016).

a "hierarchical arrangement" of category memberships (1977, 191). Rather, identities are often laterally arranged—that is to say, depending on context, one identity will be temporarily foregrounded as the others recede in influence (Handelman 1977, 192-93). We can get a sense of the difficulty and rarity of establishing a hierarchical arrangement for one's identities by looking, once again, to the late antique context. As Rebillard masterfully illustrates, the North African Church in late antiquity was characterized by leaders seeking to impose hierarchical arrangements on Christian communities who habitually tended toward lateral arrangements: As much as Tertullian (fl. ~200 CE), Cyprian (d. 258 CE), and Augustine (354-430 CE) advocated for Christianity (as they defined it) to be the only identity that mattered to their audiences, the Christians they were addressing did not "necessarily or consistently" understand their Christian identity to be more significant than their other memberships, affiliations, and identities (Rebillard 2012, 60). Membership in the imperial commonwealth, family ties, neighborhood allegiances, professional obligations, or commitments to other religious or community groups would also have staked claims on a Christian's identity, and the "Christian" identity did not always emerge as most important. Rather, Rebillard shows that Christianity became the most salient identifier for late ancient Christians only episodically—in specific times and situations.

These insights about the fluidity and elusiveness of a purely religious positionality are easily applied to political identities in the present. That is to say, membership in any one category group is never the sole determinant of a person's position in society and their experience of the world, and even when we momentarily train our focus on a single aspect of a person's identity, the internal diversity of the category itself will repel simple conclusions. Our students seem to understand this for themselves—when we ask them to self-reflect, they rarely reduce themselves to a single, labeled identity. Giving them the sense that this same complexity existed in late antiquity is crucial to their understanding of the time period in question, but it also might help them see new axes of difference in the present, for instance by blurring the false boundaries between the religious and the secular or complicating easy distinctions between, for example, Christian, Jew, and Muslim. Indeed, thinking about identities as complex negotiations of varied positionalities dovetails well with intersectionality, a term and idea that many of our students have encountered (if nothing else, as a misunderstood buzzword). Intersectionality demands that we acknowledge a multiplicity of power dynamics and their often amplifying interactions when we consider human experiences (Crenshaw 1989, 1991; Combahee River Collective 2017). By teaching the late ancient material with attention to the complexities of identity construction, on the intersectional model, we help our students problematize simplistic understandings of religious affiliation in a way completely analogous to how they would problematize simplistic understandings of affiliations of other kinds.

Stepping beyond late ancient material to a text that many instructors across the field use in our classrooms, we can also illustrate the parallel problematization of the religious and the political by considering the late Saba Mahmood's *Politics of Piety* (2004). In this study of the women's mosque movement in Egypt, Mahmood argues that many feminist approaches fail to provide adequate tools for understanding the agency of the women within the movement. Specifically, an understanding of political agency in terms of a simple binary of resistance and subordination in relation to a larger institutional power—in this instance, the secular Egyptian state—does not have the analytical range to fully account for the subject-forming activities of the women of this movement. A number of the women Mahmood considers do not understand their participation in the movement as a way of resisting the state; rather, they talk of practices such as wearing the veil as necessary for the formation of the virtue of modesty. These practices are political because they are deemed by the secular state to encroach upon the distinction between the public and private spheres that it takes as constitutive of its existence: "As theorists of the public sphere have come to recognize, regulation of such quotidian practices is of eminent political concern because they play a crucial role in shaping the civic and public sensibilities essential to the consolidation of a secular-liberal polity" (Mahmood 2004, 73-74). In examining these women's micropractices—performative iterations that shape the agent whose actions embody, reveal, conceal, and contest the social norms and power necessary for the possibility of agency (2004, 55)—Mahmood develops a framework that is potentially illuminating for a number of reasons.[5] Among these is that her comparative analysis provides an example of how positionality can condition one's conceptual assumptions—in this case, one's conceptions about what flourishing and self-determination require—and how a critical examination of the religious and the political can make those assumptions evident.

Maintaining a reflexive critique that encompasses both our own positionality and that of our subjects is crucial as we examine the late ancient world; the stakes are high, as Kate Wilkinson's work demonstrates (2015). In applying Mahmood's analysis to the practice of modesty among late ancient Christian women, Wilkinson uncovers how scholarly assumptions and failures of imagination have created blind spots in our scholarship and, consequently, our teaching. Following Mahmood's rejection of "resistance" and "subordination" as a simple binary (2004, 29), Wilkinson argues that female agency may not always present itself in ways that a contemporary American historian might be conditioned to assume (2015, 22). Her proposed solution is one that can be transposed

5 See also Butler: "The forming, crafting, bearing, circulation, signification of that sexed body will not be a set of actions performed in compliance with the law; on the contrary, they will be a set of actions mobilized by the law, the citational accumulation and dissimilation of the law that produces material effects, the lived necessity of those effects as well as the lived contestation of that necessity" (1993, xxi).

well into the classroom: ethnographic comparison, another signature tool in the "Religious Studies Toolkit." We attempt, as much as possible, to circumvent our epistemological restrictions by considering alternative epistemologies, as well as alternative forms of agency that might "decenter a tacit understanding of the person as a Western, liberal person" (Wilkinson 2015, 26). Wilkinson's call to look to "several different sorts of . . . people as possible analogies" is salutary, especially as we, in our capacities as instructors, navigate the tricky terrain of familiarity and foreignness with our students, attempting to help them feel connected to the past without allowing them to overwrite the past with their perceptions of the present (2015, 26; cf. Pagels 1979; Clark 1998; Frank 2000; Brakke 2003; Burrus 2003). While we may not want to ask our students to share their own comparable experiences (see below), by using responsible ethnographic comparanda we can validate the multiplicity of perspectives and imaginaries that might be helpful to analyzing course material, thus subtly sanctioning students' own.

Wilkinson (2015) models the utility of this decentering ethnographic approach by comparing the forms of agency available to late antique women cultivating modesty with those available to women in contemporary South Asian contexts. In analyzing the advice given to the virgin Demetrias and the other Anician women by Augustine, Jerome, and Pelagius in the early fifth century, Wilkinson compares these recommendations not only to evidence for Roman norms regarding domesticity (2015, 58-73), but also to ethnographic data relevant to the South Asian ideal of "purdah" (literally "curtain"), which regulates gender separation inside and outside of the household (2015, 73-84). These comparative examples, demonstrating how purdah is an occasion for the exertion of agency and the formation of the person, expand the interpretive possibilities for an American Catholic feminist historian analyzing the works of Demetrias's advisors, particularly given the absence of writings from Demetrias herself (Wilkinson 2015, 26). Wilkinson's comparison of late ancient texts with contemporary ethnographic studies challenges us to examine critically our own assumptions about what agency looks like, and to reexamine what data presents itself as relevant for understanding the material we study and attempt to share with our students.

As shown through each of these examples—considerations of late ancient identity, Mahmood's problematization of agency, and Wilkinson's advocacy of comparative methods—reflecting on positionality can improve both our scholarship and teaching; by explicitly addressing the positionality of both ourselves and our subjects in the classroom, we are not only better able to assess our material, but to share it and make it intelligible to our students. But we are also better able to unpack with our students the nuances and repercussions of various understandings of politics, power, and epistemology, even as we unpack the nuances and repercussions of various understandings of religion.

Positionality and Risk in Self-Disclosures in the Classroom

Analyses such as those of Mahmood (2004) and Wilkinson (2015), which explore micropractices and their role in establishing, reinforcing, masking, and disrupting norms within fields of power, raise questions for how we might reflect upon and illuminate for our students the operation of positionality in the classroom. We can examine how our own instructional micropractices—the iterative, day-to-day activities that organize classroom sessions, communications with students, and so forth—support, compound, reveal, contest, restructure, or disrupt the power dynamics already present within the learning community. Exploring our and our students' positionality provides a lens through which to interrogate notions of objectivity, interest, and disinterest as well as the assumptions, experiences, and other contingencies at work in their own cognitive frameworks. How does our location within a particular system, or several intersecting systems, of power shape us epistemologically?

Certainly, the response to charges often encountered by those in the academy of bias, irrationality, or a lack of objectivity is not simply for instructors to disclose their own experiences, beliefs, or identities for the sake of transparency and so that students can evaluate if an instructor is inappropriately or speciously interested in a particular subject matter. Doing so would serve only to reify false conceptions of objectivity and disinterestedness, political or otherwise, as either naturally inherent or achievable for individuals of certain backgrounds and affiliations as opposed to others. If an instructor's aim in the classroom is to provide a framework for thinking about how cognition and imagination are shaped by the distribution and exercise of power across a variety of intersecting spheres, attempting to establish their legitimacy as either a knower or an authority figure by appealing to certain identities, experiences, or a lack thereof *instead of others* undermines that aim. One iteration of such a conundrum is frequently experienced by the instructor of religion, who often must teach while subject to conflicting expectations and assumptions regarding their actual or perceived confessional identity.

Personal disclosures might be incorporated into the classroom, however, as a way of introducing positionality. In such an instance, an instructor might make use of their own experiences and identities as an analytical lens for the purpose of modeling for students that academic claims to objectivity, omniscience, and disinterest are pernicious illusions. There are many axes of categorization on which

instructors could choose to out themselves and establish their positionality: race, ethnicity, gender, class, religion, sexual orientation and identity, ability, national origin, immigration status, and so forth, all come immediately to mind. Of course, some of these are visible (or otherwise apparent) and some are not. Those that are readily discernible might be performed in a range of ways, either deliberately or not,[6] but those that are not immediately intelligible might require a verbal disclosure in class, should the instructor wish to include that axis of positionality in the classroom. Such disclosures are no small feat, not to be taken lightly; they are at once necessary and risky—necessary for demystifying the power dynamics at play in the classroom and in the production of knowledge, but risky, as they are predicated on instructors owning our own vulnerability (hooks 1994, 21). We, too, must abandon the illusions of objectivity, omniscience, and disinterest.

The disclosure of experiences that bear on positionality thus opens up its own range of questions and problems. In regard to the question concerning disclosure as a way of mitigating actual or perceived bias, does the suggestion that the instructor do so imply that they have a responsibility to locate themselves across all aspects of their identity? If we reveal one aspect of our positionality, might we be expected to reveal more? Perhaps those most obviously relevant for the subject matter at hand? Further, the very assumption that an instructor could deliberately "disclose" themselves to their students imagines that the instructor's presence is ever presumed to be neutral. This assumption ignores the various ways in which embodiment is always already politicized, where the bodies and voices of some instructors are more apparently politicized than others (Perlow, Bethea, and Wheeler 2014, 243-44; Marbley et al. 2009; hooks 1994, 129-75, 191-99; Sanyal 2011, 127-32). As Perlow, Bethea, and Wheeler explain, "Whereas the bodies of white male professors, their curricula (i.e., works by "great white men") and pedagogies are normalized, naturalized, and neutralized, those of women and racial minority professors are marked as politicized representations of the Other" (2014, 243). Neither we nor our ideas are ever truly operating on a level playing field: we are always dealing with positionality; we are always dealing with heterodoxy (Fruchtman 2015).

Any expectation that instructors be willing to engage in positionality-focused self-disclosures will have inequitable consequences. Research indicates that for instructors of marginalized identities, particularly visibly marginalized identities, teaching courses overtly related to diversity has negative consequences in comparison to less- or non-marginalized instructors (Gayles et al. 2015; Marbley et al. 2009; Evans and Miller Shearer 2017). These reports indicate that the dynamics operative in society more generally do not cease to inform the activities and structure of the classroom. Just as the presence of those of marginalized identities is frequently perceived as politicized in contexts outside of the academy, so too do students perceive the marginality of their instructors as an indication of a politically biased system that compromises the credibility of those instructors, a perception that can compound with student discomfort in the context of discussions related to diversity (McMillan Cottom 2019, 94). For these instructors in the American higher educational system, we might reasonably conclude that the risk incurred by any such disclosures will be disproportionate in comparison to that incurred by their colleagues.

Given the inequitable levels of risk posed to minoritized faculty members in explicitly disclosing aspects of their positionality, we do not aim to answer the question of whether or not an instructor should disclose either their personal experiences or other aspects of their identity to their students; we aim merely to propose a series of exercises regarding positionality that faculty may want to consider when making their own judgments. We do suggest, however, that any decision on disclosure might be fruitfully complemented with a critical analysis of the idea that one's identity as a learner and a knower can be disclosed or not. How much of such an identity can be confessed in this sense? How is such an identity performed, and what exactly is being asked of instructors who are confronted with the expectation that they present themselves as more neutral? Moreover, what burdens are placed upon other faculty members when an instructor, or group of instructors, claim neutrality or objectivity for their own methodology, viewpoints, and judgments? What might be the consequences of passing, either for the instructor or for the students?[7]

Presenting Positionality in the Religious Studies Classroom

As an alternative to—or possibly as a way of complementing (at the instructor's discretion)—any self-disclosures, we offer other ways of discussing positionality in the classroom. Rather than relying on course participants to foreground their own experiences and positionalities via self-disclosure, these lesson ideas provide concrete external examples with which students can critique claims and implicit assumptions, both their own and those of others, related to authority, agency, identity, embodiment, scholarly argumentation, and so forth. Such discussions afford an opportunity to explore with students how the interrogation of the social embeddedness of

6 Diane Price Herndl (2003) discusses "performing the bimbo" in the wake of her cancer diagnosis and treatment. See, too, the important collection of essays, *Being Black, Teaching Black: Politics and Pedagogy in Religious Studies* in Westfield (2008).

7 On passing, see Ahmed (2017, 115-34).

cognition, and the implications of this embeddedness for scholarly inquiry, illuminates the conceptions of politics and the political, and the significance of those conceptions for the production of knowledge, that we have argued for in the articles in this issue. These exercises facilitate this exploration by highlighting and scrutinizing the epistemological implications of academic micropractices of citation, categorization, interpretation, and embodied performativity within their larger social contexts.

The Syllabus and the Politics of Citation

To encourage students to consider the impact of positionality on the classroom and on epistemology more broadly, we can first of all be transparent about our citational practices within the syllabus. Which scholarly voices merit inclusion, and why? What voices do those scholars cite, what sources do they elect to focus on, and what silences do they disrupt or amplify? Why do the readings we have chosen, rather than other possible readings, best facilitate the course objectives? If the voices on our syllabi remain those of scholars with "normalized, naturalized, and neutralized" identities (to borrow Perlow, Bethea, and Wheeler's [2014, 243] phrasing), how might we de-normalize, de-naturalize, and de-neutralize them? Further, discussion about the syllabus itself might be a good opportunity to discuss with students the erasure of scholars of marginalized identities in environments that either tacitly or explicitly presume scholarly authority to be normatively white and male.

One way to diversify our syllabi while embracing the positionality of our students is to invite them to locate materials to add to the syllabus, either as a complement to already assigned readings or on days specifically set aside for student-selected offerings (see also Poey 2011, 87-92; Srikanth 2011, 108; and Dallalfar 2011a, 114). Classroom integration of these materials can range from student-led discussions of the sources they have chosen to a model with far less risk, where, for instance, entirely anonymous contributions are solicited via an online course-management platform and the instructor vets them before planning a class around their use.

Positionality and Categorization

Instructors can also address positionality by considering names and other forms of categorization; how such categorizations come to exist, be adopted, and be made meaningful; and how terms that might be presumed to be neutral or purely descriptive can take on different meanings, to the point of implying different questions or arguments within the context of different interpretive frameworks. By reflecting on, historicizing, contextualizing, and problematizing the very labels we use in the classroom to discuss groups of people and ideas, instructors can illustrate the ubiquity and importance of positionality, both in history and in contemporary explorations of it.

To allow her students the opportunity to reflect on the imperfect mapping of categorization onto human identity, one workshop participant, an instructor at a large state university, used a reflect-write-share strategy. Her students had been having difficulty understanding how late ancient Christians could disagree with one another about what actions and ethical commitments were required for life as a Christian. Surely one position or the other was wrong, or ill-informed about what real Christianity required? The instructor asked her students to pause; giving them a full minute to silently reflect on their answers, she queried: "What is the first thing you learned about some identity category you belong to? What was the first thing you learned about what it means to be a Christian, a Muslim, an American, whatever?" After the minute had passed, she asked her students to take another five to write down their answers, reflect on them further, and think about how they might help untangle the question of early Christian diversity. Then, the instructor asked if anyone cared to share. Several students who felt comfortable doing so shared their memories—moments from early childhood where a blessing over a meal or a grandmother's habitual "inshallah" or a father's parting words before the first day of school came into focus as uniquely part of a named identity. The students reflected, in response to the instructor's further inquiries, that it was years before snippets like these came to constitute a coherent identity for them, that the memories were inflected with smells and images and emotions that were unique to them and their families, and that every new piece of their identity had to be added to what was already there, lodged in their memory of what it meant to *be* a member of this group. The instructor then opened discussion to the full class, to ask how this might help us untangle early Christian diversity, and was rewarded with a conversation that treated these ancient people more fully as humans and subjects with their own positionalities and good-faith disagreements about how to live as Christians. It also helped lay the groundwork for future class discussions about the tenability of identifying a pure religion, unaffected by lived human experience.

Other possible exercises might center specifically on historicizing and contextualizing the terms we use, even and especially those that are widely seen as unproblematic. For example, an instructor might incorporate into their class some of the insights of Cynthia

Baker's *Jew* (2017). In tracing some of the developments of the term, Baker observes that it generally originated among Christians, often signifying

> an absolute *other*, the very antithesis of the Western Christian *self*. Almost all modern Western forms of the word—*Jew, Jude, juif, Judío, giudeo, jood, Zsidó*, etc. (and even the Yiddish word *yid*)—came into being in decidedly Christian-dominant societies and geopolitical contexts, and, with the exception of *yid*, they seem often to have taken their earliest written form in commentaries, translations, and sermons on the New Testament by Christians for Christians. (2017, 4)

Jews were thus not only not party to their own naming, but the terms that came to describe them in dominant discourse were developed in settings that explicitly excluded them and that were being mobilized to create and refine another identity, that of the Christian. Introducing our students to this history highlights not just the artificiality of the terminology we use, but the fact that categorization is itself a historical and ideological process, inevitably inflected with political operations. In other words, confronting the history of terminology allows us to denaturalize it with and for our students.

Alongside this historicization, we can discuss with students the continued use of such terms, with the aim of both alerting them to power dynamics of which they might not have been aware and modeling intellectual honesty about the difficulty of these terminological questions. Going back to the example of "Jew," we would note along with Baker that Jew is, according to an analysis by Google of its search data, more likely to be used in an anti-Semitic context than "Jewish," "Judaism," or "Jews" (2017, 10), and that "*the Jew*" became "the facilitating device for a host of ideological projects" and "a longstanding popular signifier for the contemptible" (2017, 11) in a long historical lineage stretching from the Gospel of John to Joseph Goebbels. On the other hand, Baker notes a number of modern Jewish scholars for whom claiming the terminology of "the Jew" and analyzing its construction in history is itself an occasion for the construction of various forms of Jewish agency, identity, and personhood in the context of historical trajectories in which the prerogative to employ these terms has generally been claimed by those who use them to signify others. We can discuss with our students the tricky questions of who gets to define a term, and who gets to claim it, and under what circumstances those designations might come to pass.

For Baker, "translation across the divide is at the heart of the modern project of formulating a sense of *Jew* as self within a history of *the Jew* as other" (2017, 75). Understanding the discursive context in which different communities have made use of the designator "Jew" illuminates how a term that many students might take for granted is loaded with a wide range of meaning, such that the variety of interpretive work it performs is conditioned by the positionalities of different speakers. Developing a critical awareness of the scope of this term can destabilize its usage and de-essentialize its meaning. A more detailed understanding of the history of "Jew" as a signifier for self and other provides an occasion for considering how our categorizations do not exist independently of the historical trajectories we use those terms to study while also, ourselves, inhabiting. Other discussions surrounding the relevance of positionality to the polyvalence of meaning might be pursued in the case of any number of other identifiers.

Categorization might also be explored in the classroom through an assignment focusing on larger-scale conceptual formations and their historical contingency. One workshop-generated exercise focused on Saba Mahmood's *Politics of Piety* (2004) because it presents a positionality-centered critique of doctrinal approaches to religion that also has implications for how we might conceptualize and theorize alternative notions of both the religious and the political. Unpacking her critique and its implications with our students may help them excavate what is being presumed or claimed when objectivity or neutrality are invoked. The lesson plan we developed for encouraging students to think along this trajectory involves dividing students into groups of no more than four and having each group track the experiences, commitments, and arguments of one of Mahmood's (2004) study participants, to see how their positionalities vary. We suggest, in particular, focusing on Nadia and Sana, two women who, on Mahmood's account, offer different critiques of Egyptian attitudes towards marriage, particularly those that shamed women for remaining unmarried despite the fact that it was considered improper for them to propose marriage to men. In practice, this and similar exercises work best when there are multiple groups tracking each participant, so this exercise is scalable to even large lecture classes incorporating some elements of active learning.

The reason we suggest focusing on Nadia and Sana is because, despite divergent positionalities, they nonetheless come to similar assessments of Egyptian marriage norms. Nadia, a participant in the mosque movement, understood her response to the difficulties she experienced as a consequence of these attitudes—particularly with regards to her family prior to her marriage at the age of thirty-four—in terms of the cultivation of the virtue *şabr*, or perseverance. She held this virtue as necessary to exercise "first and foremost because it is an essential attribute of a pious character, an attribute to be cultivated regardless of the situation one faces" (Mahmood 2004, 172). *Şabr* in this sense was therefore not a virtue she understood herself to develop "in resistance" to her experience, but was

the character trait that conditioned her response to her circumstances. Sana, on the other hand, was a self-identified secular Muslim and a single professional who responded to these social pressures by developing self-esteem in relation to her career (Mahmood 2004, 172). Both women, however, recognized the social punishment experienced by unmarried women as an injustice:

> Just as the practice of self-esteem structured the possibilities of action that were open to Sana, so did the realization of *şabr* for Nadia, enabling certain ways of being and foreclosing others. . . . What Nadia's and Sana's discussions reveal are two different modes of engaging with social injustice, one grounded in a tradition that we have come to value, and another in a nonliteral tradition that is being resuscitated by the movement I worked with. (Mahmood 2004, 174)

Mahmood is here making the case for an open-ended approach to feminist scholarship, arguing that the women's mosque movement provides an opportunity to reflect specifically on the limitations of those forms of feminist inquiry that naturalize liberal notions of agency.[8] Going through her discussion of the details of the lives of Nadia and Sana allows students to consider (1) how each understood the ramifications of being a Muslim and a woman for her own life; (2) how an analysis of these self-understandings required attention not only to the beliefs, but also to the micropractices of the actors of their environments, both their own and those around them; and (3) how such an analysis provides an opportunity to explore the historical situatedness of conceptions of flourishing, an exploration that has the potential to make one's own conceptual assumptions more visible. Depending on the type of class one teaches, the guiding questions for student group work could be more or less explicit about these avenues of inquiry. This sensitivity to the positionality of both observer and observed is a crucial skill that we can likewise attempt to impart to our students and, once again, it is a technique that applies equally to considerations of the religious and the political.

The class might then, from this starting point, have space to consider how there is no universal way of responding to injustice, because there is no universally agreed upon way of articulating what constitutes agency and dignity. Yet the examples of Nadia and Sana reveal how both can agree that their shared experience has been unjust, despite the fact that their different values inform their engagement with their social worlds differently. Such agreement perhaps provides those who identify as feminists with a clearer sense of the forms that anti-oppressive action might take. In any case, detailed classroom consideration of the lives of these two women may help to illuminate how the acknowledgement of the fact that our ideas of agency are not universal does not, *in itself*, invalidate any particular conception of agency. It is simply a recognition that the norms through which we structure our lives are themselves always historically contingent. Understanding the self to be organized by an autonomous reasoning faculty, which then dictates one's actions and conditions one's experience of the world, is neither a universal conception nor a provable proposition, but rather a culturally contingent assumption naturalized by Western hegemony (Mahmood 2004, 11-12).[9]

Positionality and Textual Interpretation

Instructors might also incorporate readings that explicitly discuss the implications of positionality for textual interpretation. In a world that presents us with seemingly infinite data, positionality informs what we think of as requiring explanation, attention, or comment. As bell hooks observes, "combining the experiential and the analytical is a richer way of knowing" (1994, 89); likewise, Elaine Pagels reflects that "everything we experience shapes what we are capable of understanding" (2018, xiv). Studies and classroom activities that explicitly address how the identities and experiences of the interpreter operate in the activity of interpretation provide an opportunity to initiate a dialogue on this issue.

For example, one workshop participant, an instructor at a small liberal arts college, described an assignment designed to encourage students to explore positionality in textual interpretation—students write a blog post exploring how a think-piece or article in a

8 That is, while feminist inquiry can sometimes presuppose a liberationist teleology, that teleological narrative can fail to capture alternative ways in which women might conceptualize their own flourishing. Such strains of feminist discourse can, in this respect, end up demanding that women adopt as universal what are in fact historically contingent conceptions of well-being, at the expense of their own commitments and values: "Does a commitment to the ideal of equality in our own lives endow us with the capacity to know that this ideal captures what is or should be fulfilling for everyone else?" Mahmood asks. "If it does not, as is surely the case, then I think we need to rethink, with far more humility than we are accustomed to, what feminist politics really means" (2004, 38; cf. hooks 1994, 100-18). For another critique of the presumption of liberal notions of agency in historical work, see Johnson (2011).

9 Nicole Karapanagiotis offers another example of a teaching tactic meant to facilitate the goal of enabling students—particularly "missionary students" who take her class "to learn about other people's religions" with the unstated aim, as she surmises, of trying "to *eradicate* those religions"—to adopt a critical attitude toward their own positionality (2017, 47). For Karapanagiotis, this entails learning to participate in the academic study of religion as an endeavor committed to understanding others "on their own terms" (2017, 54-60), an endeavor she considers to require a suspension of values (2017, 62). Yet understanding someone "on their own terms" does not preclude, and in fact requires, an analysis of the historically contingent nature of those terms. Nor, moreover, does such an understanding preclude denaturalizing claims to authority, legitimacy, or authenticity, particularly insofar as such claims are made in relation to others and bear implications or assertions about what can and cannot be done to them. See also Wright (2019) and Fernandez (2015).

major news publication is relevant for a particular audience *and* how it is relevant for a community to which the student belongs. Students then have an opportunity to respond to one another. Assessing how a singular text might be differently understood by different interpreters is a crucial skill for students and scholars of religious studies to exercise, and to make one of those interpreters the students themselves as they understand themselves to be aligned with a particular identity group amplifies the effect of this assignment on students' considerations of their own positionality.[10] While it is important to be mindful of the risks that students might incur in this context, one of the advantages of this assignment is that the student can control the degree of disclosure in which they must actually engage. For instance, "a community to which the student belongs" might be the student body of the institution in which the class is conducted. Alternatively, students concerned about the risks of disclosure might be allowed to submit their assignment to the instructor instead of posting it for other students to read.

Another workshop participant, teaching a small interdisciplinary seminar at a midsized private research university, initiated dialogue on the effects of positionality on interpretation by having their students read and discuss Clarice Martin's essay, "Polishing the Unclouded Mirror: A Womanist Reading of *Revelation* 18:13" (2005).[11] In this essay, Martin employs a womanist hermeneutic to read Revelation 18:3, highlighting the significance of John's indictment of slavery for his attack on Rome more generally. Martin describes womanist theory and analysis as "seek[ing] to dissolve and to dismantle the three-fold tyrannies of gender, race, and class as among the overarching and interlocking structures of domination in [the interpreters'] lives" (2005, 85). Privileging their own "identity and experience, womanist interpreters challenge the gender-exclusive hegemony of male-articulated understandings of the Christian faith" (2005, 85). Even as they struggle against the "twin evils" of androcentrism and patriarchy, womanist interpreters "also advance in solidarity with Black male interpreters against the idolatry and hegemony of White supremacy in traditional religion—the idolatry and hegemony that foster the evils of racist domination, ideology, interpretation, and oppression" (Martin 2005, 85). With such insights and affirmations in mind, Martin foregrounds John's critique of slavery, and is ultimately able to argue that ancient critics considered the Roman practice of slavery as more oppressive and dehumanizing than its apologists have argued.

Martin shows that John's critique of slavery has been overlooked and undertheorized by non-womanist interpreters. For instance, she draws special attention to how, in Revelation 18:12-13, John places enslaved people at the end of a list of commodities representing Roman excess. By comparing this to slavery's treatment in one of John's intertexts, a list in Ezekiel 27:12-25 which places enslaved people first, Martin is able to argue that John's placement "functions as a strategically crafted social critique of the widespread and 'taken for granted' practice of the slave trade in the pre-industrial, urban agrarian Mediterranean world of John's day" (2005, 99). By such arguments, Martin makes a convincing case that "John himself considered slavery in the Empire to be a horrendous, cruel, and dehumanizing institution" (2005, 101).

Martin's attention to these verses, her identification of comparanda, and her discussion of the theoretical lens she employs illustrate the contingency of interpretation (2005, 101-104). A different interpreter might situate John's critique of Rome against any number of other texts produced in the ancient period. Or a white interpreter might have had a reading similar to Martin's available to them—but might not, in fact, have emphasized these passages. As Martin explains, her attention is drawn to this particular verse, and the particular texts with which she brings it into conversation, as a consequence of her ethical commitments as a womanist interpreter, which are in turn rooted in her experiences as a Black American woman. At the same time, she rejects an essentializing understanding of interpretation: "A sustained engagement with Africana women does not require the presumption of an essentialist identity or a conflated 'homogeneity' of Africana women's experience" (Martin 2005, 86; cf. Pagels 2012).[12]

Martin's work provides an opportunity to explore with students how interpretations of historical texts that might seem obvious to them are, in fact, socially and historically conditioned by a variety of factors, among them the experiences of the interpreter. By engaging with literature that takes the question of positionality seriously, we can, with our students, reflect on the limitations of our own epistemological horizons, horizons that are at least in part shaped by our experiences as individuals and as members of communities.

10 Dallalfar (2011a) describes a similar assignment, in which students share personal responses to readings that draw upon their own experiences with the class as part of an examination of the feminist claim that "the personal is political." The theoretical insights gained in these discussions are then applied to other media Dallalfar introduces, particularly films, guest speakers, and images that the students bring in themselves (2011a, 121-2), as part of a project of constructing a "feminist global sociological imagination" (2011a, 124). In such assignments, Dallalfar, drawing on the work of Patricia Hill Collins, aims to help her students cultivate the position of "the outsider within" (2011a, 117; cf. Collins [1986]), though in this application what constitutes "the outside" and what constitutes "within" remain unarticulated.

11 In proposing alternative classroom strategies to those we have discussed here, both Sunanda Sanyal (2011) and Rajini Srikanth (2011) critique essentializing approaches to positionality while seeming to recognize inconsistently that it is possible to reject such essentialization without denying the function of positionality as such in teaching and research. While both point to the ways in which their own positionality has been operative in their teaching (Sanyal 2011, 132, 137-8; Srikanth 2011, 102), both also diminish the role of what Srikanth describes as "the specious and suspect authority of lived experience" (2011, 105; cf. Sanyal, 134, 137). For another compelling womanist perspective on *Revelation* that would work extremely well in the classroom, see Smith (2014).

12 On essentialization, see also, hooks (1994, 43-44).

The Embodied Performativity of the Instructor

Finally, if instructors feel comfortable doing so, they might introduce positionality by explicitly using their own bodies as points of departure for conversation; for examples of such discussions, see McMillan Cottom's *Thick and Other Essays* (2019).[13] Several female-identified workshop participants, for example, who teach at a wide variety of institutions, noted productively utilizing their performed gender in discussions of 1 Timothy 2:12, in which "Paul" declares, "I permit no woman to teach or have authority over a man." One workshop participant reported using this text as an opportunity to query the semiotics of the signifier "woman." If gender is a social construction, would not "woman" signify differently in the society of the second-century Mediterranean than it does in a contemporary American context?

Another workshop participant, a white instructor, made use of an activity incorporating Lloyd A. Thompson's book, *Romans and Blacks* (1989), a study that examines the valences of Roman representations of the *Aethiops* in the context of other Roman somatic types and in comparison with modern concepts of race and racism. Many of the negative stereotypes related to ethnicity were theorized in antiquity through the lens of environmental determinism. Excessively hot and cold climates impacted the character of those who inhabited them; the pale nordic barbarian was made brave but dim-witted by the cold, while the "black or near-black" inhabitants of the hot southern climes were sharp-witted but cowardly. The moderate climates of the Mediterranean, on this theory, produced the aesthetically and morally ideal human being (Thompson 1989, 101). Thompson's work might be paired with the studies of Gay Byron and David Brakke into early Christian representations of blackness (Byron 2002; Brakke 2001). In presenting this literature, a white instructor might situate their body in the context of these and other Roman and early Christian stereotypes, noting, for example, that many bodies—particularly male ones—racialized in the contemporary American context as white would have been categorized as barbarian in the Roman context (see also De La Torre 2015; Bazzano 2016, 276-82). In this regard, the white instructor's body can become a teaching tool for illustrating the historical contingency of categories of ethnicity, race, and racism. Such discussions also might be the starting point for consideration of the connections and disconnections between ancient versions of ethnic chauvinism and modern racism.

Conclusion

As educators, one of our central goals is to facilitate our students' understanding of the provisionality, contextuality, and contingency of knowledge production, a nexus of issues that is inextricable from questions of experience and its complex relationship to identity. Yet given the real, significant, and public risk disclosures pose to all students and instructors, but especially to those of marginalized identities, we have deemed it necessary to offer alternative or supplementary classroom strategies for discussing positionality. As we noted, given that the methods of the study of religion are aimed at the exploration of the relation of various identity claims to one another, and how those identity claims condition and are conditioned by interpersonal relationships and dynamics of power, these methods have a particular contribution to make to this endeavor. On the basis of the experiences of participants in our workshop, we have offered several recommendations for examining positionality's role in shaping cognition without requiring the risk that accompanies the disclosure of personal experience.

Responsible teaching and scholarship in any discipline require us to be able to investigate critically the manner in which a human being appears, an investigation that opens up a range of questions about how power, privilege, history, and experience shape those appearances. Attending to the nuances of positionality without requiring direct disclosure helps us and our students to come to terms with the idea that ultimately, our representations can never render humanity, of ourselves or of others, in its fullness. Our attempts at representation are always partial, are always asymptotal.[14] Building a classroom responsive to this fact helps us, teacher and student, to mitigate the potential for harm to members of our classrooms, and to cultivate in ourselves the critical attitude towards one's assumptions, beliefs, conclusions, and methodologies that is the *sine qua non* of inquiry.

13 For an exploration of the potential for teacher embodiment to become a site for instruction, see Freedman and Stoddard Holmes (2003).

14 See Pagels: "Even now, writing about what's so deeply personal, I'm aware that anything I say can speak to you only as it resonates through what you have experienced yourself; yet even within those limits, we may experience mutual recognition" (2018, 208).

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ARTICLE

Accepting the Inevitability of Politics in the Classroom: A Proposal for How to Identify Best Practices in Effective and Inclusive Religious Studies Pedagogy

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ABSTRACT

Once we acknowledge that we cannot escape politics in the classroom, it is imperative that we, as instructors, adapt our pedagogy accordingly, with the knowledge that our choices in the classroom will replicate, reinforce, or resist the political status quo. The political embeddedness of religion makes this all the more urgent for instructors of religious studies, as we attempt to guide students through explorations of communities, identities, histories, ideologies, and representations of human experience which all have political implications in the present. This article delineates several parameters for crafting our pedagogical initiatives, offering classroom climate considerations to keep in mind while we establish our own best practices. It then offers several suggestions—structural, instructor-focused, and student-focused—of best practices to implement in the religious studies classroom so as to achieve optimal learning outcomes for all of our students. Key among our conclusions is that inclusive pedagogy is effective pedagogy in religious studies.

KEYWORDS

inclusive pedagogy, politics, inductive pedagogy, safe spaces, classroom climate

Introduction

At the heart of pedagogy is the idea that we must recognize the needs of our students, meeting them where they are, so to speak, so that we can guide them toward more expansive knowledge. This guiding function is embedded in the term's etymology—in ancient Greece and Rome a *paedagogos* (Greek for "child-leader") was an enslaved person whose role was to accompany young students to school, making sure they arrived safely and attended to their studies. To meet students where they are, to recognize them, and listen to them properly, we need to be sensible of the power dynamics at play within our

institutions and classrooms.[1] To successfully guide them to more expansive knowledge and safeguard their access to mastery of our material, we must be prepared to implement strategies for navigating these power dynamics in ways that include all of our students in classroom success. In other words, in order to be effective instructors, we must acknowledge the presence of politics in our classrooms.

As Gibbons and Fruchtman (2020) elaborate in their article in this issue, we cannot avoid politics in the classroom. Instructors are not faced with the question of whether or not to introduce the political into our classes; rather, we are faced with the question of how to deal with the ways that politics are already present. Whatever our field, whatever the class we are teaching, there remains the human reality that we and our students are political creatures, and that what we choose to do in class will replicate, reinforce, or resist the political status quo.[2]

For instructors in religious studies, this truth is particularly important to acknowledge, given the outsize roles religion and the history of religion have come to play in public discourse. Many of us, indeed, find this political embeddedness appealing: we study what we study because of the salience of these topics to human lives, past and present. But we study them, and our expertise brings with it several important insights that we must do our best to impart to our students. We know, for instance, that the situation on the ground is always far more complicated than any one narrative can encapsulate. As scholars of human history, we also know that constructions of history reflect and shape contemporary concerns—that our sources reflect the times in which they were written, rather than the times they represent: we know there is no such thing as going to the archives and reconstructing an unbiased history "as it really was" (Clark 2004). Finally, as scholars of human groups, we know that constructions of religion likewise reflect and shape contemporary concerns—for instance the answers to definitional questions like "Who is 'Christian'?" "What counts as 'orthodox'?" and "Who gets to define what 'Islam' is?" can only be (even partially) answered by "It depends who is asking and why."

To be effective guides to (and advocates for) our field, our methods, and our subjects of study, we need our students to leave our classes not just with knowledge about human cultures and history, but with the intellectual resources required to critically evaluate any new information that presents itself; we need them to be able to articulate objections to harmful misrepresentations of religion and history and to have the tools to engage and correct those who would promote such misconceptions; and we need them to leave our classes wanting to learn more, inclined toward "critical inquiry and analysis of both the other and the self" (AAR-Teagle Working Group 2008, 21-23). Doing justice to our field, to our subjects of study (many of whom can no longer speak for themselves), and indeed to our own expertise requires that we facilitate our students' ability to interrogate sources, to recognize that every reading of texts or historical events is interpretation, to appreciate complexity, nuance, the elliptical and contingent nature of human truth, and the multiplicity of narrative, and to attempt to approach our sources with empathy as well as suspicion.

With so much at stake for our students and our subject areas, so much crucial content to convey, and so many necessary skills to impart, it is vital that we pursue best practices for navigating politics in our pedagogy. If we want to ensure that our students engage with and absorb our field's critical skills and content, we must craft our content choices, design our courses, and establish standards of discourse for our classrooms in ways that take politics into account. Politically responsible course design would, ideally, enable two interrelated outcomes: not only would instructors improve our ability to convey our subject matter and methodologies to our students effectively, but our students would also benefit from feeling included in scholarly conversations, finding themselves inspired and invigorated by their engagement in our classrooms and confident enough to make our material their own.

This article attempts to sketch some of these best practices, and to show that, indeed, being effective teachers requires being inclusive—and this means attending to the politics already enmeshed in our classroom environments. First, we establish the contours of what "best" means in this context, exploring three considerations about classroom climate that provide parameters for assessing whether our pedagogical strategies are effectively addressing politics in the classroom. We then describe and discuss several practices that meet these criteria, illustrating them, primarily, with classroom examples from our own subfield, religion in late antiquity. Though the examples of content are largely specific to late antiquity, both the skills we seek to inculcate in our students and the considerations that we must take into account as we revisit our pedagogy are broadly applicable across the field of religious studies.

1 Gonzalez-Andrieu (2015) reminds us that we also need to be aware of the larger structural dynamics that have already conditioned students' presence in the classroom.

2 For a fuller discussion of the expansive understanding of "politics" we are employing here and the impossibility of an "apolitical" classroom, please see the discussion in Upson-Saia and Doerfler (2020) and Gibbons and Fruchtman (2020) in this issue

Classroom Climate Considerations: The Metric of "Best Practices"

Taking politics into account as we craft our content choices, design our courses, and establish discursive standards for our classrooms is no simple task: it is fraught with possible pitfalls (pedagogical, interpersonal, and, yes, political). Successfully incorporating politics into the college classroom requires that we strike several balances at once: we need to recognize marginalized groups in the classroom without retrenching their marginalization; we need to preserve freedom of expression while maintaining the safety of the classroom for diverse expression; and we must guide our students without dictating to them.[3] We, the authors, suggest that these three balances should form the metric by which we can evaluate what actually constitutes best practices in our field for responsibly incorporating politics into our classrooms.

Consideration 1: Politically Marginalized Groups in the College Classroom

Our classrooms are more diverse than ever. Nontraditional students, returning veterans, undocumented immigrants, and students of every race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, gender identity, linguistic tradition, neurotype, ability status, national origin, political affiliation, educational background, and religious background show up in our classrooms.[4] "There is no longer a 'typical' college student" (Booker and Campbell-Whatley 2018, 23). It would be simply ineffective to presume homogeneity and shared experiences on any level, even if we teach at parochial institutions or those with specialized missions. But more saliently, many of the students in our classrooms are members of groups that have experienced systemic oppression in America, the consequences of which persist regardless of the privilege of the individual student: they do not see themselves or their histories reflected in our syllabi; they are constantly subjected to microaggressions and silencing tactics; they are burdened by the additional weights of having to represent their identity group, having to prove the validity of their existence, and having to navigate a world that was not only not built for them but built to exclude them, all of which combines to dehumanize them and silence them further.[5] To fail to acknowledge this reality in the classroom is to reinforce and reinscribe the oppressive structures that have marginalized our students' communities in the first place. To teach in a color-blind fashion is to ignore the realities of our students' lives and experiences: no matter how much we want to say that we are all "just human," we live in a world that treats us differently based on what type of human we happen to be, and these differentiations must be dealt with (Boler and Zembylas 2003). Any best practice must acknowledge the reality that certain groups are politically marginalized in our society, and must actively seek to address that marginalization. Crucially, we must do this without tokenizing our students, assuming to know their experiences of discrimination or reducing them to their membership in an identity group.

Consideration 2: "Free Speech" and "Safe Spaces" in the College Classroom

With TurningPointUSA and other organizations militating for a radically permissive understanding of free speech on college campuses and with, simultaneously, a growing recognition that student learning outcomes are negatively affected by secondary traumas triggered in the classroom, feelings of alienation or lack of belonging, and microaggressions (all of which highlight the need for continually considering our students' emotional and psychological well-being),[6] the conflict between "free speech" and "safe spaces" seems to be at a fever pitch. Thankfully, in this case, the poles are not as extreme as they are often portrayed to be, at least in the classroom: shouting opinions for the sake of shouting is just as counterproductive to learning as is avoiding all mention of potentially inflammatory topics. The balance we must strike here, as instructors, is to encourage (as much as possible) our students to express themselves and to work through ideas on their own, in accordance with their own values and insights, but also to ensure (again, as

3 For a complementary discussion of classroom climate and positionality, see Gibbons and Fruchtman (2020) in this issue, as they harness considerations of power dynamics in the classroom to redefine how we and our students can understand politics (in the classroom and beyond).

4 For the status of racial and ethnic diversity and inclusion in American college classrooms, as well as the implications and prospects of this trend, see U.S. Department of Education (2016). For numerical data on gender, ability status, ages, veteran status, and ethnicity/race, see: https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=98. As Lee, Poch, Shaw, and Williams note, "The students who attend our colleges and universities increasingly reflect the broad array of national and global diversity" (2012, 2).

5 The benefits of culturally responsive and inclusive curricula have been well documented (see especially Dee and Penner 2017), as have the consequences of monocultural curricula (see Harris and Reynolds 2014), but monocultural representation still predominates and diversity initiatives are often embattled and belittled (see Smith 2018; Gay 2004). Scholars, as a general rule, seem to be reluctant to rethink our canons. On microaggressions and silencing tactics, see Sue et al. (2008) and Berk (2017a, 2017b, and 2017c); on the burden of representation, see Watson et al. (2002, 67-70), Walls and Hall (2018), and Fries-Britt and Turner (2002); on white supremacy in the classroom, see Yacavone (2018); for how the histories we recount are white supremacist; and see Green (2016) and Steele (1992) for how the structures of our universities and classrooms themselves uphold white supremacy. In general, see Shorter-Goodin (2013) as well as Harper and Davis (2016) and the sources they recommend.

6 See Crumpton (2017, 138) and Fenner (2018, 88-89) on secondary trauma negatively affecting student outcomes; see Booker (2016), Booker and Campbell-Whatley (2018), and Osterman (2000) on belonging and student performance; and see Berk and his sources on how microaggressions "create feelings of isolation, exclusion, loneliness, and tokenism" and "lower the individual's work productivity and problem-solving abilities" (2017a, 68).

much as possible) that every student feels safe in our classrooms—to express themselves, certainly, but also to be in a dynamic and respectful classroom where they do not have to worry about their humanity being called into question during the course of a discussion.

This is eminently achievable—the reason that "free speech" and "safe spaces" have, to this point in our discussion, been placed in scare quotes is that real classroom safe spaces are spaces that are safe *for* free speech, ones that provide an atmosphere in which difficult topics can be discussed openly by all students. As Holley and Steiner (building on Boostrom 1998) describe, the safe classroom "allows students to feel secure enough to take risks, honestly express their views, and share and explore their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. . . . [C]lassroom safe space refers to protection from psychological or emotional harm" (2005, 50). Importantly, the safe classroom is not one without challenge or discomfort.[7] As Holley and Steiner note, "[b]eing safe is not the same as being comfortable. To grow and learn, students must often confront issues that make them uncomfortable and force them to struggle with who they are and what they believe" (2005, 50). This is not to say we should wantonly disregard our students' emotional and psychological states in the name of challenging them.[8] We need to do the work of making students feel secure enough and supported enough in our classrooms to respond to the challenges we and their classmates present, and this might require things like establishing guidelines for class discussions, structured reflection, grounding exercises, and even (the much-maligned) content warnings (Wyatt 2016; Crumpton 2017).[9] It will certainly require self-reflection on the part of the instructor (see Byron 2012, 118).

Thus, while creating a safe classroom climate is achievable, it is neither easy nor simple to do. It requires that we as instructors actively cultivate a classroom environment that is supportive enough to allow free speech, where every student feels like a full, valued, and respected member of the classroom community at all times.

Consideration 3: Deductive vs. Inductive Pedagogy: Telling vs. Teaching

Research shows that students learn best through active learning—engaging with material through discussions, in-class activities, collaborative projects, and constructive (rather than recitative) assessment exercises, so that students "become participants in constructing their own knowledge" (Murphy Paul 2015). But even within the active learning framework, we know that long-term, transformative learning is best achieved through inductive pedagogy: rather than telling students a principle and having them exercise it (the deductive method), instructors challenge students to address a specific problem or issue and then intervene when students recognize the need for "facts, skills, and conceptual understanding" (Prince and Felder 2007, 14; Brown et al. 2014).[10] We should strive, then, to use inductive methods in our classes wherever possible. However, this is not without risk, particularly in the religious studies classroom.

One challenge for using inductive pedagogy in the religious studies classroom comes from the fact that our subject matter largely consists of people and their practices and beliefs. Thus, when students make the mistakes and missteps inherent to (and essential for) inductive learning, they are making mistakes about people—some of whom may even be represented in the classroom. As we exercise our analytical techniques and exorcise our ignorance in religious studies, then, we run a greater-than-usual risk of contributing to the otherization and alienation of class members who affiliate in any number of ways with the people, practices, and beliefs under discussion.

7 See also Boler (1999) and Boler and Zembylas (2003) on the "pedagogy of discomfort": "To engage in critical inquiry often means asking students to radically reevaluate their worldviews. This process can incur feelings of anger, grief, disappointment, and resistance, but the process also offers students new windows on the world: to develop the capacity for critical inquiry regarding the production and construction of differences gives people a tool that will be used over their lifetime" (Boler and Zembylas 2003, 111). As Winnifred Fallers Sullivan noted on accepting the AAR's 2017 Martin E. Marty Award for the Public Understanding of Religion, "Going to school is a dangerous thing" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=XxtbUAiJ4cg at 1:03:18). Also helpful is the notion of Callan (2016) distinguishing between "intellectual safety" (where one's ideas go unchallenged) and "dignity safety" (where, despite disagreements, all parties understand one another as equals).

8 While much public comment has focused on the damage we do to students by "coddling" them and not exposing them to the source of their fears (Lukianoff and Haidt 2015), we as instructors need to recognize that we are not our students' doctors; it is neither our job nor our right to declare that by avoiding content warnings we are acting therapeutically. See Wyatt (2016) for a good discussion of the ethical uses of trigger warnings, and Crumpton's (2017) view of content warnings as hospitality.

9 The authors concur with Fenner that content warnings should be understood as "tools to facilitate access to challenging material, rather than excuses to avoid it" (2018, 86) and Penny (2014) that "a trigger warning is not a rule, it's a tool. It does not demand that we withdraw from topics that are taboo or traumatic, but rather suggests that we approach such topics with greater empathy, greater awareness that not everyone reads the same way."

10 As an example, see the Teaching Tactic by Park (2020), in this issue, in which students are asked to research and then, in a "Town Hall" setting, present the hermeneutical positions of disparate biblical interpreters. By making much of the research of a solo or small group activity and by checking in with students frequently, Park allows for inductive learning, while still maintaining the classroom as a safe space for free inquiry.

Another challenge for aspiring to inductive pedagogy in religious studies is that, often, the traditions students are making mistakes about are their own. Indeed, the risk of proliferating unknown unknowns is particularly acute in religious studies classrooms where students often arrive assuming that they, as practitioners of a tradition, unproblematically know its truths. Well versed as practitioners, they may not recognize a need for intervention, not realizing that their assumptions are not universally shared or unproblematically true. The facts, skills, and conceptual understandings their instructors aim to convey would never hold the requisite urgency for inductive learning, because the student might never be confronted with the inadequacy of their received information and logic.[11]

A final challenge is that, in the event of our students *not* coming to academically defensible conclusions, missing the insights we, as instructors, had hoped they would come to about the diversity and otherness of the traditions we are studying, there are both too few and too many real-world consequences. A chemistry student who failed to absorb an instructor's intended lesson might see their experiment fail: they would know they had missed a step somewhere and need to go back to correct it. There are no such tangible, reflection-mandating consequences for misunderstanding material in religious studies. Rather, the consequences of such misunderstanding may be far-reaching and vastly destructive, but may never impinge on a student's consciousness as they head off into the world with toxic misunderstandings of people in their communities and, in the worst-case scenario, the belief that our discipline endorses those misguided understandings.

Whatever best practices we develop must allow for inductive learning by our students, while still buffering the classroom community from the missteps necessary for inductive learning and while ensuring as much as possible that our students' final takeaways fall within an academically acceptable range of understanding.

Suggested Best Practices

If we can meet the standards outlined in the foregoing classroom climate considerations, we stand to gain not only a more positive classroom experience for more of our students, but also a greater level of efficacy in teaching our subjects. Students who feel encouraged, engaged, and valued in class will invest more energy in learning the material, will make more connections between the material and their contemporary lives, and will be more likely to treat the material with a nuanced eye. Being inclusive—which means actively acknowledging the role of politics in the classroom—allows us to be more effective instructors.

There are many strategies instructors can employ to help us meet these standards. The following suggestions are certainly not meant to be exhaustive.[12] Rather, they are illustrative of the types of decisions we can make as instructors to better serve our students and our areas of study. For clarity's sake, we have broken these suggestions into three (somewhat artificial) categories: those that focus on the structure or design of the course, those that focus on instructor behavior in the classroom, and those that focus on fostering and utilizing student agency in the classroom.

1. Structural Solutions

Course designs are a particularly effective venue for incorporating political reality into our teaching. Not only do they put our acknowledgement of politics into active, explicit practice that shapes every moment of student course contact, they are structures that we can craft prior to the semester's start and on our own, allowing instructors to preserve their time and safeguard their emotional reserves during the semester.

A. Choosing Content: Diversity and Relevance

Perhaps the most fundamental structural strategy we can adopt is to keep political concerns in mind as we choose our course content. When choosing primary sources, we can choose texts and material evidence that represent an expansive and inclusive range of historical realities. When choosing secondary sources, we can seek out and select for class use excellent scholarship by women and people of color as well as by people with diverse political and methodological agendas. When choosing what topics to include in our

11 See, for instance, the types of epistemological assumptions that Karapanagiotis (2017) describes her students holding, as they enter her world religions classroom with the intention of becoming Christian missionaries.

12 For a wealth of additional ideas and suggestions, see the Humanities, Arts, Science and Technology Alliance and Collaboratory (HASTAC) site at hastac.org. Thanks to Dr. Dorothy Kim for this and many other references.

classes, we can help prepare our students for real world interactions by selecting topics that are at the forefront of public discourse, and also can demonstrate the possibilities and relevance of scholarly engagement by assigning and discussing public scholarship.

Selecting diverse source material is not only politically responsible, it is necessary if we want to do justice to our subject areas. Religion is, after all, "largely created by its adherents" (AAR-Teagle Working Group 2008, 21), which is to say, by people. Scholars of religion in late antiquity can no longer sustain the illusion that the only people who existed or mattered were elite clerics whom later tradition identified as orthodox or that the ideas endorsed by the powerful and privileged were the only ones to have ever existed, or were the only "viable" options on the table. No course on the Bible can responsibly talk about the formation of biblical canons without reference to and readings from books that did not make it.[13] Now that we have the texts discovered at Nag Hammadi, for instance, there is no excuse for only reading Eusebius's *Church History* or Irenaeus's heresiology. Our students tend to easily grasp the principle that history is written by the winners, but we need to disrupt several related and often unarticulated assumptions: that winners and losers can ever be discretely defined,[14] that "winning" implies superiority rather than historical accident,[15] that only winners write histories,[16] and that the winners' histories are the only histories that matter.

We also need to disrupt the equally pernicious and pervasive illusion that white, male voices represent the only real, legitimate, or neutral scholarship. As Perlow, Bethea, and Wheeler note, "Whereas the bodies of white male professors, their curricula (i.e., works by 'great white men') and pedagogies are normalized, naturalized, and neutralized, those of women and racially minoritized professors are marked as politicized representations of the Other" (2014, 243).[17] Bringing in the voices of women and scholars from historically marginalized groups will not only help us begin to correct the racism and sexism entrenched in our institutions and fields of study, it will also improve our teaching and awareness of current scholarship, necessitating as it does the continual reconsideration of the sources we assign.

In addition to diversifying the positionalities of the scholars we cite and assign, we can diversify our sources' media of distribution. If we ask our students to read public scholarship—for example, Sarah Bond's articles in *Forbes*, essays and reviews in Marginalia of the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, the independent *Ancient Jew Review*, or even Twitter threads by scholars such as Megan Goodwin, Wil Gafney, and Nyasha Junior, who routinely collate and amplify scholarship while adding to it in thought-provoking ways[18]—in addition to works available only in print or behind a paywall, we not only demonstrate to them that good scholarship comes in many forms and couched in a variety of institutional relationships, we also model for them how public discourse can be elevated by thoughtful, evidence-based research and sophisticated argumentation.

The aim of diversifying our sources, importantly, is not to offer token appeasements to students whose constitutive identities we assume we know. It is, rather, to reach beyond our received "canons" for illuminating sources that disrupt default assumptions of elite authority, exposing students to the real diversity of lived experience. When such sources are not available, we must name and foreground the reasons they are not.[19]

Content choices can help us address all of our classroom climate considerations. Our syllabi and reading lists establish the frame of the class, giving us control over much of the direction of the class while not appearing to infringe on our students' autonomy: after all, every class has a syllabus, and every semester we must make hard choices about what to include. This control does not

13 For class exercises on the New Testament canon formation with the use of non-canonical writings, see Byron (2005) and Cobb (2005). For creative teaching tools for the topic of canon formation, see McGrath (2016) and Dalton (2017).

14 For an excellent and clear discussion of this (as well as the assumption that "winning" implies superiority), see Brakke (2010, 7-18) as he problematizes the "horse-race" analogy of early Christian diversity.

15 The vagaries of manuscript survival, for example, are legendary. The dramatic discovery of the so-called "Nag Hammadi Library," which had been buried in a sealed jar in a cave in the fourth century only to be discovered in 1945 by an Egyptian farmer (see Goodacre [2013] and Denzey Lewis and Blount [2014]), is a story that most instructors of late antiquity include in our classes. The Derveni Papyrus and *Beowulf* are two more examples, though not late antique. The Derveni Papyrus failed to fully immolate in a funeral pyre and gifted us our oldest extant papyrus scroll (Most 1997, 117). The sole known copy of *Beowulf*, which had been catalogued incorrectly and forgotten by all before being first happily defenestrated during a fire in 1731, was then accidentally rediscovered by an Icelandic historian fifty years later (see Fulk, Bjork, and Niles 2008, xxv-xxvii).

16 See, for instance, the "hidden transcripts" through which non-dominant parties communicate and create community (Scott 1990).

17 See also Ahmed (2012), Gutierrez y Muhs et al. (2012), and Gibbons and Fruchtman (2020) in this issue. For the issue of "the politics of citation" in religious studies, see Parrish (2009).

18 Thanks to Sara Ronis for these Twitter suggestions.

19 These include, but are not limited to, historical accidents (like the manuscript survivals described in note 15 above), cultural devaluations of non-elite epistemologies (for example, defining literacy as being able to read and write in a non-vernacular language), and concerted programs of erasure (including the marginalization of "heterodox" views after Church councils). And then there are issues of reception, in which our contemporary prejudices prevent us from understanding the meaning of the text (see, for example, Thorley [1996] for a succinct presentation of the habitual modern misgendering of the female apostle Junia).

have to be absolute: encouraging students to suggest complementary content (or simply sharing with the class resources that, as often happens, individual students have brought up in class) can enhance students' sense of ownership of the class. Showcasing a diversity of voices both in premodern contexts and in scholarship can not only help students of varying backgrounds see themselves validated as active producers and curators of knowledge, but can also serve the intellectual interests of our field far better than pretending that, for instance, only the proto-orthodox had perspectives worth learning about or that only tweed-wearing old white men have the wherewithal to analyze late ancient material. Choosing topics that speak to contemporary hot-button issues can also help us be inclusive to politically marginalized students as we articulate the histories, ideological foundations, and, importantly, the noninevitability of contemporary injustices. For example, 2015 was an opportune year to teach the topics of marriage, gender, and sexuality in early Christianity, as the U.S. Supreme court heard arguments in Obergefell v. Hodges and subsequently made their historic decision to protect marriage equality as a civil right; similarly, a course on the use of the Bible in public discourse is a timely offering in election years. Such content choices can also help us navigate the tricky terrain of creating safe spaces for free expression. By scheduling politically relevant topics into our syllabi, we can offer our students opportunities to express their perspectives on difficult issues without blindsiding anyone—the listing of the day's topic can serve as a form of content warning, while we can all (students and teachers alike) come to class better prepared for a contentious or emotional dialogue.

B. "Just-in-Time Teaching" and the Flipped Classroom

Moving beyond content choices, there are ways of structuring courses to maximize effective student engagement with that content. Two related course design components stand out for their ability to satisfy all our classroom climate considerations: "Just-in-Time Teaching" (JiTT) and the flipped classroom.

JiTT involves requiring students to complete assessable assignments ("warm-ups") a few hours prior to arriving in class. The instructor then reviews these warm-ups to learn what their students are interested in, what misunderstandings need to be corrected, and what topics need to be drawn out. In practice, the instructor would have the class plan outlined (and, if applicable, have slides prepared), and would tweak their plan and activities based on student responses in the hours before class. Hence the name.[20]

The essence of JiTT is the idea that we can be more effective teachers if we know before the class period begins how our students have understood the materials for that day and what reflections or associations the materials may have prompted. We can then train our focus on areas of weakness and speak directly to our students' concerns, bringing in their voices and ideas. In JiTT, warm-ups can be as directive as focused (but evocative) reading questions or as free-form as emailing the instructor a question about the reading, so long as they achieve the aim of fostering student engagement.[21] But as Novak and Patterson note, the best warm-ups are those that prompt students to "come to class with informed responses that they are eager to defend" (2010, 7). Examples of these types of motivating exercises in a classroom focused on late ancient religion might include asking our students to take a side in a Council debate, for instance by asking them to argue against Nicea from Arius's position; asking students to imagine themselves as historical figures in hypothetical situations, for example by asking them what Anthony might have thought of Athanasius's biography of him; asking students to reflect on their own perspectives by "othering" them through ancient eyes, for instance asking them what Augustine might have thought of American exceptionalism (or perhaps a popular TV show). The warm-ups should invite creativity and ask students to synthesize information, linking what they are learning to what they think they already know and to things they encounter every day but had never previously thought to examine.

To best address our classroom climate considerations we recommend warm-ups that are fairly open-ended, and that allow students to see and possibly to react to one another's responses, thus helping to create rapport among peers. For example, students could submit brief forum posts (guided by prompts or not) prior to class time via a web-based learning management system.[22] It gives all

20 JiTT was developed in the mid-1990s by Gregor Novak, Evelyn Patterson, and Andrew Gavrin, working at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) and at the U.S. Air Force Academy, with support from the National Science Foundation (see Novak and Patterson 2010, 5).

21 As practitioners note, it is extremely important to adapt JiTT to your own teaching style (Novak 2011, 68). Furthermore, as a practical consideration for instructors with heavy teaching loads and limited time for grading, it is worth noting that since the point of these preliminary exercises is to shape the class plan, they can be graded quickly via a "check plus, check, no check" system without comments (because you will largely be addressing their concerns in class); because they represent a substantial amount of work and consideration on the students' part, they can be weighted heavily as part of the student's course grade (though it should be noted that even a weighting of 5-10 percent is enough to produce 80-90 percent participation [Novak and Patterson 2010, 16]).

22 These could be structured in various ways to suit the size of the class, the level of the class, and the instructor's time constraints. For example, for a fifteen-student, upper-level course that met three times a week, each student would be responsible for originating a thread in the forums the night before class, while all students would respond to their choice of thread prior to every class period, with enough "drops" built in to the grading to allow students to respond one or two times per week. By contrast, a forty-person, lower-level course would require students to originate threads only three times in the semester, with just-in-time forum responses required for approximately half of the class meetings. With clear grading criteria (such as focusing on quote utilization and clarity), and generously weighted, option-limited rubrics, grading these does not have to be onerous. To aid in my own time management, I (Fruchtman) do not give comments on response posts, only the originating posts. This, however, is a time-saving feature of JiTT, as noted above: rather than responding individually to students via comments on individual assignments, you incorporate their responses into your class presentation, obviating the need for several types of individual interventions.

students the opportunity to express themselves and shape the direction of the class while still allowing the instructor to steer focus, making it more inductive than traditional methods. And it also offers the instructor the buffer of a learning management system (LMS) through which to moderate and address problematic or offensive comments individually, thus helping to make the class feel safer for free expression. It also equalizes the voices in class, giving everyone the space to contribute and allowing students to weigh in relatively anonymously, thus contributing to inclusivity.[23] This is helpful especially for one particular group of marginalized students: introverts (Zimmerman 2018).[24] In practice, JiTT produces better attendance, better study habits, and better preparation for class, as well as strikingly more significant cognitive gains than traditionally taught classes (Novak 2011, 71, 70).

In conjunction with JiTT, the use of a flipped classroom offers even more opportunity for implementing inclusive and inductive pedagogy in an atmosphere of safe expression. At the heart of the flipped classroom is the notion that classroom time should be reserved for activities and discussions that presume familiarity with the material and that could not be accomplished by the student sitting alone in a room reading or watching videos. While some versions of the flipped classroom involve recorded lectures and activity-only class periods,[25] the aspect of the flipped classroom we want to recommend here is simply the idea that class time should not be used to replicate the material encountered in the students' assigned readings, but to engage students on the material, both with the instructor and with one another. JiTT is one excellent and evidence-supported way of ensuring that students do enough work at home to participate fully in class, but other strategies might work as well, provided that, as with JiTT, there is some mechanism for all students to express themselves and attempt to deal with the material in an inductive fashion. The flipped classroom allows more class time for instructors to attend to their students' perspectives (which facilitates both inclusion and a sense of safety for expression) and to allow for inductive explorations of the material.

C. Anti-racist Grading Practices

There is not space here for a full discussion of anti-racist grading practices, but suffice it to say that students are frequently assessed on skills which they bring to (rather than develop in) the class, skills which are "more representative of socioeconomic status [and experience with academic English] than knowledge" (Polish 2017, citing her mentor Carmen Kynard). Anonymized grading, contract grading, labor-based grading, and other alternatives—allowing, for instance (for those who have the time and instructional support), unlimited revisions on submitted work—are some options for structuring our courses in inclusive ways that allow our students full, free expression and make the most of student autonomy without sacrificing rigor.[26] These techniques help safeguard against unwitting instructor bias in grading and remove artificial, unjust, and inequitable barriers to students demonstrating that they have mastered core concepts.

2. Instructor Behavior

Structural strategies lay an excellent foundation for politically responsible pedagogy, but it is also crucial that we cultivate best practices in our own behavior as instructors. Certainly even the best-organized, most equitably structured class can be derailed by a careless instructor, and even the most uninspired course design can be mitigated by an instructor who models respectful dialogue and politically astute critical inquiry.

First and foremost, instructors must be informed on areas of social justice and aware of how privilege operates: even if politics never comes up explicitly or overtly, we need to be prepared in case it does, and we need to be able to sense when there are political undercurrents to what our students are saying (Gay 2002). We also need to be cognizant of our students' positionalities, as much as we are able. What trends are there among the students our institutions serve? Are they residential students or commuter students? First generation or legacy? Full-time or part-time? How many of them have jobs and/or kids? Where are they from, regionally, culturally,

One final note: It is always good to give your students the option of emailing you their posts/responses privately, to assuage their anxieties about sharing their views in public. Students seem to rarely choose this option, and, if they do, they only exercise it once or twice, on particularly fraught issues or when they feel uncertain about their reading of a text. But it is an important option to have on the table.

23 It can allow completely anonymous responses if the instructor chooses, since many learning management systems include features that hide identifiers.

24 We should also note that there are many factors that contribute to student silence in the classroom (see Panofsky and Bogad 2011); JiTT is helpful in almost all cases.

25 There has been a surge of online opportunities in the study of religion and late antiquity in recent years, which offer useful resources for a flipped classroom approach: for example, Society of Biblical Literature's Bible Odyssey project; edX courses such as Laura Nasrallah's (2020) "Early Christianity: The Letters of Paul," Gary Anderson and John Cavadini's (2020) "Jesus in Scripture and Tradition," and "Religious Literacy: Traditions and Scriptures" series organized by Diane Moore (2020); and Barry Scott Wimpfheimer's (2020) Coursera course "The Talmud: A Methodological Introduction."

26 As an example of labor-based grading, see Traci Gardner's infographic (http://tracigardner.com/labor/); for anti-racist assessment ecologies, see Inoue (2015). For overall strategies of fostering student success despite differences in student background and preparation without sacrificing rigor, see Gabriel (2018).

linguistically, and economically speaking? What are their interests and media consumption habits? What are their preferred names, nicknames, and pronouns?[27] This awareness is crucial not only to skillfully pitching our explanations and examples,[28] but to the interpersonal relationships that we build with students (which have been shown to improve student outcomes; students' sense of belonging affects both class performance and persistence to degree [Booker and Campbell-Whatley 2018, 14-15; Booker 2016; Strayhorn 2010]).[29] Including a survey on the first day of class or a mandatory early-in-the-semester office hour visit for credit can help instructors begin to get to know their students' backgrounds, personalities, intellectual landscapes, and para-academic concerns.

While building rapport and establishing interpersonally-based pedagogies may be a best practice in an ideal setting, it is important to acknowledge that these might be unattainable by some instructors or even undesirable for them, for the same reasons that we must attend to the positionality of our students: in other words, instructor positionality matters, too (see Gibbons and Fruchtman [2020]). There are myriad reasons an instructor might not feel like they themselves belong at an institution: contingent status, social marginalization or vulnerability, affiliation (or even perceived affiliation) with an underrepresented group, and so forth might all make establishing rapport difficult and even potentially dangerous for some instructors. Further, instructors in these positions are typically already overburdened: contingent faculty are often piecing together a living by teaching many courses at several different schools, and women and minoritized faculty are disproportionately sought-after by students seeking guidance or mentorship (as well as by administrators looking to diversify their committees). These potential pitfalls to interpersonally-based pedagogies are why structural strategies are so crucial.

A far more basic and broadly accessible strategy is to cultivate "confirming communication"—that is, enacting endorsement, recognition, and acknowledgement in interpersonal interaction (Sidelinger and Booth-Butterfield 2010, 169). This does not mean that we cannot press our students or challenge their views; rather the goal is to recognize the humanity of our students such that we can show "acceptance and validation of [their] feelings and thoughts, . . . awareness of [their] existence, and . . . attentiveness to what [a student] says, feels, or thinks" (Sidelinger and Booth-Butterfield 2010, 169). Specific techniques for cultivating this communication include expressing interest in student comments verbally or through nonverbal cues like making eye contact or nodding, avoiding "disconfirming behaviors" like verbal aggression or dismissiveness (2010, 170), and practicing Active Empathic Listening (AEL), in which the instructor fully acknowledges student comments while incorporating them into class, following a tripartite structure of sensing, processing/evaluating, and responding (Weger [2018]; see also the very helpful account of Nonviolent Communication in Agnew [2012, 215-217]). In essence, instructors should show by whatever means we are comfortable that we are taking our students seriously.[30]

The biggest thing we can do as instructors to meet the challenges of all of our classroom climate considerations is to make our students feel heard and listened to, so that they feel like valued members of a learning community. By regulating our behavior as instructors to be welcoming, affirming, and supportively challenging, we can move closer to politically responsible classroom climates.

3. Students as Co-Constructors of the Classroom

Finally, a pedagogically fruitful classroom climate depends on the students themselves—learning environments are co-constructed by students and instructors, and student-to-student connectedness has a larger impact on student communication and participation than either class size or instructor encouragement (Sidelinger and Booth-Butterfield 2010; Booker 2016). While we can do much, structurally speaking, to ensure that students engage with one another—designing the course to include student-to-student interaction through forums, group work, peer feedback, and time allocated for collaborative classroom exercises, for example—student-to-student interaction and sharing do not by themselves guarantee positive encounters.

Instructor behavior can help effect appropriately respectful critical classroom discourse, as students tend to model their interactions with one another on instructors' interactions with them (Ellis 2004; Johnson 2009; Weger 2018). But instructors can also be more overt

27 For practical guides for this topic in critical pedagogy, see Spade (2011).

28 It was with great sorrow, for example, that I (Fruchtman) discovered in 2018 that the climax of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* is no longer a usable demonstration of the concept of "the numinous."

29 See Frisby et al. (2014), Bourhis and Allen (1992), and Goodboy and Myers (2008) for the correlation of rapport/confirmation and student performance. As Booker and Campbell-Whatley note: "When students feel disrespected, unwelcomed, or fearful, learning is minimized. Conversely, when classroom dynamics are positive, inclusive, and engaging, learning can flourish optimally" (2018, 15).

30 Modeling this sort of respect for our students also has the added benefit of encouraging them to show respect for one another (Weger 2018).

in recruiting our students to help us cultivate an atmosphere of safe exploration and open inquiry. For example, we can choose to be transparent with our students, discussing with them the balances we hope to achieve in the classroom and asking for their help in establishing guidelines to realize them—an example of inductive pedagogy we can exercise on the first day of class.

Instructors can also suggest and implement explicit guidelines of our own that we explain to our students and ask them to honor, "introducing dialogue as an intentional mode of discourse for the class" (DeTemple and Sarrouf 2017, 289). Aaron Castelán Cargile suggests "adding without contradiction" as "a conversational frame that allows dialogue participants to express a multiplicity of cultural truths" (2010, 137).[31] As the name indicates, adding without contradiction asks students to contribute their own perspectives and their own stories without negating other students' expressions of their own experiences. It encourages students to see their in-class comments as adding threads to the fabric of knowledge woven by the class, rather than as replacing or competing against other comments.

Another option, detailed by Jill DeTemple and John Sarrouf in a profoundly helpful 2017 article in the Wabash Center's *Teaching Theology and Religion* (with implementation discussed further in a 2019 interview in the same journal), is Reflective Structured Dialogue (RSD). In RSD, the goal is to disrupt our habitual modes of listening and argumentation, incorporating time for reflection and space for everyone to share, as well as inviting feedback on the process itself. We begin with deep questions—those that require complex, value-reflective answers rather than simple, actionable fixes. After taking a set time to reflect on the questions, students respond through structured speaking, following a pre-determined speaking order and confining their comments to a designated duration (usually a minute). Everyone reflects, everyone speaks, everyone listens, and the "artificial" format disrupts patterns of debate that keep us talking past one another. As the authors note, this is not a format that can be employed every class period (for most classes), but one that can be tremendously useful at specific moments in a course, and whose effects and repercussions for classroom interactions can be felt even when RSD is not actively being employed (DeTemple and Sarrouf 2017, 290).

"Adding without contradiction" and RSD both serve to help us move toward our classroom climate goals, once again by inviting diverse perspectives and making sure our students feel heard—not just by their instructors but by their peers.

We have gathered these suggested best practices—for structuring our classes, adapting our instructional personae, and encouraging our students to take shared ownership of the classroom—not with any intention of being exhaustive or restrictive, but to showcase some possible and practicable ways that we can improve our pedagogy for a greater number of our students.

Conclusion

The suggested best practices presented here are evidence-based, practice-tested strategies for optimizing student learning, and may already be familiar to *The Wabash Center Journal on Teaching's* readers as techniques for encouraging active learning. But they are also strategies with great potential for making students of all political identities and positionalities feel included in the classroom, for encouraging all students to express and challenge themselves, and for training students to responsibly assume control of their intellectual pursuits and apply the skills and content they have learned in new contexts. They are strategies, in short, that will allow as many of our students as possible to understand as well as possible the insights and lessons afforded by the discipline of religious studies.

It is no coincidence that effective teaching means inclusive teaching, or that awareness of the pervasiveness of the political enhances our pedagogy. To be effective *paedagogoi*, leading our students to their studies, we need first to be able to locate them—to see them and recognize them for who they are. We need to know which paths are treacherous for them and how such narrow ways might be navigated. We need to consider what lessons and what sources will best capture their attention and encourage them to assimilate what they learn in our classrooms into their own critical worldviews. Finding our students, guiding them, and ensuring that they learn the essential lessons of our field—this would all be impossible without acknowledging the political pressures they (and we) are subject to, the forces that help shape all of us and our experiences in the classroom.

31 While the practice of "adding without contradiction" seems to be an effective pedagogical tool, the authors would like to note that Cargile's (2010) characterization of it as an "Eastern outlook" is problematic.

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THE WABASH CENTER
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CONVERSATION

All Choice is Political: A Conversation with Shawkat M. Toorawa

Shawkat M. Toorawa
Yale University

Maria E. Doerfler
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ABSTRACT

This interview with Shawkat M. Toorawa, Professor of Arabic Literature and Chair of the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at Yale University was recorded, transcribed, and edited for publication. The conversation addresses such topics as: the political positionality of expertise and often essentialized identity as a Muslim or person of color, the "balancing act" scholars who are Muslim face between, on the one hand, the study of Arabic literature as a literary tradition, and on the other, Islam as a lived or even theoretical religion, and problems of the canon, "classics," Arabic literature, and the category of "world literature."

KEYWORDS

Islam, Arabic literature, 9/11, bodies and pedagogy, Qur'an, violence, religion

Maria Doerfler

Thanks for making time to talk with me about politics and pedagogy, Shawkat. I've learned so much from you over the past couple of years, and look forward to learning more today. To start out, I want to go back to your very early pedagogical experience—the time that you spent teaching at Duke—because you recently wrote a very moving reflection on developing identity as a scholar and teacher (Toorawa 2012). I want to just very briefly read you a couple of sentences that make me laugh because I think they're an incredibly relatable experience for anybody who teaches premodernity:

> In 1990, in my second year teaching Arabic at Duke University, I received a call from a Durham newspaper asking me for my "expert" opinion on Operation Desert Storm. I curtly asked the reporter whether the newspaper had contacted the English department when the Falklands Crisis erupted.

This really resonated with me, in part because I think everybody in academia has at some point been on the receiving end of those kinds of questions. I wonder, however, if in the years since then you've had more such encounters with people wanting to make you into an expert on contemporary political developments, and if your response has changed.

Shawkat Toorawa

As you know from having read the piece (Toorawa 2012), it deals with the balancing act scholars who are Muslim face between, on the one hand, the study of Arabic literature as a literary tradition, and on the other, Islam as a lived or even theoretical religion. I've spent a lot of time separating these two categories, and

there are all kinds of ways in which I continue to separate them even as I also appear to be undermining that separation. That's a source of some frustration: you spend a lot of time trying to get people not to think of you [as a Muslim] in your pedagogical capacity, and then you yourself do things that encourage people to think of you that way. This makes it tricky.

For example, I've co-edited a book on the Hajj (Tagliacozzo and Toorawa 2016) and a primer on Islam (Allen and Toorawa 2011), two projects of which I'm very proud. My co-editors invited my involvement in part because of my "Islam credentials," but the latter is a function not of my being Muslim, but of my being well trained academically—I had the good fortune to be in a department where my teachers didn't believe that you should train only in your area of specialization, so I got medieval Islamic institutions, medieval European history, and Byzantine history, in addition to Arabic literature, because they are all connected. And yet, after finishing co-editing (with Eric Tagliacozzo) the book on the Hajj, I got a phone call from a reporter about an American Muslim woman's piece for the *New York Times* about her performing the Hajj, and I was asked to comment. I said, "I'm sorry I don't answer these questions. I can give you the names of people who are experts on contemporary Muslim religious experience, but that's not the nature of my work beyond what I covered in the book."

So, I do still try to separate the academic and the experiential—there tends to be an assumption that one's religious identity makes one an expert on topics related to that religion, which is really a form of essentializing discourse. Of course, there are always exceptions: 9/11, for example.

Pedagogy in the Context of International Crisis

Maria Doerfler: Can you expand on that a little?

Shawkat Toorawa: When 9/11 happened, I had recently returned to the United States. I had been peripatetic: moving from the U.S. to Egypt, back to Duke, and then to Mauritius. I was at Harvard in 1999-2000, working on a project about race and identity in Mauritius, and found myself at Cornell the following year. I remember my chair, Ross Brann, turning to me when we heard the news. He said "This sets our field back fifty years." It turns out he would be proven wrong—but he was wrong because we all responded the right way, for fear that it would set back the field fifty years.

Cornell was deeply affected by the events of 9/11: it is a state university of New York; the Cornell Medical Center in New York City was one of the trauma centers; twenty-one people with Cornell connections died we later learned; I could go on. So, we did a lot of things for a year, teaching. I was part of the university teach-ins, along with the president and Ted Lowi, Cornell's senior American historian, as the token Muslim faculty member.

Maria Doerfler: Can you talk a little bit about those teach-ins? What did those look like?

Shawkat Toorawa: They looked like white people and me.

Maria Doerfler: Go on.

Shawkat Toorawa: I got difficult questions from the students—many of them good, or at least important. One student said to me "What do you think was going on in the minds of hijackers?" and I said, "If I were a deranged hijacker, I might tell you what it's like. I have no idea what it's like to be a deranged hijacker." And then I said to the young woman: "You know, I don't have a problem with you asking that question, but we need to think about why you came up with it, and why you think I might be the one on this panel to answer it." She might have asked: "Has anyone ever been in a hijacking, or ever studied hijackers, and do any of you have any insight on why someone might want to do something like this?" Why assume that the one brown member of the

panel would know? I told her that I also have to explain this to my four- and six-year-old daughters, never mind to eighteen- and nineteen-year-olds. I remember our younger daughter coming home one day soon after and asking me just completely innocently and plaintively: "Is there such a thing as a bad Muslim?" And I had to explain to her that there are bad people of all kinds.

One of the locations for our teach-ins was the Ithaca high school. Some students had received death threats, so the high school had shut down for half a day, and the Department of Near Eastern Studies did a teach-in there. That was a really interesting experience, because it seemed to me there were proportionally many more students engaged in the conversations than there had been at Cornell. Many of the students, both Muslim and non-Muslim, came up to us after the teach-in to talk about different aspects. Many students came up to us and said: "Thank you for this [teach-in] because we're outraged, but we don't have the language or the background to respond to the kind of hate that we hear from our understandably ignorant friends. You've given us information and ways of responding." I thought the teach-ins were, in fact, much more successful at the high school than they had been at the university. I think part of the reason for that was a kind of naivety among high schoolers that was slowly eroding at college.

In the years since, I've tried to steer clear of anything involving having to explain Islam or Muslims to anyone other than in the classroom. I took a call from PBS once when there was a flare-up in Mauritius. A colleague who used to teach at the University of Connecticut had told them that I might have some insight. I took that call because the questions they posed had nothing to do with Islam.

Bodies, Books, and Politics

Maria Doerfler: Sometimes politics comes for us, as in the case of 9/11 and its aftermath, and I imagine a few other incidents in recent years that we might talk about here. One of the things that you've noted in the context of your conversation with the Cornell undergraduate who asked about the mind of the hijackers, is something that I think you and I have touched upon in previous conversations: that in some ways we bring politics into the classroom by virtue of our bodies. Many of the contributors to this special issue are not persons of color and are speaking out of their research, of course, but also out of their experience as young, mostly white men and women. Do you want to talk a little bit about your own experience as a brown person in the classroom?

Shawkat Toorawa: Let me say a few things which will, I suppose, connect in the end. One of the things that I realized early in my career is that when I'm in Europe I know I'm brown or bearded, and when I'm in the U.S. I often have no consciousness of it. When I'm walking around the streets of New York or New Haven, my brown body might signal to African Americans, for example. The other day a man addressed me as "brother" and, while I may be mistaken, I cannot imagine he would have done that if I were white. I was with my daughter and I said to her: "Brown people basically pass on both sides." Those moments are interesting but I do feel my brownness far less here [in the Northeast] than in Europe. When I walked into the classroom at Yale my first day I didn't do so, thinking: "Oh, people think of me as brown," which is not to say that I try to erase [my ethnic identity]. Much depends on context and perceptions: in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, for example, someone asked me if I was Jewish, based on my appearance.

Maria Doerfler: That must have been either a very open-minded or slightly confused person.

Shawkat Toorawa: The latter, I think. All that's to say: when I taught an undergraduate lecture course on the Qur'an at Cornell, I was acutely aware of the students' perception of my appearance. I was scheduled to teach that course for the first time in spring 2002, the semester after 9/11. These two events were unrelated; my department had made the decision to offer that course in April of the preceding year. Not surprisingly, the class attracted quite a high number of Muslims and quite a high number of brown people, many more than in other Near Eastern Studies classes.

As a result, there were new burdens on me because, as I soon discovered, a number of Muslim students expected me to toe some kind of a party line, even if they didn't know what that party line was: they felt that I needed to fly the flag or champion their faith. By contrast, a number of the non-Muslim students were suspicious of my veracity. That's when I was made very aware of my Muslim-ness, and my male Muslim-ness, as many of the topics that came up in the course had to do with gender, gender relations, or gender equality. Plus, of course, given that Islam is a pre-modern tradition, for the first 70 to 80 percent of the course everything we read was authored by men. That emphasizes the importance of foregrounding women's voices in secondary scholarship and being intentional in my choice of primary sources as soon as the option of including women authors arises.

In response, I developed a number of pedagogical strategies: I told the class that I would be treating the text, the Qur'an, the way I would treat *Hamlet*. I would do things like take a copy of the translated Qur'an and drop it to the ground. I explained to the class early on the need for respecting the fact that some people in the class might or might not believe that this is the Word of God, but that [at Cornell] we were in university, not a seminary. It's not that *this* book isn't sacred—it's that all books are sacred and that we should have the same reaction to dropping a book on the ground whether it's *Hamlet* or whether it's the Qur'an. That we should treat them all with reverence just as the university does. In short, I did something I've never had to do when teaching non-religious texts perceived to be of the same tradition as I am: I explained my subject position vis-à-vis the course material.

Earlier in my career, when teaching a class on Islamic civilizations at Duke, one of my students, maybe two or three weeks into the class, asked me: "Are you a Muslim?" My answer then was: "You tell me at the end of the class whether you think I'm Muslim."

Maria Doerfler

That's an interesting response. I teach plenty of courses that engage some degree of political positionality. But my students by and large are not interested in where I stand politically—and that may be because they are drawing certain inferences on the basis that I'm a white, reasonably highly educated immigrant woman. But for the most part they really want to know what my religion is.

Shawkat Toorawa

Right. I wouldn't have a problem with [sharing that information with students] any more than when they want to know where you went to high school or got your degree, except that it leads to a view about your reliability which isn't implicated in the same way by other kinds of information about a faculty member. I think the idea is that if you're teaching Buddhism and you're Buddhist — that's good. If you're teaching Judaism and you're a rabbi—that's good. But I suspect that if you're teaching Mormonism and you're a Mormon, that's bad, or if you're teaching Islam, or any religious movement that is less well understood—say, a Jehovah's Witness teaching new American religious movements—students are likely to be skeptical about you. To be brutally honest, I get it. If a Mullah is teaching Shiism, [under the rationale that more expertise is better], the student response, in theory, ought to be: "Wow, an absolute expert!" But that tends not to be the reaction, and this, too, of course, has to do with politics and their pervasive influence on the classroom. But it is a burden.

Maria Doerfler

Does that lie at the root of the suspicion you encountered from students when teaching the Qur'an?

Shawkat Toorawa

Yes, definitely. One of the things I say to students [in these kinds of courses] is: "Think about the Qur'an as an orange. Imagine you've never seen an orange before in your life. All you can really say about it after having held it is that it's orange and that it's spherical. If you've seen other oranges you realize that they are all that way. But if you really want to know about the orange you have to put a knife to it and cut it open, you have to squeeze it—and that's what we're going to do to the Qur'an." This is not doing violence to the orange—rather, it helps you to learn how better to interact with the orange.

One of my main objectives in the course is to have students see that Muslims have said valuable things about the Qur'an and also stupid things about the Qur'an and that non-Muslims have said valuable things

Shawkat Toorawa: about the Qur'an and stupid things about the Qur'an. It's not about whether the scholar is Muslim or non-Muslim. Then students get to decide whether they believe that, and obviously not all do.

Politics in Classroom and Curriculum

Maria Doerfler: So, you obviously are a pre-modernist. . .

Shawkat Toorawa: . . .and a modernist.

Maria Doerfler: You're jack-of-all-trades. When you teach pre-modern subjects do you find that you either purposefully seek to bring politics—broadly conceived, conversations about gender, race, or ethnic identity, et cetera—into the classroom, or do they find a way to nudge in despite your not inviting that?

Shawkat Toorawa: I actually actively do bring [these topics] in, knowing that they will come up anyway—and if by some miracle they don't come up, then I will be the one to raise them. You cannot as a responsible pedagogue avoid talking about certain things. I think for example, teaching the Qur'an you can't *not* include a conversation on jihad and violence, but there isn't a "violence week" [on my syllabus], although some of my colleagues do include one, of course. Rather, these are topics that need to be treated organically as part of the tradition throughout the course.

Maria Doerfler: That's interesting to me because courses on sacred texts from other traditions could certainly have their own equivalent "violence week," but to the very best of my knowledge they do not.

Shawkat Toorawa: Absolutely. Of course, for the longest time the "Judaism/Christianity/Islam" course at Cornell was taught by Ross Brann as "Holy War/Crusade/Jihad," as a way to subvert these kinds of assumptions. It attracted a lot of students, and he then expended the whole class undermining that paradigm, which is really quite a clever pedagogical move. But anyhow: I choose texts carefully. I'm a literature person, and with literature, everything inevitably comes up. It [would be like] watching *Game of Thrones* and avoiding talking about violence! In fact, I tend to pick stuff that has all the hot-button topics in it, but I aspire to complicate them for students.

For example, one of the texts I like to read with the students is the description of Egypt by 'Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi, written in the late 1100s—his depiction of Cairo, the vegetables, the pyramids, the plague, the famine, and stories that he hears about cannibalism. He's brilliant: chief physician of Baghdad, a polymath. He's multilingual, meets Maimonides—just an amazing guy, and his account provides opportunities for all kinds of conversations with students. But one of my students recently said to me: "I never knew people like him existed." Of course he knew they existed! He's heard of Leonardo da Vinci, Shakespeare, and Ben Johnson, but he had no notion that people like this could exist anywhere else in the world—in Islamic or African culture, say. So helping students realize and reflect on their own blindspots and misconceptions by introducing them to the texts and artifacts of groups that lie beyond their field of vision, personal experience, or expectations about different cultures: that's really my pedagogy.

It is actually encapsulated by something a colleague at Duke said in a class I created, "Introduction to Asian and African Languages and Literatures." All five of us who co-taught that class gave a two-minute subject position at the beginning of the semester: this is who I am and this what do I do. He said, "I'm here supposedly representing the literatures of South Asia, but all I really want you to get out of this class is to understand that human beings everywhere at all times are just as complicated as you." I do something like that in my classes now too: for example, when I talk about Medieval Baghdad, I say: "Look this is an ascendant civilization, it's like New York today, and the difference between them and us is one thing only: technology. They have the same aspirations, the same hang-ups, the same murderous tendencies, the same amorous tendencies; we have cellphones and they didn't."

It is in this context, too, that religion comes up in my classes. One of my "finest hours" was the first time I ever taught a sophomore seminar on Medieval Baghdad at Cornell. It was a writing class, and the major assignment I set for it was writing content for a website. At one point we were designing the architecture of the website and writing all the categories for it. The students came up with a number of categories—the Caliph, food, all kinds of stuff—and in the end I asked them: "Isn't there something missing?" They didn't know what I was talking about, and I pointed out that we did not yet have religion as a category. And the students all looked at each other like: "*That* should be a category?!" I thought I should just retire. If you don't think religion is a category when thinking about Medieval Baghdad that's fantastic, because, of course, religion is implicated in all the other categories without being a stand-alone monolith. But, of course, in the end I convinced them that it should get its own category anyway, in large part because of the many other religions in medieval Baghdad: Christianity, Judaism, and so on.

Maria Doerfler: I appreciate your investing in my field.

Shawkat Toorawa: That exchange convinced me that maybe I'm picking the right kinds of texts when I'm teaching. In the same way, I'm not ignoring politics, rather they are implicated in everything and come up to the extent that they can come up.

Maria Doerfler: So being intentional about text selection is a starting point.

Shawkat Toorawa: That is key. The readings you choose ought to provoke and invite important conversations. I am involved in helping develop a first-year seminar as part of a new humanities initiative at Yale. The class is going to be called "Six Pretty Good Books," and so I chose the *Shahnameh* as one of the books. It's an epic poem, a kind of foundational Iranian text translated splendidly from Persian by Dick Davis that makes *Game of Thrones* look like a walk in the park. The students devour it when it's assigned; the last time I taught it, I only assigned two hundred pages but they read nine hundred!

I said to the students: "Excluding Iranians, there are only this many [**holds up two fingers, an inch apart**] people in the world who have read this text, despite its being one of the most important things humanity has ever produced and being just a fantastic yarn. That alone should be a source of pride for you: you've now been exposed to something in college that you might not otherwise have encountered, whereas we're all reading *Arabian Nights*." Mind you, all Arabists teach the *Nights*—*I* teach it—and many of us use it as a pretext to introduce more important texts. But it's a real shame that the only way to get students into the classroom is to have them read a text that is not canonical within the Arabic tradition, often pooh-poohed, not found on university or college syllabi in the Arab world, and is probably the most Orientalized, sexualized text we have, aside from the Kama Sutra. It has become a Western text: in the U.S., it is frequently the only Arabic text taught as part of "global" curricula—and that, of course, is also a deeply political decision.

Maria Doerfler: You've brought us in our conversation towards your "non-pedagogical" roles, your service in administrative and department leadership, and your involvement in crafting courses on a super-departmental level. When you're mentoring faculty in your department, in conversation with junior faculty members, do you ever encounter anxieties or aspirations about addressing politics in the classroom?

Shawkat Toorawa: Yes, absolutely, but I think my take on this is that all faculty should teach what they want. I trust people to have good reasons for their pedagogical choices, even though I admittedly also think it's naive to not pay attention to another kind of politics we encounter in the academy, namely those surrounding the numbers of students in the classroom. As a faculty member, you need to show your colleagues that you are having an impact. That doesn't necessarily always lead to bad decisions: when I started teaching the *Arabian Nights* at Cornell, it was in order to get thirty-six people into the classroom rather than the nine who took my course on "Classics of the Arabic-Islamic World." If a junior colleague asked me which of the two courses to teach, I would urge them to teach "Classics of the Arabic-Islamic World" first and try and build it. But

that may be a naive take on all this, and ultimately it is their decision that counts. In other words, I don't think junior colleges should think of themselves as "junior." I didn't. I wasn't treated as junior and I didn't act as junior, I acted like I was in charge of my own courses and my own advising—within the boundaries of departmental service and departmental requirements. We're all in charge of our own pedagogy and we're all colleagues.

The thing I and many of the faculty I advise are struggling with is the identity politics bandwagon.

Maria Doerfler: Do you want to expand on that?

Shawkat Toorawa: Let me put it this way: I am more interested in showing people the differences between traditions than in constantly looking for the commonalities while proselytizing common humanity. It seems to me that if I'm going to teach you a text in Arabic at a university, [I should do so] because it's just normal. It is completely reasonable for me to do that. I don't have to explain why I'm teaching you an Arabic text. It's not because I need to rehabilitate Arab culture. Now if I thereby do that, great, but there's this strange category of "world literature"—and as someone else said before me, it's only "world literature" to English speakers. It's not "global humanities" either: my colleagues and I are allergic to this concept. I'm actually thinking of proposing "Humanities for the Twenty-first Century," but even that is not great. That's how we came up with [the course title] "Six Pretty Good Books"—we didn't want the course to get caught up in arguments about "global" something or other.

All that's not to say that there isn't a place for Western classics [taught at] a Western university with a Western education system. After all, even the most downtrodden and oppressed members of our society are legatees of that tradition, and need to know it, even if only in order to be able to reject it. As scholars of premodernity know, the very people who studied premodernity and could quote it chapter and verse have been historically the most effective rejecters of tradition. At the University of Mauritius, I taught French literature and was instructed to start with the eighteenth century. The rationale was, "We do modern stuff now." I asked, "You're prepared to award a B.A. with Honors in French to students who have never even encountered *La Chanson de Roland*?!"

All this hinges on the question of relevance, which is in its own right deeply political. Everything is relevant, of course, but you have to decide what you're going to pick [to teach]—and that is a political choice. We need to be aware that we're making political choices even in how faculty and institutions define "relevant": for example, as "relevant to the present moment," as opposed to "relevant for the present era."

Maria Doerfler: So, everything's relevant and everything is political.

Shawkat Toorawa: Yes, you knew that already: all choice is political and we are all forced to make choices.

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CONVERSATION

"Keepin' it Real"—When Scholarship Meets the Political: A Conversation with Shanell T. Smith

Shanell T. Smith
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ABSTRACT

In this conversation, Shanell T. Smith shares her strategies for incorporating politics into the classroom via an explicitly politicizing technique, "Keepin' it Real." She discusses the process of considering what to include and how to include it (and why we must!), and offers a window into how it might look in the classroom, using examples from a class on Mary that she teaches in an online seminary setting. Smith emphasizes the importance of modeling personalized scholarly inquiry for our students, including and especially the openness and vulnerability that make our scholarship matter both to us and to the world we share.

KEYWORDS

politics, #metoo, Mary, positionality, instructor modeling

Diane Shane Fruchtman

Thank you for joining us, Dr. Smith. Before we get started, I wanted to share with our readers how this interview came about. So, I first encountered your work through a poem you wrote following the Charleston murders in 2015, (Smith 2015). You captured so well the anguish of many of my Black students, colleagues, and friends, and also clearly conveyed how non-Black folks (whether Christian or not) could help, to begin with by listening and attempting to empathize. The poem asks all Christians to reconsider using Scripture as a means of healing without, first and foremost, offering care for the individual in crisis.

I began following you on Twitter shortly afterwards, and have been continually inspired by your blending of scholarship and politics, both in the public sphere and in the classroom—not to mention in your books and articles. As we were bringing together new voices for this issue you came immediately to mind, particularly because you had recently tweeted about an exciting New Testament and reception class you were teaching—"There's Something about Mary," (Smith 2015) I thought this would be an amazing opportunity to pick your brain about your teaching at the intersection of antiquity and the political.

I'm so grateful to you for sharing your work and your insights with us. I'd like to begin with one of the tweets that made me think we needed your voice for this issue. In this tweet about your Mary class (see Figure 1), you highlighted student engagements with ancient materials that were both deeply personal and deeply political. Is this a primary goal for you in your pedagogy?

Figure 1: #TheresSomethingAboutMary Tweet

Shanell T. Smith

The goal is making scholarship applicable to everyday life. Scholarship has to *do* something. If all we do is engage pre-modern primary and secondary texts, and wax poetically about methodologies and various forms of scholarly critique, with rote recapitulation, but do not teach our students *how* to use them in real life situations, then what good does it do? Scholarship becomes this abstract glob of information that evaporates as soon as the class ends. However, something *amazing* happens when we not only engage scholarship, but take it a step further and apply it to contemporary life. Employing scholarship in the context of real life—for example, engaging the political—not only helps students move beyond the mere retention and regurgitation of concepts, but it also compels them to be more ethically responsible, and helps build community among the students.

Diane Shane Fruchtman

So, to take a step back, can you tell us a bit more about the class and the context in which you are teaching it?

Shanell T. Smith

I teach at Hartford Seminary in Hartford, CT—an intentionally multi-faith seminary where my students are, first and foremost, awesome! They are Christians, Jews, and Muslims, and they vary in terms of their future (and sometimes present) professional placements. These may include careers in ministry, education, non-profits, politics, et cetera. I have students at all levels, and no familiarity with the tradition or traditions is required for them to take this class.

I teach it as an online class, but much of it would work in in-person courses as well. It's an introductory course that's meant to help students acquire foundational knowledge of a tradition, and to enhance their ability to engage in constructive dialogues with diverse groups.

The class is called "There's Something about Mary," and it's an opportunity for students to learn about these biblical women in their ancient contexts and consider how, why, and for whom their New Testament accounts were written, using a variety of critical approaches. But it also asks students to think about the political, theological, and ethical implications of these stories for today, and to practice wading into dialogues about these texts respectfully, with theological and ethical sensitivity, especially across faiths.

Diane Shane Fruchtman

You can really see this dual focus, on the ancient and the "now," even in your course description, which is really engaging (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: "There's Something About Mary" Course Description

Course Description:

Yes, there certainly is something about Mary! But which one? The Virgin Mary? Mary Magdalene? Mary of Bethany? Who are they? How are they presented in New Testament texts and other early Christian writings? What was their relationship with Jesus? How are these Marys depicted in art, music, film, and other forms of contemporary culture? What is her legacy? That is, how have these Marys been interpreted, and what are the implications thereof? How do these women influence issues concerning the construction of gender and sexuality, surrogacy, rape culture, martyrdom, motherhood, women's roles in both secular and sacred spaces, unjust social systems, etc.? But it's never just Mary, is it? What is that something about you that you bring to the discussion? Do you have any biases or assumptions? Would one of these Marys give you the side-eye for judging them when you. . . ? We will engage these questions and more employing critical methodologies such as historical, literary, rhetorical, and postcolonial criticisms, and gender studies including feminist theory, womanist biblical hermeneutics, and masculinity studies. There is something extraordinary about Mary. And we will love her!

Diane Shane Fruchtman: Looking at the course description, I notice a few things. First, it's unapologetically political, and secondly, it's, simultaneously, unapologetically personal. You start with presentations of various Marys in the New Testament, but quickly move to how those presentations are received and then reinterpreted in the present, and in controversial contexts to which your students are not just invited, but mandated to speak and *feel*.

Shanell T. Smith: "Mandated" is such a strong word, and honestly, it unsettles me. The reason being that I am also aware of, and sensitive to the fact that I have some students for whom these topics may be triggering. My assignments come with a caveat to "proceed with caution" or that they may be "triggering," and request that students for whom engaging such "real life" topics is traumatic or retraumatizing to contact me, and we created an assignment just for them in which they can still learn the objectives for that day's work.

Diane Shane Fruchtman: You do a lot of work to help your students feel comfortable engaging in the political, and you've developed a process for it—"Keepin' it Real." Can you tell us about that?

Shanell T. Smith: I use this tactic throughout the entire semester, in each exercise. The first step is to determine the "so what": Reflect on the primary and secondary texts assigned for the week, consider their main arguments, and decide what you want your students to take away from the readings. Why are these points important for them to know?

I include in each module a brief lecture on the text that includes a broad scope of the historical background and traditional and other (contextual) interpretations (womanist, feminist, postcolonial, queer, and so forth). When determining which interpretation I want to highlight—which never means it's the *right* one—I try to think how the text at hand may justify, contribute to, or emphasize a particular (and often contentious) contemporary issue.

Diane Shane Fruchtman: So you start with the issue, and the contemporary connection. How do you stay aware of what your students are following and preoccupied by in the "real" world?

Shanell T. Smith: I teach adults, many of whom are full-time or second-career students. What I follow is what is pressing in social media, what I hear in the hallways, in the news.

I have a very creative, out-of-the-box, I-won't-shy-away-from-it pedagogical style. I am a firm believer that we must talk about these texts and how they affect us today—in our contemporary circumstances.

Diane Shane Fruchtman: And the next step in your process is how you connect our "so what" to your students' lives here and now (and in the future, hopefully).

Shanell T. Smith: Yes. The second step to the process is "Keep it real." You consider, and reflect on, contemporary issues—social, political, cultural—to which the readings and concepts may apply, and you "Keep it real." You make scholarship relevant by putting your students in conversation with issues they should be aware of—systemic oppressions such as the "Cradle to Prison Pipeline™," hot topic issues such as a woman's right to abortion, being inclusive of the LGBTQI+ communities, and so forth. You need to be explicit about the theoretical and political considerations that go into the tasks you expect them to perform. There are various ways to engage scholarship with the political: by engaging social media, videos such as children's cartoons, music videos, via the creation of scenarios, and so forth.

This is perhaps the most difficult part of the teaching tactic because it requires professors to "get out of their own way." It necessitates them moving beyond a sole focus on scholarship, and being vulnerable and taking risks in terms of assignment creation.

Diane Shane Fruchtman: Can you say more about how we can "get out of our own way"?

Shanell T. Smith: Be willing to take risks. Be willing to be vulnerable in the classroom. Be willing to ignore or resist the unspoken, but oft-assumed rule that scholarship—*serious* scholarship—can't be fun and engaging. Embrace your inner child and let your creativity flow!

Diane Shane Fruchtman: I hate to bring this back to brass tacks, but it does sound like this takes a lot of effort and time on the part of the instructor.

Shanell T. Smith: It depends. The time required depends on two factors: the length and requirements of the assignment and the emotional energy that it sometimes necessitates.

But it's worth it: Something beautiful happens when students are required to think beyond scholarly concepts, and are invited to apply it to contemporary life. They are intellectually stretched, and become ethically responsible.

Diane Shane Fruchtman: I can really see that in some of the assignments you shared with me, both the intellectual stretching and the cultivation of ethical responsibility. The choice of topic, even, is sobering and necessary: you do a whole week on "The Virgin Mary and Rape Culture."

In the first assignment you shared with me (see Figure 3), which is from this week of the course, you do a few things that seem really exemplary.

Figure 3: Mary and #MeToo Images Assignment

Task 1: Mary and #MeToo Images

This is going to be very interesting. In fact, I cannot wait to see what you will do here!

Post an image that represents *to you* an engagement with "Mary and the #MeToo Movement." I have intentionally left this topic very broad. In five sentences or less, interpret the image. (Why did you choose it? How does the Virgin Mary relate to the image? How does the #MeToo Movement fit in? Give us your thoughts.) Don't forget to provide us with the source.

I'll start. The image below is called "Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary" (straymonds.org). What stands out to me is the way Mary is pointing to herself (indicative of self-identification #MeToo). Her face appears to be arrested between a sad face and an almost-smile. Someone is telling her, "It's okay. You'll be okay." But she can't get there. She doesn't believe it. So she does her best in front of the "camera." She is hurting but is trying to "be strong" in front of others. "Fake it until you make it," you know? Perhaps she knows no one would believe her.

Meanwhile her other hand *appears* to be in the act of volunteering, but *not quite*. If I view her as saying "yes" to doing a good deed for God, she seems to have some concerns. She knows God. . . but she. . . (*This is quite triggering for me, but there you go.*)

Diane Shane Fruchtman: First, you ask your students to bring in their own images. We talk elsewhere in this issue about ways to diversify the sources we use in class, and this seems like a perfect example of how to do that organically. But secondly, and I think most importantly, you model your own answer, and include your own vulnerabilities there. Do you get any pushback from students about sharing in this way? Do you think the fact that they're seminarians makes them more inclined to "Keep it Real" with you?

Shanell T. Smith: I do not think any of this affects their receptiveness to "Keepin it Real." To be transparent, they do the assignments because it is part of their assessment (laughs). But in all seriousness, I do not ask my students to do an assignment that I have not exemplified and illustrated myself. I cannot ask my students to be vulnerable if I am unwilling to be so. Their responses to real-life, often "hot topic" scenarios emerge from their own experiences and upbringings—all of their "stuff"—and not simply or only from their faith tradition.

Diane Shane Fruchtman: Do you think the atmosphere of the class and their sharing is affected by the "intentionally multi-faith" mission of Hartford Seminary?

Shanell T. Smith: It doesn't shape it for me. I would run this course the same way if I were at a Christian-based institution. One of the main things I teach my students is that we are human beings. We each come with our own experiences, traumas, and life learnings that are not based in our faith traditions. The latter does not make up the entirety of who we are.

Diane Shane Fruchtman: So, speaking of trauma . . . The second exercise you shared with me directly confronts trauma, in a way that it would be really hard for a student to deflect from, I think. This is, essentially, a role-playing scenario where you set the stage quite vividly and then ask your students to take over just at the moment the fictionalized dialogue partner says something explosive (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: "There's Something About Mary" Assignment

Task 2: Scenario: "Was Jesus a Rape Baby?"

It's a cold day in November, so you relish the heat that encompasses you as you enter the mall. It's not even Thanksgiving yet, and folk are in there in droves shopping like there will be nothing left to purchase after today. Passing by a place that specializes in making cinnamon buns (hehe), you stop when you see an old friend from college, and the following conversation ensues:

You: Hey _____! How are you? Are you getting ready for the holidays? I see you've already gone shopping. (You look at the 5 bags from various stores sitting between her/his/their legs as she/he/they waits in the long line.)

Friend: Hey (uncomfortable pause) you!

You: It's ____. I haven't seen you in a long time! How long has it been?

Friend: (thinking) I think the last time we saw each other was at the "Going Wild. . ."

In unison: ". . .Party in 1985!"

You: OMG! (You lower your head in embarrassment.)

Friend: Hey. You gonna be here for a while? You wanna get some coffee?

You: Sure! I'll meet you by Cafe-La-Creme and find us some seats.

(Five minutes later your friend joins you at the table.)

You: So are you getting ready for Christmas? Do you celebrate it? It's a crazy time of year, right? All the excitement and the magical feeling. . .

Friend: Well, yes and no. I am a Christian, but I only celebrate the gift-giving aspect of Christmas. (hmm?) I refuse to celebrate any theological aspect of it because the way Jesus came about was downright disrespectful and included a sexual assault on Mary. I am a survivor of sexual abuse. I got three daughters and a son of sexual maturity (whatever that means), and I cannot condone that kind of violence—especially at the hands of God! I love him, but Jesus was a rape baby. . .

You respond by saying. . .

**** Students will:

State whether they agree or disagree with their friend, and respond accordingly.

Include each secondary article paraphrasing the main ideas, what shocked you, intrigued you, angered you, etc.

From Mbuwayesango's (2016) article, include how sexuality is used as a strategy in biblical texts. Although her article references texts from the Hebrew Bible, how might her work be applicable to the discussion of Mary's conception of Jesus in the New Testament texts? Was she a rape victim?

Include the following topics/terms: consent, historical info about girls/women ages and betrothal in the first century, power dynamics, "God as predator" (Woods 2017), "good girl" (Everhart 2016), purity, Mary's fear. . .

Also include your own interpretation of the New Testament texts. STAY IN CHARACTER.

Don't forget to respond to two of your colleagues' posts.

Shanell T. Smith

We should never assume that we or our students will be able to remain objective when engaging the political. It's important to advise students that their emotions, opinions, and life experiences will be touched upon, and affected, in some way. This is a task in vulnerability. For this reason, as I said before, I do not expect anything from my students that I am unwilling to do.

For example, in the same week on "Mary and the #MeToo Movement," this was the first thing my students read (Figure 5):

Figure 5: Caution

A Word of Caution: This week's topic, although an important one, will be triggering for some of you. It was for me. Some of the articles we will read for this week are very provocative, and will incite extreme emotion. Take care of yourself, and do the best that you can.

Shanell T. Smith

A safe classroom does *not* exist, especially when you engage the political. And that is okay. A professor's task is to create a space where open and honest dialogue can occur, and to be able to turn "hot moments" in the classroom into teaching opportunities.

Diane Shane Fruchtman: Do you find that's even more challenging, though, when you're asking your students to "get in character" as you do here?

Shanell T. Smith: I ask them to respond to each scenario "in character" because in the "real world" this is how those conversations and topics are engaged. This is how "hot topics" are often experienced, witnessed, or talked about. This is prep work!

But as I said before, the professor will first need to illustrate or answer the scenario first. And there may be some students who need more time to process their responses.

I will add that the scenarios—while based on real life issues—are also based on the primary and secondary texts we read for the week. So they are also expected to express the main ideas of the readings as well as their critique of it (pros and cons) while being in character.

Whether or not a student is expressing their *true* belief on a certain issue is truly uncertain . . . however, the dialogue that follows one's post tells all.

And professors also have to be flexible about the assignments when students are triggered. As long as the student understands the main idea of the article and can engage the primary text, I do not force them to get in character. They are told to reach out to me offline with this request. I also provide a warning/caution *before* we engage on certain topics such as sexual abuse.

Diane Shane Fruchtman: It seems like this is a really good environment for them to exercise and do this "prep work"—almost like rehearsing—for things they might encounter outside of class.

Shanell T. Smith: Our students matter. What better way to make scholarship matter than by engaging the political that affects their daily lives.

Diane Shane Fruchtman: Thanks so much for talking with me, and sharing your assignments for this course. I thought I might give you the last word—is there anything more you want *The Wabash Center Journal on Teaching* readers to know?

Shanell T. Smith: This is how scholarship meets the "political." This tactic supports student learning by illuminating scholarly concepts by applying them to everyday life situations. Students retain so much more this way, and it is great practice for students who will have similar conversations in the real world. This particular strategy is transferable to any subject matter and academic context. You already have the scholarship—determine what you want them to know. Life is constantly "happening" all around us providing great fodder for engagement. All you need to do is put the two in conversation, and be creative in terms of assignment construction. Have fun. Never ask your students to do what you aren't willing to do *first*. Take a risk. Be vulnerable, and "Keep it real."

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DESIGN & ANALYSIS

Engaging Politics in the New Testament Classroom: Excavating a Syllabus

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ABSTRACT

Teaching the historical study of the New Testament and early Christianity at the University of Tennessee requires creativity, confidence, and compassion. The forty-person, upper-level "Introduction to the New Testament" course that I teach every year is my most challenging and most pedagogically interesting class, and also the most rewarding. My goal in this class is to make space for a variety of responses to the material while teaching the context and history of the New Testament texts as well as how to think critically about the politics of their interpretation. The challenge is to take the diverse passions that my students bring to the class and help them all to engage together critically with both the historical study of early Christianity and the politics of its interpretation that are so visible in the world around them.

KEYWORDS

New Testament, pedagogy, "Bible Belt," critical thinking, Tennessee, politics

Teaching the historical study of the New Testament and early Christianity at the University of Tennessee is not for the faint-hearted—it requires creativity, confidence, and compassion. The forty-person, upper-level "Introduction to the New Testament" course that I teach every year is my most challenging and most pedagogically interesting class, and also the most rewarding. While some students take the material in stride, for many the experience is life-changing—for some because it upends what they believed were certainties and challenges them to ask new questions, and for others because it offers alternatives to teachings that felt restrictive or otherwise harmful. My goal is to make space for all of these experiences while teaching the students the context and history of the New Testament texts as well as how to think critically about the politics of their interpretation.[1] Some of my colleagues elsewhere in the country say it can be a challenge to get their students interested in early Christianity. Fortunately for me, most of my students arrive in class already interested, many because they are an active member of a church they love, or because they have recently left a church in anger, disgust, or frustration but still find themselves surrounded by conservative Protestant images and rhetoric. The challenge in my classroom is how to take these diverse passions that so many of my students bring to class and help them all to engage together critically with both the historical study of early Christianity and the politics of its interpretation that is so visible in the world around them.

I teach at the public land-grant and flagship campus of the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, located in Appalachia near the beautiful Smoky Mountains. I offer my New Testament class in my home department of religious studies and cross-list it with Judaic studies, history, and Middle East studies; students who take the course are often majors or minors in one of

1 On this use of the term "politics," see Upson-Saia and Doerfler (2020).

these programs, or take the class as an elective. Each class, however, includes first-year students and seniors, as well as those with some relevant historical or biblical knowledge and those with very little. Regardless of their previous coursework, the majority of the students who come to my New Testament class are already deeply engaged with the Christian Bible, whether from a passionate commitment to a local church community or from an equally passionate disillusionment with the same. East Tennessee is a place where conservative Protestant expectations permeate social and political norms, and most students grow up familiar with certain strains of exegetical traditions whether or not they agree with them. In this context, many students arrive in the beginning of the semester with a host of pressing questions about how biblical texts impact their lives and the lives of their family and friends.

Given this audience, I do a lot of work in the first days of class to set the tone for the semester regarding our historical and critical approach to the New Testament and how to recognize different perspectives and treat them respectfully. To begin, before students arrive in class the first day I ask them to read the first five pages of Miguel De La Torre's book, *Reading the Bible from the Margins* (2002), which addresses how a person's race, class, and gender affect their interpretation of scripture. Its first words, "All football players are damned!" catch my students' attention at our big state Southeastern Conference football campus, and open up conversations about the perspectives of biblical interpreters and the embodied contexts of differing truth claims. After the introductions, attendance, and discussion of the syllabus in the first class, I ask how many students have heard someone use the phrase "the Bible says," and invariably all of them smile ruefully and raise their hands. Handing around a cup of Bible passages on slips of paper, I ask students to take a passage and think about what behaviors the one they chose could be used to justify or prohibit.

Passages in hand, I name a topic—for example, women's ordination, war, slavery—and ask students to read aloud the biblical passage on their slip of paper if they think it relates to the topic. As students volunteer to read their passages one by one, it doesn't take long before there are uncomfortable looks and nervous shifting in seats as they start to hear passages that clearly could be used to support diverse positions with respect to these complex topics. On the topic of war, I always get particularly surprised looks when one student reads, "They shall beat their *swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks*; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isaiah 2:4 [NRSV]), and another offers, "Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare war, stir up the warriors. Let all the soldiers draw near; let them come up. Beat your *plowshares into swords*, and your *pruning hooks into spears*" (Joel 3:9-10 [NRSV]). It is important to have the students themselves contribute the biblical passages to the discussion because it makes them participants in the apparent contradictions. It is much more pedagogically effective to have them tell me (rather than vice versa) that they find the verses contradictory, and then to discuss together the possible causes and consequences of that observation. This is a disorienting exercise for many students, making some anxious and others excited, but making all of them interested in learning more.

I take advantage of their dawning recognition that it is easy to pluck out verses from the Bible to defend opposing perspectives by initiating a discussion that engages with the first pages of De La Torre's (2002) book, and before they know it, they are deeply involved in conversations about perspective, identity construction, normativity, and the politics of biblical interpretation. The exercise demonstrates to them that to make a claim about what "the Bible says," a reader first needs to choose a passage they believe is relevant to the discussion topic, and then choose an interpretation of that passage that supports their claim. We consider along with De La Torre (2002) some of the differences (such as age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, class, education, ability, family, and religious traditions) that could affect a reader's choices, and why different interpretations could seem self-evident to people in different circumstances. Having just read different verses, I can ask them, for example, what might lead one person to address the question of women's ordination by referring to 1 Timothy 2 versus Galatians 3:28 or Romans 16:1, and vice versa. Because De La Torre's (2002) interpretation of Leviticus 11:8 (that one should not touch a pig's carcass) as a condemnation of football players (because the game's ball is nicknamed a "pigskin") seems reasoned and yet so counterintuitive to my students, it is a useful way to start a conversation about how a person's reading of scripture is shaped by their own particular interests and circumstances. Throughout the semester I remind students that there are people with different backgrounds and perspectives in the class. The context of East Tennessee has already prepared many of my students to be sensitive to strong religious viewpoints, and my reminder is usually sufficient to produce respectful conversations. I also remind them repeatedly that the purpose of the class is not to evaluate whether different interpretations are right or wrong, or good or bad, but to understand the assumptions and logic that motivate them and the consequences of those views in our current context.

The second day of class I build on the first day with two additional exercises, both designed to make those who think they already know all there is to know about the New Testament and those who arrive nervous that they don't know enough feel like they have something to contribute and something to learn in the class. I begin this second meeting by sharing my hope

that this course will "make the unfamiliar more familiar, and make the familiar more unfamiliar." I read a passage where Bart Ehrman describes the first-century Greek pagan philosopher Apollonius of Tyana in ways that echo Gospel descriptions of Jesus (2016, 44-46). I ask the students to identify the person being described, and then to brainstorm all the ways they "know" it's about Jesus, such as his special birth, the miraculous healings, that he is called the Son of God, and that he appeared to his followers after his death. This helps many students, especially those who are more conservatively Christian, contribute to the discussion and feel comfortable in the class. The big "reveal," that this passage describes a pagan philosopher, results in many surprised faces. We talk through what students are feeling (confused, worried), which helps them to identify and process some of the assumptions they brought to the class, such as that Jesus was the only person who had these things attributed to him, and to see the room they have for learning. It is important to acknowledge that the Ehrman passage is purposely written to cause this mistaken identity, and to respectfully help the students see the learning value in being surprised in this way—that is, the value in recognizing their unfamiliarity with the New Testament world.

Finally, I do one more exercise on the second day to try to jolt loose even more of their entrenched assumptions and open space for new ways of thinking about the material, this time involving the stories of Jesus' birth. I ask students to brainstorm what they know about Jesus' birth, and I write their answers on the board. Students who know the stories well often seem relieved to be on more familiar footing and glad to be able to contribute to the discussion. Christmas pageants form the basis for most of their knowledge, and it is easy to develop a list of the wise men and the shepherds, Mary and Joseph, the virgin birth, the angels, the manger, and other familiar parts of the story. I interject a few questions as we brainstorm—"Okay, born in Bethlehem. And why were they in Bethlehem? Oh, because there was a census. Wait, who visited his birth? Magi. But how did they find him? King Herod. Ok, but wait—who called the census? And did the magi visit before the shepherds or after? And when did they flee to Egypt?" Before long, students sense that they can't quite remember enough details to be able to answer my questions, so I ask them where we would go to read the story. We start by looking at Mark's Gospel, then we move to John's. They are relieved when we get to Matthew and Luke and start to find the passages they remember. By that point, however, they are paying closer attention to detail and we talk about the significance of each Gospel telling the story in its own way, and what is gained and what is lost when we think of the life of Jesus as a single story versus as four different stories, each with their own emphasis and themes. A quick thematic survey that connects Luke's "Blessed are you who are poor" and "Blessed are you who hunger now" (Luke 6:20-21) with the birth-story's shepherds (Luke 2:8-20), and Matthew's "Blessed are the poor in spirit" and "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness" (Matthew 5:3, 6) with the birth-story's magi bearing gold, frankincense, and myrrh (Matthew 2:11) is enough to persuade even the most knowledgeable student of the Bible that they can learn interesting new things in the class and that they need to pay attention to which book is telling which story and with what details in order to keep up with the class discussions. Whether because it seems new or because it covers familiar texts, most students seem excited in these first days to continue the conversations.

I carry the threads of critical awareness, detailed analysis, and diverse perspectives through the semester by means of a variety of in-class conversations, readings, and two- to three-page "Analysis Topic" essays that complement the themes of the New Testament books we are discussing, such as social class and poverty with Luke and Acts, race and slavery with Philemon, and gender and sexuality with Romans, Galatians, and 1 Corinthians. The Analysis Topics assignments are particularly helpful in this regard, since they provide the occasional reflection on the contemporary relevance of the texts in the weeks when the class discussion is otherwise largely historical. These sporadic assignments pose thought-questions in the syllabus about the day's readings, and even though each student only writes an essay on half the prompts (to allow for flexibility in people's schedules and to allow for more frequent small-group discussions), everyone spends time discussing the questions in small groups on those days. The syllabus might ask, for example, "What do these writings say about Jews and Judaism? Is Christianity inherently anti-Jewish?" or "What do the Pastoral Epistles tell us about authority in the early church, particularly in relation to the role of women? How do they relate on this topic to the epistles that scholars agree are by Paul?" After students pick a small group for the first topic and rearrange their groups as they choose for the second topic, they stay in the new groups for the rest of the semester, which allows them some initial flexibility in choosing their group and then some consistency in order to build trust. The small-group discussions give them a safer space to try out new ideas and hear the ideas of their peers before the full class discussion where they can hear some of the ideas from other groups and share their perspectives. By the end of the semester, the students are well practiced in reading early Christian texts in their first- and second-century historical context as well as thinking about the impact that the canonical texts continue to have today due to the very fact of their canonization.

When I teach this course, I want my students to learn the history of the New Testament texts' early context, but I also want to help them to consider the contemporary politics of their interpretation. At the end of the semester, I assign a "New Testament Today" project in order to allow the students to return to the questions that initially brought them to the class but with the added analytical and methodological skills they have learned through the course of the semester. I use this assignment to

point out the contemporary relevance of the early history we are studying, and also to give them practice applying the critical analysis skills they have learned during the semester to a particular case study that interests them. The fact that these topics are usually on the front lines of politicized national disagreements makes the projects challenging as well as engaging. In my experience, this combination of history and contemporary culture provides not only information, but perspective that helps them see the idiosyncrasies of their own assumptions. One of my favorite student comments has been that the class "made me start evaluating everything to make sure I knew why I thought how I did."

For this last assignment, each student writes a short paper on competing contemporary interpretations of the New Testament. The prompt reads,

> Each student will write a short paper (2-3 pages, plus bibliography) on the use of the New Testament in our world today. Topics must be approved by the instructor and should be a balanced study (neither criticizing nor evangelizing) of two different perspectives on the same topic, such as a church that ordains women and a church that doesn't and the biblical justification used by each side. Focus on the method of how each side uses scripture to defend their position; consider using our Miguel de la Torre reading.

Students can work alone or in small groups to research an example of the Bible (with an emphasis on the New Testament) being used today to legitimate at least two different sides of an issue, but they are each responsible for writing their own individual paper. I ask them to engage with the pages we read at the beginning of the semester from Miguel De La Torre's *Reading the Bible from the Margins* (2002, 1-5), with an eye toward the methodological questions of perspective, embodied reading, cultural norms, and power dynamics. After a semester of practicing such conversations in the Analysis Topics, students generally throw themselves into this project with an enthusiasm and effort far exceeding what you would expect for the relatively small percentage of their grade the assignment represents. They frequently choose to study differences on questions of women's ordination, responses to LGBTQ+ people, teachings about Jews and Judaism, and stances regarding physical violence, including the death penalty. In the last case, for example, students often contrast Christians who defend their stand against capital punishment by using passages such as Jesus turning the other cheek (for example Matthew 5:39) or releasing the woman caught in adultery (John 8) with other Christians who defend the death penalty by prioritizing passages like Genesis 9:6 or Paul's call for his audience to obey the government (such as Romans 13:1-7). They have, however, chosen a wide variety of topics including whether music or dancing is acceptable, responses to wealth and poverty, the relation of the church to the state, and teachings about drinking alcohol, childrearing, and marriage.

The day the projects are due, they spend the whole class period paired up and sharing their findings with a series of partners in ever-diminishing periods of time until everyone is laughing from the speed-dating-like quality of the shrinking discussion times. This process gives the students practice summarizing their projects and identifying the key points in increasingly succinct ways. We end that day with a class conversation about what they learned from their projects and from their peers, and it has never yet failed to be my favorite day of the semester, to hear them speak in such articulate, thoughtful, and sophisticated ways about the questions that drew many of them to the class to begin with—namely, the complex, pervasive, and powerfully influential politics of biblical interpretation that shapes so many of our lives. In a regional context where many grow up hearing that the Bible has one clear answer to any given question, it is often challenging but exciting for students not only to see the scriptural support for opposing views, but to think methodologically about how each side makes its case, and the significance of seeing that opposing sides both cite Christian scripture. In a region where the dominant Protestant culture can feel monolithic, our class discussions highlight the diversity of Christian teachings from antiquity until today.

There is no doubt that the "New Testament Today" exercise would look different in different pedagogical contexts. In East Tennessee I have the advantages and disadvantages of teaching students who predominately already see a contemporary relevance in the New Testament texts, and who tend to be very aware of ways in which these texts are deployed politically and socially. Class size would also affect the shape of this exercise. Over the years I have tried different incarnations of it. Sometimes it requires a Powerpoint presentation that is posted to the class website the day before so that students can look at each others' projects. Sometimes it involves each student presenting to their small group, or small groups that worked together presenting to the class. One important part of keeping the exercise on track has been to stress that these projects are not meant to defend one point of view, but to show how two different uses of scripture can lead to different perspectives on the same topic. For this reason, I require their essay to cite the De La Torre (2002) reading or another of our methodological readings from the semester. I find that this helps ensure that their focus is methodological, looking at their topic as one example of how people read scripture differently, rather than trying to determine the "best" position on their specific topic.

Many students arrive in my New Testament class suspicious of me and the course material, having been explicitly warned by their family about the spiritual dangers of studying religion at our public state campus. Such students would be wary and defensive if I were to announce from the front of the classroom the first day that the Christian Bible "contradicts itself," or that readers' own perspectives shape what they believe the biblical texts "say." As a result, I have shaped my class around exercises that I hope will surprise students and bring them face to face with some of the assumptions that they bring to the class. I have found students most willing to engage sincerely with unfamiliar perspectives about New Testament texts, historical and contemporary, after they first come to realize that their own perspective is likewise idiosyncratic and particular to their own embodied experiences. Most of the course is spent introducing Jesus and Paul in their first-century Roman context of Jewish apocalypticism. This is most effective, however, when students have the methodological tools to recognize that reading is an act of interpretation, and that the New Testament texts' meanings necessarily shift as they are read by different people in different times and places. Teaching my New Testament students critical thinking and analysis skills thus helps them understand the history and historical context of the New Testament at the same time that it helps them recognize the ways in which those texts are deployed in religious, social, and political conversations today.

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DESIGN & ANALYSIS

Responding to Political Hot Points in Real Time: A Twitter Thread

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ABSTRACT

Professors have an obligation to respond in real time to politically charged events in society, whether they are in the news or in our students' lives on campus (or both). So how do we do that without replicating our own biases and/or confirming our students' worst stereotypes of us as teachers? In a Twitter thread, with research-based supporting materials, I discuss the reasons why we should engage our students in conversations about politically-charged events and some of the best practices that I have discovered for doing it. I apply my practices to several complex, controversial current events: national anthem protests at sporting events, the Indigenous Peoples' March confrontation, and a racist incident on my own campus.

KEYWORDS

Twitter, politics, citizenship, theory

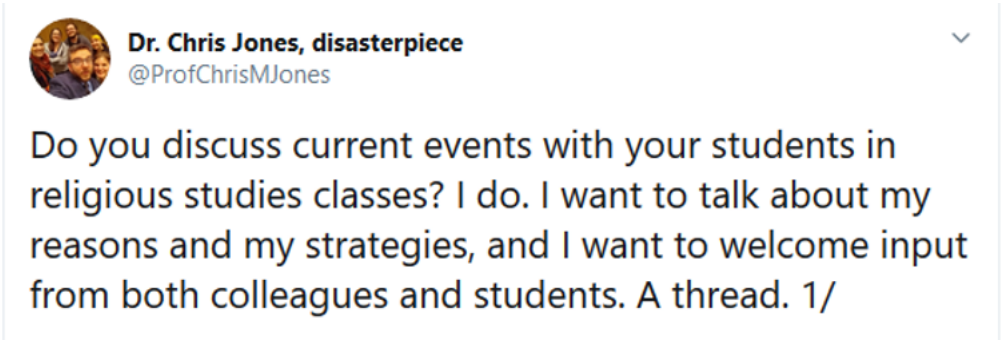
This essay is about the challenges that we face, as scholars of antiquity, when we teach classes outside of our areas of expertise in the midst of highly charged political events. Though I am formally trained in the study of ancient Semitic philology, I now rarely teach topics directly related to that material. Unlike the other authors in this issue, then, I am not going to be discussing how I relate the contemporary to the antique. Rather, I will discuss the ways that my background in Jewish texts of the early first millennium has prepared (or not prepared) me to administer and operate a religious studies program at a regional public university near the geographic heart of the United States at the end of the second decade of the third millennium. In short: my students, like any others, need teachers who can guide them in assessing multiple sources of incomplete information for credibility and who can model an even-handed (but not dispassionate or disengaged) approach to unfolding controversies.

I have been on Twitter (follow me here! [Jones 2020])[1] since 2009, and active since 2011. My engagement with #AcademicTwitter has had an incalculable impact on my teaching practice because it connects me with a vast network of teaching professors across the world. I have learned by quietly reading what others post (Stommel 2019), by actively asking for help with pedagogical problems (Jones 2019), and by sharing my own developing practices with others (Jones 2019). I often use Twitter to engage students and colleagues in discussions of teaching. I do that in part because I am the only faculty member in religious studies at my institution. It helps me to form connections with colleagues at other institutions. It also helps me to market the program in religious studies to students at my institution. In short, Twitter has been a professional lifeline of sorts for me.

1 The URLs for Dr. Jones's individual tweets are available online at https://doi.org/10.31046/wabashcenter.v1i3.1483.

In May of 2019, following a particularly challenging year of teaching, I sent out a series of tweets (see Figure 1) about teaching political hot-button topics in real time in my courses "Introduction to Religion" and "World Religions." You can see the original thread here, with comments and animated gifs, and you are invited to use the thread to continue the conversation in real time (I will gladly respond on Twitter).

Figure 1



One of the first challenges that we face in engaging our students about current events is our own perception that they are politically ambivalent and disengaged (see tweet). This is actually not true. On the contrary, our students are radically engaged, though not necessarily in ways that help them to understand what is happening around them. Smartphones have fundamentally changed the relationship between the college classroom and the outside world. I'm not talking about students using (and abusing) their phones in the classroom—that debate rages on elsewhere (Kelly 2018; McKenzie 2018; Lynch 2017; Bahrampour et al. 2018; Ashby 2017). Instead, I'm concerned with the ways that our phones keep us (faculty and students alike) wired to the 24-hour news cycle (Gottfreid 2020) and allow us to customize that news cycle to our own political preferences (Schmeiser 2017). We become aware of newsworthy events as soon as they happen (Bishop 2017), and we are immediately immersed in commentary (via official news sources and our online social networks) that reinforces our prior perceptions. Our students, like us, are constantly aware of political issues (Zinshteyn 2016), and they are also constantly afraid of offending other people by talking about them.

As teachers in the liberal arts tradition, we literally exist to prepare our students for preparation in a free, democratic society (tweet). In an era in which we must constantly justify the existence of liberal arts curriculum in higher education (Strauss 2018), we need to emphasize what liberal arts professors alone can do. We cannot fulfil that mission if we don't talk about current political events with our students. One of my formative influences as an educator (and as a Wisconsin Badger) is William Cronon's (2016) classic essay "'Only Connect. . .' The Goals of a Liberal Education," and for that reason I have always understood religious studies not as an escape from worldly issues (à la the Huston Smith "great insights of the world's religions" model) but rather as one of many points of access for students who want to better understand complex human motivations.

Of course, for academic teachers whose employment is precarious (adjunct, limited term, continuing lecturer, and pre-tenure), the Huston Smith model can be much safer precisely because it avoids contemporary controversies. Teaching about the intersections of religion and politics in an age of radical polarization is professionally dangerous (tweet). It's hard to overstate this point. Outside of super-elite institutions, the classic liberal arts majors are in freefall (Buurma and Heffeman 2018; Felder 2018). We have powerful, motivated political opponents and few political allies (Harris 2018). All of the momentum in higher education is towards gutting our programs in favor of STEM and pre-professional curriculum (Kiley 2013)—despite evidence that our majors go on to successful and lucrative careers (Carlson 2018). There is no safety in silence. Our best hope of saving our programs is to make ourselves indispensable to our campuses. And if we're doomed anyway, we should at least go out with our integrity intact.

That having been said: I am a straight, white man in a tenure-track position. I have one of the most secure jobs in academia, even without tenure: because of my identity, I get better student evaluations (Flaherty 2018), and I enjoy unearned respect

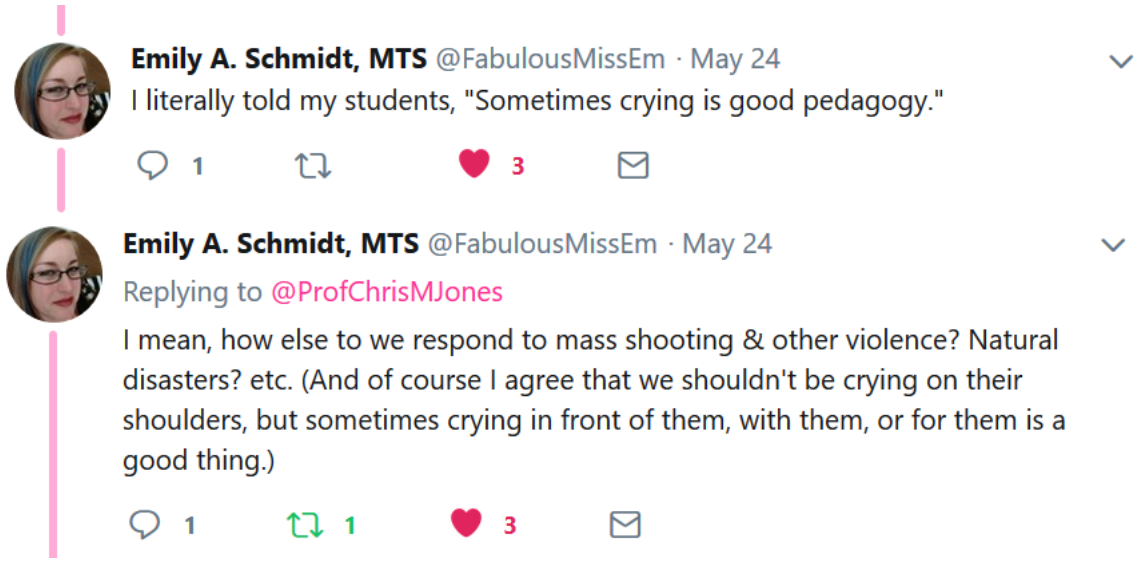
from my colleagues and administrators (Jones 2018). I won't presume to tell anybody else what to do, but I regard it as a professional obligation for somebody who inhabits my particular kind of body to teach difficult and dangerous topics in the classroom (tweet). So the rest of this piece will be devoted to my approach to addressing political hot points in the classroom: how I draw upon my background as a scholar of Jewish antiquity, how I integrate (or do not integrate) real-time political events into class curriculum, and how I have succeeded and failed in those efforts. The political hot points I will be discussing are Colin Kaepernick's National Anthem protests (Longman 2018), the Tree of Life massacre (Robertson, Mele, and Tavemise 2018), the Indigenous Peoples' March confrontation (Associated Press 2019), a racist incident on our campus (Moore 2019), and the murder of a student at a house party (Hrenchir 2019).

Specific Teaching Strategies

I do not believe that it is necessary that we be dispassionate about the topics that we address in class (tweet). I have had profound emotional investments in all of the hot issues that I've talked about with my students in the past two years. In each case, I prepared as extensively as time allowed, making sure that I controlled the relevant data and that I had anticipated a wide range of ideological responses from students (particularly responses that might upset or offend me). Visualization (Vilhauer 2018) is a technique that I've picked up for managing my own anxiety. I am not a psychologist or a mental health professional, however, so seek a therapist's advice before trying it yourself. On that note, I sometimes tell students that I see a therapist, not to overshare or to center myself, but to destigmatize mental health care for them (tweet).

The core principle for self-disclosure in the classroom is that it cannot be part of your own self-care—it must serve pedagogical goals (Mazer 2017). In response to this thread, my colleague Emily Schmidt (2019) put it especially well (see Figure 2).

Figure 2



The same principle holds true of political biases. When I presented on flag protests, the Tree of Life massacre, and the Indigenous Peoples' March confrontation, I told students about my own political predispositions as a political progressive. This is for two reasons: (1) as a teacher with disproportionate power over my students, I feel ethically obligated to disclose my biases if they might affect classroom discussion, and (2) I don't want conservative students, in particular, to think that I'm trying to covertly change their minds (Smith 2019). Putting my biases front and center allows me to show students how I control for my own biases in my teaching practice.

All five of the hot issues that I discussed with my classes last year involved violence (physical and/or verbal) against minoritized people.[2] Such incidents can take an immediate emotional toll (Williams 2015) on students who share identity with the people targeted by this violence, and that toll can be amplified when the incident is relived in the classroom (tweet). It is always a best practice to inform students ahead of time if a topic in class may profoundly upset them, and to give them multiple options for engaging with it (that's why I am an ardent supporter of trigger warnings, properly understood and deployed)(tweet). During class, be deliberate and judicious in your use of graphic details, and always warn students first. While you may want to reinforce the realities of structural violence for students unaffected by it, always prioritize the well-being of the students who are affected by it.

In several cases, I chose to devote full class sessions to current events—essentially bumping the content scheduled on the syllabus to the next session. In each case, I tried to use course concepts to engage the issues, both to maintain continuity with the class and to model the ways that specific disciplinary modes of thought help us to understand our world (tweet). I used a full session of my "Intro to Religion" class in Fall of 2018 to discuss the practice by athletes, initiated by Colin Kaepernick, of kneeling in protest during the playing of the national anthem before sporting events (tweet). John Carlos had just appeared on Washburn's campus for a talk (Anderson 2018); meanwhile, an attempt to bring Kaepernick to campus in 2016-2017 had not come to fruition. I wanted to give students an opportunity to reflect on both men and their protests, and why Carlos is an acknowledged American hero while Kaepernick remains deeply divisive (Layden 2018). In class, I showed students iconic images of Carlos at the 1968 Olympics and of Kaepernick in 2016 (tweet). I asked students first to discuss, with pre-assigned small groups, what the American flag symbolizes, and then how its reference points intersect with deeply held American myths. Then we talked as a class about the various strategies that Americans employ to effect and sustain the flag's status as a sacred symbol. The key discussion was then what, specifically, is symbolized by Carlos (and Tommie Smith) giving the Black Power salute during the Olympic flag-raising ceremony, and by Kaepernick kneeling during the anthem ceremony before American football games.

Another time that I diverted the course schedule to accommodate a current event was in the Spring of 2019 in my "World Religions" class. We were halfway through our unit on Yoruba traditions. Following a highly publicized confrontation between Black Hebrews, Indigenous Peoples' March participations, and March for Life participants in Washington, D.C., in early 2019, I devoted a full session of my World Religions class to a discussion of the incident (see the linked tweet threads for details). Because this incident specifically involved an individual wearing a MAGA hat (Darby 2019), I knew that the discussion ran the risk of inviting political polarization (rather than productive dialogue). My strategy was to lay out the facts as clearly as possible and to let students watch clips of raw (tweet) video (tweet) from the incident and draw their own conclusions (tweet). I drew on my training in ancient Jewish texts in a couple of ways: explaining the particular background of the Black Hebrews and their use of biblical typology to identify Native Americans (Gad) and white Americans (Edom), and discussing the power of deeply rooted symbols to create and reinforce identity boundaries. I was especially careful to avoid triggering the so-called "backfire effect" by giving students the impression that I was attempting to challenge their own deeply held beliefs (tweet).

The final example of a time when I simply replaced scheduled class content with a response to real-time news was following the Tree of Life Synagogue massacre in November of 2018. This is also the presentation that most closely drew upon my training in ancient Jewish texts, both in its specific content and in its consciousness of the ways that deep history can inform contemporary events. To my students, it was just another mass shooting in America. Most had no idea about the history of anti-Semitism, let alone the particular connections between the shooter's ideology and the anti-immigrant rhetoric of the contemporary American right. I presented students first with the facts, as plainly as possible, focusing on the victims and deliberately refusing to name the shooter or talk about his background more than was necessary. I did, however, show screenshots (Web Archive 2018) of the shooter's social media postings, and his repeated references to the anti-Semitic conspiracy theory (Lind 2018) that immigrants are meant to replace white Americans. I used anti-Semitic cartoons to reinforce the history of anti-Semitism in the United States, and then I highlighted echoes of that theory in the rhetoric of contemporary conservative figures (Marshall 2018; Trump 2018; Amato 2018; Politi 2018; Murphy 2018). I invited students to make up their own minds about the degree to which this anti-immigrant rhetoric was connected to anti-Semitism.

Despite our efforts (and perhaps because of our efforts) students may express a range of emotions. Sometimes I have to overcome my preference for an orderly, civil classroom and reinforce space for students to process their reactions in real time (tweet). In that vein, I have found the distinction between tone policing and boundary maintenance helpful (Miri 2016).

2 Colin Kaepernick is specifically protesting police brutality against Black people (Wyche 2016); the Tree of Life Massacre targeted Jews (Barrouguere 2019); white students at the Indigenous Peoples' March can be seen doing ironic tomahawk chops (Mervosh and Rueb 2019); the racist incident on Washburn's campus involved a student using the N-word with the hard "r"; the murdered student was a Black male.

When a student speaks emotionally, ask yourself: is this student violating classroom policies? If not, let them finish, and then use breakout strategies to redirect the class without chastising the student. As it happens, in neither of these discussions did students become emotionally charged, but if that happens it may be necessary to follow up with students and take appropriate further actions (tweet).

Above all else: make sure that you err on the side of acknowledging when events outside of the classroom may be impacting discussions within it (tweet). Following the murder of a student last year, I had several students in class who had witnessed the shooting just thirty-six hours beforehand. Very few of them wanted to talk about it in class, but they were grateful that we acknowledged it and that we talked about resources available. On the flip side, one of my greatest failures as a teacher was the day of the Las Vegas massacre in 2017 (Corcoran, Baker, and Choi 2019). I learned of the shooting the morning before teaching my class, but I couldn't bring myself to talk about it because I knew I'd break down emotionally. I should have broken down anyway—I quickly found out that that's what was happening to my students, and they could have used an empathetic ally that day.

Reflections

I did not debrief in any systematic way with my students after these sessions, in part because I did not anticipate publishing anything about these exercises. However, I can say that, anecdotally, students said that they were glad that we had these discussions and that they felt that they learned from them. Nobody expressed any disapproval of our classes going off schedule, and for the most part students seemed to be fully engaged in the discussions as they took place. In retrospect, I should have checked specifically with students whose identities (racial, ethnic, or religious) may have been at stake in these discussions. That was a mistake on my part, and one that I will not make again.

As for the pedagogical consequences of diverting the course schedule: because my general education courses are more skill-oriented than content-oriented, it did not have a significant impact on student learning outcomes. In each case, we used disciplinary vocabulary and content analysis techniques to understand what we were discussing. In the case of Kaepernick's protests, we employed the concepts of "myth" and "sacred," and I used examples from that class period in a review session leading up to a major paper. In the case of the Indigenous People's March, it provided another illustration of my World Religions course's core proposition: people's identities and motivations are messy and complex and play out in surprising ways, so we must pay careful attention to context and detail. These lessons, in short, became part of the curriculum, rather than intruding on it.

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THE WABASH CENTER
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DESIGN & ANALYSIS

Building a New Testament Syllabus after the 2016 Elections

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ABSTRACT

After the 2016 elections, students at Macalester College, a small private liberal arts college in Saint Paul, Minnesota, encouraged the faculty and staff to combat hate, sexism, racism, anti-Semitism, and white supremacy in and out of the classroom. These students inspired me to reconsider the way that I taught my introductory New Testament course. In this essay, I present the process by which I redesigned the course to explore not only the historical context of the New Testament texts but also our present political context and the ways it shapes biblical interpretation. The redesigned syllabus includes scholarship representative of feminist, post-colonial, African American, Latinx, Asian-American, Jewish, queer, and other liberationist and identity-based approaches to the study of the New Testament.

KEYWORDS

New Testament, syllabus, inclusion, diversity, biblical interpretation

In the fall of 2017, students at Macalester College, a private liberal arts college in Saint Paul, Minnesota with around 2,100 undergraduates, led a walk-in against hate on our campus. In light of the 2016 elections and increased incidents of hate in our community and nation, students asked faculty members to consider, among other things, how whiteness and white supremacy operated in our classrooms and courses. I am grateful to these students for leading me to recognize the whiteness of my courses, which begins with the syllabi I design. The majority of textbooks, monographs, and articles that I assigned in my classes were written by white-identified scholars. The methodologies that I taught were rooted, in many cases, in white, male, and Eurocentric ways of knowing. I knew I could begin to change my practices and offer more equitable and inclusive learning experiences for my students, and I decided to start by redesigning my course, "Introduction to the New Testament" (Drake 2018c).

I have taught an introductory New Testament course every other year at Macalester for over a decade. My original intention for the course was to introduce students to the New Testament texts in their original contexts, employing historical criticism as my primary method. After the walk-in, I became more aware of the pedagogical problem that I faced: the methodologies and interpretations that I taught in my New Testament course were rooted in a white, mostly male, European, and, historically, anti-Semitic model of biblical interpretation. I decided to redesign the course to explore not only the historical context of the New Testament texts but also (and more pressingly) our present political context and the ways it shapes and is shaped by biblical interpretation. I recentered the course on feminist, post-colonial, African American, Latinx, Asian-American, Jewish, queer, and other liberationist and identity-based approaches to the study of the New Testament. The specific learning goal that I had

for my students was to understand several early Christian documents through a lens that engaged topics of race, sexuality, religion, identity, difference, and power—then and now. My hope for the course was that this new approach would not only introduce students to multiple and diverse perspectives but also enable them to develop more facility in understanding the complexities of identity, difference, hierarchy, and power in the ancient Mediterranean world.

In what follows, I discuss my redesigned syllabus, my learning outcomes for the students, my reasons for including some specific assignments, and the students' and my assessment of what worked well and what could use improvement. The redesign of my introductory New Testament course began with a new title and course description. I also registered to have the course count toward the U.S. Identities and Differences (Macalester College 2020) general education requirement at our college. Not only did this designation align with my new aims for the course, but I also wanted the course to attract students who might not traditionally take a course in biblical studies or religious studies. At Macalester, students who complete the U.S. Identities and Differences requirement will be able to:

- Recognize that group identities and differences are socially constructed or historically contingent;
- Examine forms or forces that create, reflect, maintain, or contest identities and differences;
- Evaluate the significance of identities and differences for life and culture in the United States. (Macalester 2020)

I envisioned that students who were mostly interested in ancient religions would be exposed to ways in which contemporary theories of identity and interpretation shape our understandings of ancient differences and identities. Likewise, students who were mostly interested in issues of identity and difference nationally or globally would learn about how identity, difference, and power functioned in the ancient Mediterranean world. With a joint examination of issues of difference in the ancient Mediterranean and the modern U.S., this class aimed to contextualize discourses of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, economic status, religion, and power in their own historical periods (ancient and modern). We studied the social construction of difference and its historical negotiation in biblical times *and* in the modern U.S. by studying early Christian texts through the lens of scholarship and biblical interpretation from scholars in historically-marginalized groups in the U.S.

Most of the biblical scholarship covered in this course challenged white, Eurocentric biblical interpretation—including the historical-critical method which has become normative for U.S. liberal arts colleges and graduate programs in religion. Students learned not only various methods of biblical interpretation but also how subjective experiences, identities, shared histories, institutionalized privileges, and histories of oppression shaped the reception and use of the New Testament across diverse communities in the U.S.

My syllabus for this class is still a work-in-progress (Drake 2018c). Some of the assignments worked well, some less so. I chose to begin the course with the same set of readings and assignments with which I have always taught my New Testament classes, that is, by reading the work of several prominent (white, male) scholars in the field. Looking back, it is perplexing to me that I began this revamped course in this way, but it also shows me how attached I am to these particular readings and assignments as a way of beginning: Reading Dale Martin's "The Myth of Textual Agency" (2006) which enables students to recognize and discuss "how people mean with texts"; presenting Jas Elsner's chapter on "Art and Religion" (Elsner 1998) to give students a taste for the varieties of pietistic practices in the Roman world and the material culture of the first centuries, C.E.; and reading several essays from the *Jewish Annotated New Testament* (Levine and Brettler 2011) to understand late second temple Judaism and its cultures and histories.

Two assignments complement the readings from the first two weeks. In the Ancient Avatar assignment (Drake 2018a), students create and present ancient avatars for themselves. These avatars live, work, and worship in the ancient Mediterranean in the first century, C.E., and students get creative in the various ways that they present the daily lives of their avatars to the class (from Instagram feeds to singles ads to dioramas). One student noted that this assignment "helped her, over the course of the semester, to continue to put herself in the frame of mind of someone who lived in that era." It created an opportunity for empathy and learning across difference. The second assignment, the critical terms worksheet (Drake 2018b), presents an opportunity to develop a shared vocabulary among the students and professor. Getting everyone on the same page in regard to the critical vocabulary of the field of biblical studies is, I believe, a necessary first step in creating an equitable and inclusive classroom. In hindsight, I would add more terms to this list to encompass the technical terms from the critical studies of race, gender, sexuality, class, colonialism, and dis/ability.

When I began exploring the histories of feminist/womanist, African-American, Latinx, and Asian-American biblical interpretation, I noticed how many of these interpretive methods drew on the language of liberation theology. I had never

taught liberation theology before so I needed some guidance from textbooks and encyclopedias. The students and I found the *Handbook of U.S. Theologies of Liberation* (De La Torre 2004), to be a very helpful resource in learning about the history of liberation theology, its U.S. reception, and its engagement of and influence on biblical interpretation. Several students reported in end-of-course surveys that the group presentations on individual chapters from this handbook were among the most effective and memorable learning experiences of the course. It was their first exposure to the wide diversity of biblical interpretation in the contemporary U.S. as well as the connections among biblical interpretation, liberation movements, and political activism.

One of the challenges in designing this syllabus was striking the right balance between the primary texts and the more recent biblical scholarship and interpretive methods. The students and I found that a good rhythm for the week involved work on the New Testament texts in the beginning of the week (including a lecture on ancient historical contexts of the gospel or letter) and a discussion of the interpretation of that text at the end of the week. In the end of course surveys, some students indicated that I needed to be more consistent with this rhythm to help them organize the new material they were learning—both ancient and modern. In the midterm examination (timed, open-book essays), I asked students to choose to respond to two of four essay prompts, each of which required them to engage select New Testament texts in their ancient contexts and the use of these texts in one or more of the twentieth and twenty-first-century interpreters we had considered to this point in the semester. Students' midterm essays showed me that they had, for the most part, a very good grasp of the primary and secondary texts as well as the ways that social, historical, and political positioning mutually informed biblical interpretation.

Another challenge I faced involved the order in which to present the different approaches to biblical interpretation. Should I assign readings from womanist and feminist biblical interpreters first or should these be intermixed all along? In the end, I had no particular rationale for beginning with liberation theological approaches, then moving to post-colonial, African-American, queer, feminist, womanist, and *mujerista* methods of biblical interpretation, but this ordering is something I would like to reconsider the next time I teach this course. Reading an essay such as Jacquelyn Grant's (1989) "Womanist Theology: Black Women's Experience as a Source for Doing Theology, with Special Reference to Christology" early in the semester is an effective way to introduce students to the intersectionality of identity and the complexity and multilayeredness of systematic oppression. Students found Grant's essay (1989) particularly helpful in drawing links between politics, activism, theology, Christology, and biblical interpretation.

I realized halfway through that my learning goals for the course amounted to more than a semester's worth of work, and some of my ideas were given short shrift. For example, with an additional semester (or in an upper-level version of this course) I would have spent more time studying the methodologies of different interpretive communities. We touched on this briefly in the readings by Vincent Wimbush (1991; 2013), Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1985), and Gay Byron and Vanessa Lovelace (2016), which enabled us to explore the histories, theories, techniques, and internal diversities of the identity-based approaches to biblical interpretation.

This syllabus is just a starting place for my shift in practice that takes into account students' and teachers' *contexts* (including the contemporary political contexts) as well as the *content* of the course (the New Testament documents). At the end of the course, students' comments attested that the engagement of context and content transformed their understanding of not only the New Testament texts but also identity and difference in their more proximate communities. One student indicated that this course helped them "re-examine long held perceptions and assumptions"; another said that the course helped them to "understand different perspectives that [they'd] never considered before" and "see more connections" between the biblical texts under study and the world around them. Another student wrote that this class helped them appreciate "how important biblical interpretation can be for different groups of oppressed peoples." They learned to ask the following sorts of questions: Who gets to create biblical interpretation? How do we differentiate among "better" or "worse" interpretations? And how do methods of biblical interpretation function as claims to power? The redesign of this course has spurred me on to critically examine the whiteness of my other course syllabi and to learn and adopt more techniques to make the learning experiences in my classrooms more diverse, inclusive, and equitable.

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DESIGN & ANALYSIS

Annotated Lesson Plan: Paul, Ethnicity, and Belonging

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ABSTRACT

This is an annotated lesson plan for a class discussion and activity about Paul's letters to the Galatians and Romans in an "Introduction to the New Testament" undergraduate course. The primary aim of this lesson plan is to help students develop a vocabulary to discuss ethnicity and belonging. In the first part of the activity, students closely read Galatians and Romans and were able to articulate how Paul differentiates between Jews and Gentiles, and further, how their differences are important for how each group achieves the crucial status of righteousness. In the second part, students drew comparisons between Paul's seemingly universalizing statement in Galatians 3:26-29 and contemporary political discourses that employ universalizing/particularizing dichotomies. Specifically, they analyzed the #AllLivesMatter response to #BlackLivesMatter and how Paul might respond to both.

KEYWORDS

Paul, New Testament, race, ethnicity, #BlackLivesMatter

Background

As the teaching assistant for "Introduction to the New Testament," I observed the class from the sidelines and designed weekly discussions of the course material.[1] During the unit on Paul's letters to the Galatians and Romans,[2] I noticed that students struggled to talk about Paul's categories of belonging—Jew and Gentile. When asked how Paul uses ethnic terms to define belonging to the people of Israel, students often invoked "religion" as a response to the question. Instead of marking differences between Jews and Gentiles, students assumed (especially based on their reading of Galatians 3:26-29) that Paul argues that Christianity is "universal" and that being a Christian does not hinge on one's ethnicity, gender, or slave/free status. Further, in both texts, they understood Paul to be arguing that faith in Christ had nullified Jewish Law. Students, in other words, were comfortable discussing sameness (Jews and Gentiles as "equal") but not difference and what factors constitute differences (ethnicity, language, geography, and so forth).

Students entered the classroom with the assumption that religion, namely Christianity, was something universal; anyone can be a Christian regardless of one's identity. In their interpretation of Galatians 3:26-29, Paul is arguing that differences

1 This course was taught at Indiana University, a large public university in the Midwest. In general, the students are predominantly white and from Christian backgrounds.

2 I am using the New Revised Standard Version for all biblical quotations.

between Jews and Gentiles are irrelevant because Christianity is universal—that is, being a Christian is an option available to anyone. I found that students' vocabulary was preventing them from understanding the first-century categories that Paul used. "Religion" and "Christianity" are modern categories and not ones that first-century writers employed; rather, they often theorized difference and belonging through ethnicity (for example, descent through Abraham).[3]

Paul is not concerned with persons identifying as a member of a specific religion but with obtaining a specific status, "righteousness," with God. As an eschatological Jew, Paul held that persons who had the status of righteousness would be saved when the *eschaton* arrives. To be sure, Paul does argue that righteousness is open to all and is not dependent on one's gender, ethnicity, or slave/free status. Yet, Paul is clear that differences between Jews and Gentiles are critical in the process of obtaining this status. God had already promised salvation to the people of Israel, but salvation for the Gentiles is not a guarantee and must be achieved through another mechanism—faith (Romans 11:1, 23-26). Paul, then, depicts Israel as a natural olive tree, and Gentiles as wild branches that can be included by being grafted onto the tree. Still, he privileges Israel's "cultivated tree" over the Gentiles' inferior grafted branches: "You stand only through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe" (Romans 11:20). What is more, in Romans 4, Paul also constructs his own version of ethnic belonging through Abraham.[4] He argues that Abraham is the common ancestor of both Jews and Gentiles (that is, the circumcised and uncircumcised). The basis of his argument is the plural "nations" in Genesis 17:4: "You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations." By crafting his own conception of ethnic belonging, Paul places the Gentiles firmly within the confines of the people of Israel where they are able to obtain righteousness.

My strategy for discussion sections, then, was to help students cultivate a vocabulary to discuss the categories that Paul, a pre-modern author, used to conceptualize difference, particularly ethnicity. I wanted students to see how Paul is not making universalizing statements about religion but rather theorizes how both Jews and Gentiles can belong to Israel and attain righteousness while being different from each other. Since we were on the topic of universalizing discourses, I used this class as an opportunity to discuss contemporary political discourses that employ universalizing and particularizing language. In Paul's case, it is modern readers who interpret sections of Galatians and Romans as universalizing due to the modern understanding of religion (especially Christianity) as universal. Some contemporary discourses use universalizing language (for example, "all," "every," and so forth) to obscure claims that are directed toward certain persons and groups. I thus chose to pair Paul with the #AllLivesMatter response to #BlackLivesMatter, which was popularized on Twitter by the #BLM and #ALM hashtags.

Learning Objectives

1. Students will be able to articulate why and how ethnicity matters for Paul in his letters to the Galatians and Romans.
    - Students will analyze Galatians 3 and discuss how Paul differentiates Jews and Gentiles
    - Students will analyze Romans 11 and explain Paul's more detailed argument about how (1) differences between Jews and Gentiles are important for how each one achieves righteousness and becomes "in Christ"; and (2) how Paul conceives of ethnicity in terms of belonging to a common ancestor (such as Abraham)
2. Students will be able to draw comparisons between Paul and contemporary discourses that use universalizing terminology
    - Students will discuss the #ALM response to #BLM
    - Students will discuss whether or not Paul would use the #ALM hashtag

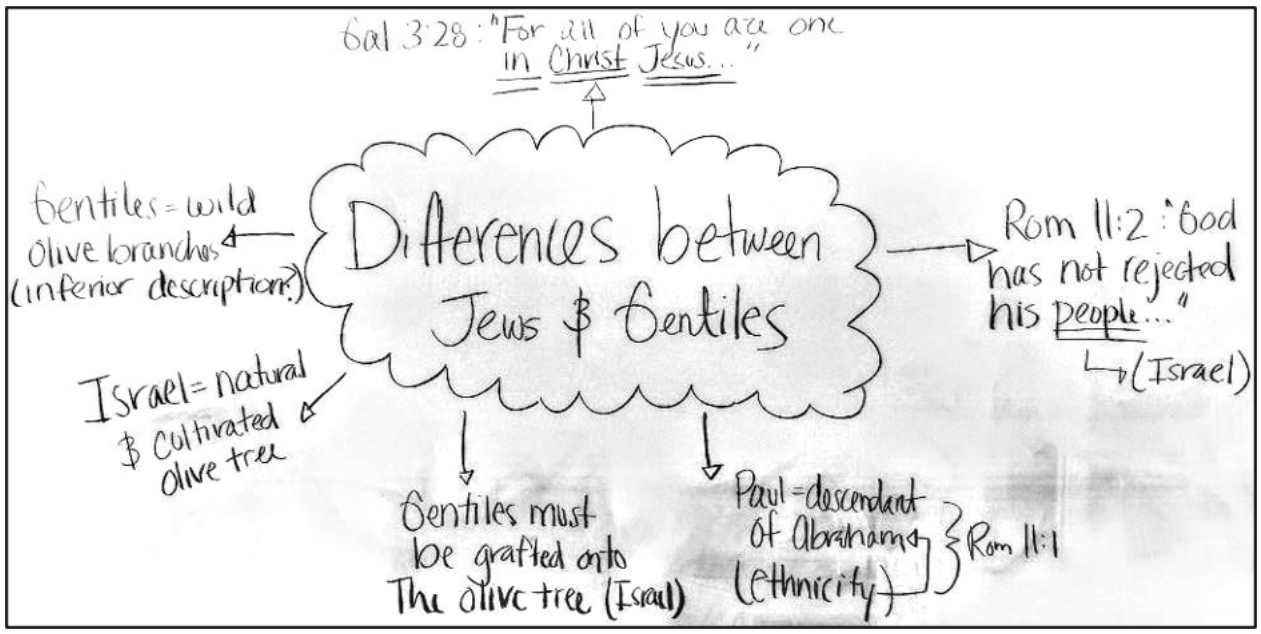
3 To be fair to my students, the applicability of "religion" is also a contemporary debate among scholars of antiquity. Brent Nongbri (2013), for example, has accused scholars of antiquity of retrojecting "religion" into the premodern world, as evidenced by their translations of various words in ancient languages as "religion" or "religious." At the heart of this error in translation is the pervasive idea that religion is something universal and timeless rather than a historically specific and constructed concept.

4 While I primarily used "ethnicity" instead of "race" in the classroom, I acknowledge that the distinction between the two is slippery. As Denise Kimber Buell (2005) describes, scholars often prefer ethnicity over race, as the latter is commonly associated with the nineteenth-century European interest in using biology and genetics to justify genocide and discrimination against certain populations of people. Ethnicity, in contrast, is viewed as an acceptable alternative because it implies less fixity and more mutability; it privileges common ancestry but leaves room for factors such as language, geography, eating habits, and so forth. Yet, Buell notes that ethnicity too is a modern category and also contains fixity, particularly in relation to its emphasis on kinship and common ancestry. She ultimately prefers to describe race/ethnicity in terms of fixity and fluidity in her analysis of early Christian texts. In this way, "appeals to kinship and descent are one significant way in which the 'reality' and 'essence' (or fixity) of ethnicity/race is articulated" (9). Likewise, texts can also appeal to fluidity: "When kinship and descent participate in the fluid aspect of ethnicity, insofar as descent and kin relations shift and can be redrawn (discursively or ritually) to exclude and include individuals and groups, these signs of fluidity are often accounted for by asserting that ethnic claims of descent and kinship are 'fictive" rather than 'real'" (9).

Activity (Part I): Thinking About Ethnicity Instead Of Religion

- Students have already read Paul's letters and came to class prepared with a notecard responding to the open-ended question: "What does Paul think about the differences between Jews and Gentiles?"
- Some students volunteered to share their responses with the class, and I wrote down some key terms and phrases (see Figure 1):

Figure 1



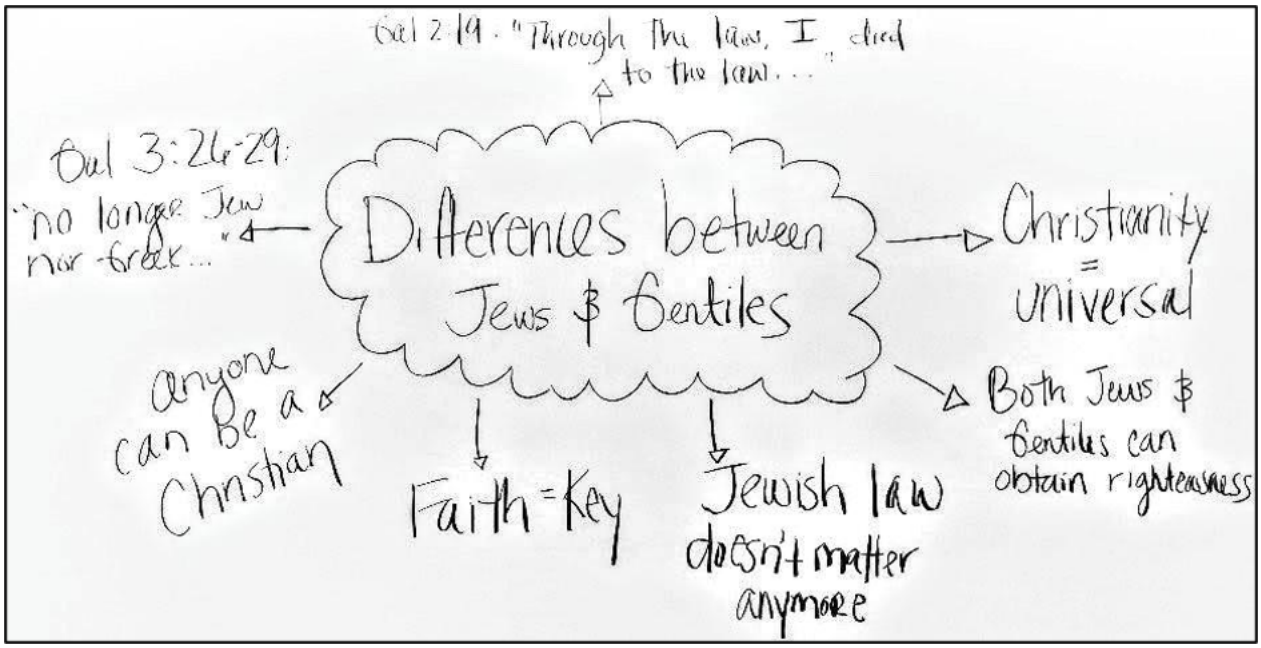
In groups, students answered the same question (groups look at either Galatians 3 or Romans 11), but are not alowed to use the following terms:

- Religion
- Faith
- Belief
- Christian/Christianity

- Students are required to use the following terms in their responses:
  - Ethnicity
  - People (in other words, belonging to a group or "people")
  - Jew
  - Gentile

- Students shared their responses, which incorporated this new terminology. I wrote down key terms and phrases (see Figure 2):

Figure 2



After removing "religion" and other similar terms from students' vocabulary, it was easier to lead discussion about ethnicity and belonging. Without "religion," they were challenged to look more closely at their primary sources and think with first-century terms. In our discussion, the students who looked closely at Galatians 3 were able to see how Paul delimits difference in his statement in 3:26-29 that there is "no longer Jew or Greek." They identified his modifying phrase "in Christ Jesus" (3:28) as a way to describe belonging to the community that will survive the eschaton. They further pointed out "righteousness" (3:11) as the special status that both Jews and Gentiles needed to achieve in order to become a part of this community.

While differences will not matter for those who become "in Christ" and survive the eschaton, the students who analyzed Romans 11 were able to describe how differences between Jews and Gentiles do matter in order to achieve righteousness. They discussed, for example, Paul's metaphor for the people of Israel as a natural olive tree and the Gentiles as wild branches that need to be grafted onto the tree. They were able to point out how this metaphor privileges the people of Israel as natural and cultivated compared to the wild and unruly Gentiles. I further prodded students to consider Romans 4; I asked them to think about how Paul theorizes ethnicity in relation to Abraham. We discussed how Paul makes a radical move by identifying Abraham as the common ancestor to both the Jews and Gentiles. The latter, too, could claim descent from Abraham through this alternative means. With their new vocabulary, students could now articulate how Paul defined ethnicity and how Jews and Gentiles could each claim Abraham as their progenitor but in different ways.

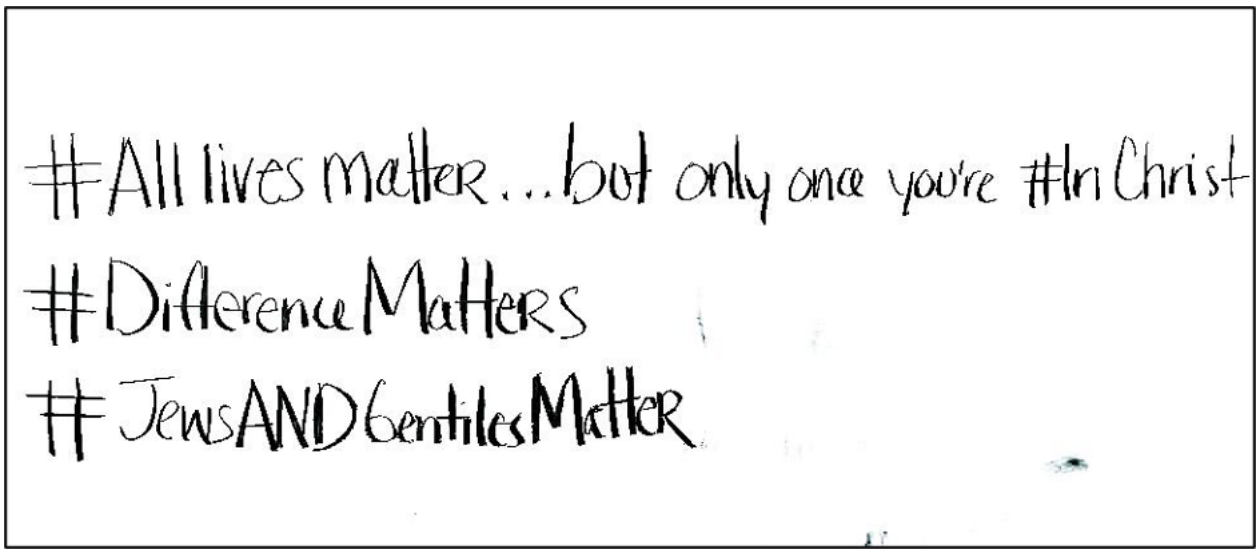
Activity (Part II): Is Paul Saying #ALLLIVESMATTER?

In the remaining portion of class, we discussed how contemporary political discourses make use of universalizing statements. Most of my students were already familiar with the #BLM and #ALM debate but in order to smoothly transition into this discussion, I began with a brief free-writing activity about how #BLM and #ALM might relate to Galatians and Romans. The first part of class seemed to prime students for this discussion, as they quickly pointed out that #BLM focused on race and difference while #ALM claimed universality and sameness. We then discussed how #ALM hides its whiteness under a cloak of ideals such as sameness, equality, and the universal. In this way, it portrays #BLM as being concerned with identity, race, and the particular.

I then asked students if Paul would use the #ALM hashtag. We discussed how on the surface it may seem like Paul is advocating for #ALM, but on a closer look, his statement in Galatians 3:26-29 only refers to persons once they had obtained righteousness. While differences will not persist once one eventually becomes "in Christ," he argues that the differences between Jews and Gentiles mandate separate mechanisms for each to achieve this status. As we discussed earlier, Paul even

creates his own ethnic argument based on Genesis 17:4, wherein Jews and Gentiles are both descendants of Abraham. We spent the rest of class brainstorming Paul's hashtags (see Figure 3):

Figure 3



I found that pairing Galatians and Romans with #BLM and #ALM was instructive and helpful for students. Although students initially shied away from talking about difference and ethnicity, they spoke more openly and fluidly about it when I provided guidelines and specific terminology they could use. Providing specific words (and restricting others) proved useful when students disagreed with or challenged my lesson plan. For example, when a student interjected "But isn't Paul a Christian?" I was able to note that Paul never refers to himself as a Christian but rather as a Jew.

In the second part of class, the discussion and hashtag activity helped students see the work that universalizing language does; it can conceal its own biases under the cover of sameness and equality. Students were also able to point out subtle distinctions between Paul's arguments, #BLM, and #ALM. Most students agreed that Galatians 3:26-29 might initially read like an #ALM statement, and Paul does, in fact, think righteousness is potentially available to everyone. Yet, Jews and Gentiles are different groups of people and thus have different means to obtain righteousness. Furthermore, the hashtag activity allowed students to detect disparities and continuities between pre-modern and modern conceptions of belonging. Although neither #BLM nor #ALM map perfectly onto Paul's schema of belonging, students were able to note that Paul was not making universalizing statements about religion but was instead invested in thinking about how Jews and Gentiles are different from each other.

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DESIGN & ANALYSIS

Learning Design: Discussing Political Issues with Ruth

Christy Cobb
Wingate University

ABSTRACT

In this learning design, the book of Ruth is read closely and critically in order to foster dialogue about political issues in the classroom. Using bell hooks' model of engaged pedagogy, political issues such as feminism, immigration, gender, sex, and consent are carefully addressed through the pedagogical strategies described. Teachers may use all of the strategies in a full unit on Ruth, or they may choose one or two to implement in a single class. Cobb suggests the use of polling, creative expression through drawing, videos, small group discussions, and maps to incite thoughtful conversation about relevant political issues and the book of Ruth.

KEYWORDS

Ruth, pedagogy, teaching, politics, feminism, immigration, gender

"The classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy" (hooks 1994, 12). Even though bell hooks wrote this sentence nearly twenty-five years ago, the sentiment endures. To foster critical thinking about religion and politics, the classroom is a fruitful place to start. In this learning design, I suggest the book of Ruth as an ideal biblical text for engaging political discourse in the classroom. Aspects of the narrative address political issues including immigration, feminism, gender roles, sex, and consent. Pedagogically, Ruth can be used to instigate conversations on these relevant topics while students are reading and thinking critically about the text.

The Context And Pedagogical Purpose

I teach undergraduates in a small liberal arts college in the southeast United States where evangelical Christianity is a strong cultural norm. I use the following teaching tactic primarily with first-year students in a required biblical studies course offered in the core curriculum, with typically twenty-eight students in the room. I employ these strategies halfway through the semester, once students have become accustomed to a classroom climate that fosters mutual respect while initiating dialogues about controversial issues. I have encouraged and created this climate by adopting the pedagogical theory laid out by bell hooks in *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1994). In this book, hooks offers experience and strategies for "engaged pedagogy," which challenges instructors to be self-aware and open about their own humanity and excitement about the subject while simultaneously inviting students to be equal participants in the discussion, where the voices of all present are validated and valued.

The strategies outlined below can be implemented in two fifty- or seventy-five-minute class sessions, or one longer two- to three-hour session. Because the exercises are versatile, professors/instructors may also choose the exercises they prefer and use them independently, or mix-and-match, according to the needs of the course. These strategies can also be easily incorporated into an online course, especially as platforms such as Zoom (2020) allow for polling, breakout rooms for discussion, and screen sharing.

Description Of Strategies

The book of Ruth, while only four chapters in length, is full of thought-provoking ideas, concepts, and issues relevant to our current political context. The sections that follow utilize pedagogical strategies such as: technology, film criticism, creativity, small group discussions, polling software, dialogue, and mapping. When teaching Ruth, I do not lecture, but guide the students into the text through these strategies and engaged pedagogy.

Ruth and Feminism

I begin class with a fifteen-minute discussion on what it means to be a feminist. While this question might seem simple to some, many students, especially in my own context, struggle with what they have heard about feminism in the news or what others have told them about feminists. In order to encourage students to discuss this occasionally difficult topic, I utilize polling software such as iClicker (2020) or PollEverywhere (2020) in order to ask an anonymous question of the group. First, I ask: "Which words or phrases do you think of when you hear the word feminist?" After students have entered their answers, I allow the software to populate a word cloud (Word Art 2020) which will include the students' own answers. If more than one student uses the word "empowerment," for example, that word appears larger on the word cloud. This strategy involves a bit of risk because students might include a negatively-charged word or phrase in their anonymous answer. For instance, I often encounter terms like "man-hater" or "irrelevant." However, I welcome the opportunity to discuss these stereotypes with my class, and the anonymous polling software allows these viewpoints to surface without implicating a particular student.

Once the word cloud is generated, we look together at the words used to describe feminism. I ask students which words or phrases they notice. We also talk openly about any negative words that have surfaced. I ask the class, "Why do some people have negative views about feminism?" I conclude by emphasizing the simplest definition for feminism: Advocacy for the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes. I then take a moment to introduce them to the term intersectionality as "the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group." I note the ways in which feminists today often advocate for other oppressed groups and communities in addition to women. I begin with this exercise, instead of beginning with Ruth, in order to motivate students into thinking about women, agency, equality, and politics. This exercise also functions to provoke open dialogue and conversation in the classroom.

I then play this video (Sarkeesian 2009) to introduce my students to the Bechdel test (2020) (named for the well-known cartoonist, Allison Bechdel).[1] The brief test analyzes current films according to the following requirements: (1) The movie must have two or more women in it who have names, (2) the women must talk to one another, (3) about something other than a man. The video highlights the large number of films that do not pass the Bechdel test. I first ask the students what they think of this test, and if they can think of a recent film they have seen that does pass the test. This incites a bit of discussion about current movies and the question of female presence in those films. Then, I bring up Ruth, which they have read prior to class. I ask: Does Ruth pass the Bechdel test? Before the students discuss their answers, I utilize polling software again and ask the students to choose (a) yes or (b) no. I display the results for the class, which are typically mixed. Then, I open discussion for students to defend their answers for the class. Finally, I move to the final question: Is Ruth a feminist text? While the Bechdel test is not an indication of whether a film is "feminist" or not, the discussion guides the students into considering how the text treats women.

1 The idea to apply the Bechdel test to Ruth developed in conversation with several colleagues at Drew University, where I received my doctorate and where we often discussed the Bible and pedagogy.

Ruth as a Graphic Novel

In order to encourage the students to read and think about the text closely and creatively, the second exercise that I use is one I call "Ruth as a Graphic Novel." This is usually a larger part of the class and takes half an hour, typically. I divide the class into groups of three to four students. I give each group a notecard with a section of Ruth on it as well as a small (8x10) dry erase board, dry erase marker, and eraser.[2] Because of the size of my class, I divide the students into eight groups; my textual divisions are: 1:1-5; 1:6-18; 1:19-24; 2:1-13; 2:14-23; 3; 4:1-12; 4:13-17.[3] However, a variety of divisions would work for this exercise, for instance a class could be divided into four groups with a chapter per group. I instruct each group to use the board to create a panel of pictures (for example, see Figure 1), using very limited text, to illustrate the events that occur in their passage of Ruth. They may use stick figures; it need not be an intricate work of art. I give the students ten to fifteen minutes to create their panels and I walk around complimenting their work or asking questions about what they have included. When the students are done, we line up the panels, in order, at the front of the classroom. One at a time, I hold up a panel, show the class, and we briefly discuss the interesting aspects of this depiction.[4]

Figure 1: Sample Graphic Novel Depiction

This exercise is beneficial in several ways. It encourages cooperation as students work with one another to read closely, represent the text accurately, and use the space on the small board effectively. Typically, a creative exercise such as this one engages students who might not normally talk in class but are creative or read graphic novels/comic books. Additionally, this exercise encourages students to consider and carefully illustrate some of the more complicated parts of the story, such as the incident discussed below on the "threshing room" floor found in chapter three or the agreement between Boaz and the guardian-redeemer in 4:7-8.

Ruth and Immigration

Having discussed the student-created graphic novel (which I leave up during this discussion and reference later, when appropriate), I ask if any of the panels note the geographical setting of this story. Students easily answer Moab first, and then Bethlehem in Judah. I then ask which characters are Moabite, and students respond both Ruth and Orpah. This begins a discussion of Ruth's ethnicity as a Moabite (Powell 2019), her circumstances, the loss of her husband, and her choice to follow Naomi back home to Judah. I display a map (Society of Biblical Literature 2019) of the region illustrating Moab's

2 To use this exercise online, I suggest an whiteboard platform such as Miro (2020), which is free and allows students to collaborate together creating a whiteboard that can be saved as a pdf and shared with the class. The instructor could place the students into breakout rooms and allow them time to create a graphic novel panel to then share with the group.

3 All online Bible texts link to BibleGateway (2020).

4 The example included with this article is from my own class. Special thanks to the Spring 2020 Tues/Thurs 11am "Global Perspectives in Scripture" class at Wingate University for allowing me to share their graphic novel panel.

proximity (Routledge 2019) to Judah (to the east of the Dead Sea), while noting scholars are not certain (Jones 2019) of the exact location. As the text makes clear, a Moabite was not an Israelite, and this part of Ruth's identity suggests that she is a foreigner or even an immigrant (Smith-Christopher 2019), as she travels to a place that is not her own, yet is not altogether that far from her home. Again, I allow students to control the direction of the conversation, but recently the conversation inevitably addresses the Mexico-American border and the construction of the "wall." What would have happened if there were a wall between Moab and Judah in the book of Ruth? Did Ruth experience any discrimination because of her ethnicity? Does Boaz expect that Ruth will be sexually harassed (Carasik 2019) because of her identity, as suggested in 2:9? How does it impact political discussions when Ruth the Moabite is identified as an immigrant who crossed a border?

Ruth, Sex, and Consent

"What do you think happened between Ruth and Boaz on the threshing room floor?" (Halton 2019). In order to broach the controversial topic of sex in this narrative, I use a strategy of slow, critical, and reflective reading of the text. I divide the class into small groups (from two to four students), project parts of Ruth chapter three, and deliberately read those parts out loud.[5] I begin with 3:1-5 and ask the students to discuss with their peers, for a couple of minutes, what they think Naomi is telling Ruth to do. Then, I display Ruth 3:6-10, which shows how Ruth acted on her mother-in-law's instructions and how Boaz responded. After another few minutes of small group discussion, I display Ruth 3:11-13 and I also write on the board: HINT: Deuteronomy 25:5-10. This passage gives basic instructions concerning Levirate marriage (Weisberg 2019). I ask the students to discuss what is happening in 3:11-13 while they look up the verses from Deuteronomy as well. During this time, I wander from group to group asking questions and assisting when necessary. After this guided discussion, I bring the dialogue back to the class as a whole. After hearing several students vocalize their thoughts, which often include the idea that Naomi told Ruth to initiate sex with Boaz, I ask: "Is it difficult to imagine that the Bible contains a story of pre-marital sex?" This leads to a discussion about the ways that biblical texts have been used to promote sexual abstinence, purity, gender roles (hierarchical), and heterosexual ("traditional") marriage.[6]

I then steer the conversation into a discussion focused on "intent" and "consent" in the book of Ruth. Here, I again utilize polling software and post the following question:

> Who was the initiator of the incident on the threshing room floor?
>
> • Ruth
> • Boaz
> • Naomi

Using software in this way enables me to display the results on the projector using a chart, allowing the class to see how many students voted for which character as the "initiator." Because this is a sensitive subject, I allow the students to control the conversation and I encourage as many students to talk as possible. This inevitably leads to a diversity of opinions including those who do not think anything sexual or inappropriate happened between Ruth and Boaz that night. The question of "initiator" can be answered without the student deciding what happened on the threshing room floor, which is why it is a thought-provoking question for discussion.

After I show the results of the poll, I ask for someone who voted for Ruth to defend their choice. I do the same with Boaz and then Naomi. In this discussion, many questions arise. Did Boaz invite Ruth's visit? Did Ruth want to visit Boaz? Why did Naomi not go to the threshing room herself? Could Ruth have said "no" to Naomi? What would have happened if Boaz rejected Ruth? In the end, did Boaz propose marriage to Ruth, or did Ruth propose marriage to Boaz through her actions? The lively debate as to who initiated this visit leads naturally into a discussion about gender roles. Typically, in my classes, fewer students vote for Boaz as the initiator (he is likely quite drunk and asleep), and so I ask how this affects his gender role in the impending marriage. Is Boaz viewed as passive in this text? Do the women in the text (Ruth or Naomi) have agency?

5 If using this strategy online, an instructor using Zoom could place the students into break-out rooms for the brief group discussions.

6 For a resource engaging these issues in the book of Ruth, see Stephanie Day Powell (2019).

Why It Is Effective

Beginning with current topics such as feminism encourages students to talk about a political topic they have heard of and have considered previously. Discussing feminism before opening the biblical text allows students to think about this definition without the previously conceived ideas they might have about the Bible and gender, or about the book of Ruth. Creative exercises, such as depicting Ruth as a graphic novel, invite students to read the text closely and inspire artistic students to be involved directly in class discussions. Videos such as the Bechdel test bring the biblical text into a modern context and encourage the students to consider the media they imbibe in their daily or weekly life. Small group discussions in addition to the use of anonymous polling software encourage students to vocalize their own beliefs without the pressure of speaking in front of the whole class. Current political topics such as immigration, sexuality, marriage, gender roles, and feminism can all be examined using this one short, accessible, biblical text.

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THE WABASH CENTER
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TEACHING TACTIC

Seeing the Unseen: Art and Politics in the Biblical Studies Classroom

Sonja Anderson
Carleton College

The context

I created this exercise for an introductory religion course on "Jesus, the Bible, and Christian Beginnings" at a non-sectarian liberal arts college. The course enrolls twenty-five students and is discussion-based and writing-intensive. Students have read Mark, Luke, and select historical-critical, feminist, and liberationist biblical scholarship by the time we do this exercise.

The pedagogical purpose

Discussing the politics of biblical interpretation can be fraught for students whose religious commitments to the Bible may block them from developing the critical distance necessary for academic religious studies. This exercise uses visual analysis to bring politics—social arrangements of power based on gender, race, class, etc.—into the biblical text and into the classroom. It also shows students how much they can notice when they slow down, helps students review biblical texts already read, and sparks a discussion of hermeneutics and the ethics of interpretation.

Description of the strategy

I project Diego Velázquez's seventeenth-century painting *Kitchen Maid with Supper at Emmaus*.[1] Students spend three minutes in silence looking at the painting. Most finish after just one minute, glance around the room, and sheepishly resume looking. They then spend two minutes writing down what they saw before turning to a neighbor and asking, "What did you see?" and, "What do you think this painting is depicting?"

Students share their answers with the class, and a consensus usually develops that the painting is of the Last Supper, with an unnamed dishwasher listening in. I then reveal its title and ask someone to read out the relevant passage: Luke 24:13–35. This text describes a resurrected Jesus whom the disciples meet on the road but don't recognize until he sits down and breaks bread with them—at which point he vanishes from their sight. Luke's story is about recognition and misrecognition, especially as mediated through sound and hearing, appearance and sight. Unlike Velázquez, Luke mentions no women (or skin color).

I ask students how the title—Supper at Emmaus versus Last Supper—changes their interpretation of the painting. Perhaps, as Poet Laureate Natasha Tretheway suggests,[2] the kitchen maid isn't just eavesdropping but is actually recognizing a voice she's heard before, at the Last Supper, where she was also present but unseen by others (Tretheway, *Thrall*, 2012 Houghton Mifflin Harcourt). I ask students if they think this is a legitimate interpretive move. May one "read into" a text characters and viewpoints that are "not there"? How might historical critics, feminist critics, and liberation theologians answer?

Why it is effective

This exercise sidesteps students' religious commitments by analyzing an image rather than the Bible itself. Through visual analysis, students (including those whose reading skills are weaker) experience firsthand how meaning is produced. Through the juxtaposition of image and text, students see how little information a text actually conveys and how much must be supplied—consciously or unconsciously—by the reader.

1 https://www.nationalgallery.ie/art-and-artists/highlights-collection/kitchen-maid-supper-emmaus-diego-velazquez-1599-1660.

2 https://poets.org/poem/kitchen-maid-supper-emmaus-or-mulata.

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TEACHING TACTIC

"Town Hall Meeting" on the Bible in Contemporary Issues

Chan Sok Park
The College of Wooster

The context

This exercise is designed for an undergraduate upper-level, seminar-based course (with approximately twenty students) on the use and misuse of the Bible in contemporary contentious issues in a small liberal arts college context.

The pedagogical purpose

Students cultivate more informed and sympathetic views of the use of different biblical interpretations in contested contemporary issues, becoming active "co-constructors" of class learning by sharing their research with their peers.

Description of the strategy

Early in the semester, I introduce the idea of the "town hall meeting." I divide the class into groups of three to four students to select, research, and write a report on a controversial contemporary issue for which a range of interpretations of biblical texts have played authoritative roles in both academic and popular debates. Possible topics include: religious violence, economic justice, gender and human sexuality, ecology and environmentalism, immigration and refugee, race and racism, and slavery and modern human trafficking. The goal of the written report (approximately ten pages, properly cited), which will be shared with the entire class prior to the debate, is to identify the main issues at stake and a spectrum of different positions on the topic, and to examine how pertinent biblical texts have informed the debate over the issue in one way or another.

In the second half of the semester, each group takes a fifty-minute class session to host their town hall meeting. Each group member gives an opening statement to succinctly introduce a pre-assigned position on the issue. (Note that each member must stay "in character" throughout the debate regardless of their own positions on the topic.) Then the floor is opened to questions and comments from the rest of the class (who have read the group's report in advance). After the debate, we debrief: panelists reflect upon what they learned from arguing for particular positions on the topic, especially when different from their own; the rest of the class provides constructive feedback to the group. Both the written report and the town hall debate are graded on (1) subject knowledge; (2) structure and creativity in presentation; and (3) teamwork and individual contribution. Grades are typically assigned to the entire group with the exception of individual member's absences or poor participation.

Why it is effective

This activity enhances students' interest in, and comprehension of, their chosen topic through active learning and inductive pedagogy. Rather than passively listening to lectures on hermeneutical principles and the use of the Bible in ethical discourses and case studies, students take the initiative to research a specific problem or issue of interest to them, and discover for themselves the need for additional resources to better understand what is at stake in a given case. In order to be attentive to potential challenges of inductive pedagogy I periodically monitor each group's progress in the preparatory phase.

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BOOK REVIEW

Theologians and Philosophers Using Social Media: Advice, Tips, and Testimonials

Thomas Jay Oord, *editor*

San Diego, CA: SacraSage Press, 2017
(447 pages, ISBN 978-0-578-19399-1, $29.95)

Reviewed By

Jonathan C. Roach
Stratham Community Church, Stratham, New Hampshire

This massive edited volume contains ninety-one essays from philosophers and theologians around the world and explores how they use social media and technology. The volume contains an amazing lineup of authors who represent a wide array of disciplines from Biblical studies to systematic theology as well as various faith perspectives and approaches. They range from the well-known theological and philosophical superstars, Richard Rohr, Miguel De La Torre, Kwok Pui Lan, and Amos Young, to recent graduates, and nearly everyone else in between.

The concept of social media is used in its broadest sense in this volume. It refers not only to Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube-type platforms but also to blogs, apps, personal websites, podcasts, online journals, webinars, online education platforms, and specific web-based products and sites. The editor, Thomas Jay Oord, explains that "social media now plays a key role in generating ideas, networking, crowd-sourcing, private or classroom discussions, research, project publicity, personal branding, journaling, event organizing, and more. Some use their presence on social media to generate speaking or writing opportunities. Others do ministry, pursue activism, or create digital content in ways previously unimagined" (3).

Oord argues that he "conceived of this book as a way for contributors to reflect on their practices and theories and as a source of advice on how thought [sic] leaders use social media and technology collectively" (4). He asked the contributors to respond to six questions in their essays and left it up to them whether to understand these questions as general guidelines or specific requests. The questions, which he lists on page four, are broadly framed what, how, and why questions that deal with subjects including platforms, approaches, insights, time management, and recommendations.

The 432 pages, after the editor's Introduction, contain hundreds of excellent insights and recommendations from the contributors that provide a window into the usage and impact of social media in this day and age. In general, the essays are well-written, insightful, and thought provoking. The content encourages theologians and philosophers to reflect upon their usage of these platforms and consider both their message and their medium. As Deirdre Good writes, "social media has changed our world. In terms of scholarship and teaching, we are limited only by what [we] can imagine would enhance pedagogy or what we can actually bring about" (161). From the academic pursuit of high-quality online teaching to Nathan Hamm's quest to do good theology in 140 characters (188), this volume has something about nearly everything technological in the philosophical and theological worlds.

The vision and scope of this volume is outstanding; unfortunately, it reads more like raw data than a polished well-edited tome. The contributors provide rich content, but much of the work of interpreting this volume is left to the reader. It suffers from a lack of organization and editorial interpretation. Rather than grouping the essays into sections that share common perspectives or explore similar issues, the essays are simply presented in alphabetical order. This challenges the readers to make sense and draw connections between the various themes and styles of the various authors. In this volume, it is hard to see the trees for the forest. The powerful lessons are hidden because this book lacks a strong editorial voice to guide and mentor the reader through these mazes of ideas and complex realities. This volume needs an expanded introduction, periodic editorial interpretation to draw out vital insights and connect ideas, and an epilogue where the editor empowers readers to draw conclusions and challenges them to reflect upon their practices and approaches.

Despite these weaknesses and although this content will become dated quickly, this is a valuable text. It is a vital subject for recent graduates who will be entering teaching or ministry and will help them prepare for their teaching and ministerial methods as well as empower them to fully consider their use of social media—whether a plaything or an important tool. Also, mid-career and even elders in these fields will benefit from reflecting upon these subjects through the lenses of their peers. This volume might be hard to digest, but it is an important subject, and this is data worth considering.

THE WABASH CENTER JOURNAL ON TEACHING

BOOK REVIEW

Spirituality, Community, and Race Consciousness in Adult Higher Education: Breaking the Cycle of Racialization

Timothy Paul Westbrook

New York, NY: Routledge, 2017
(xvi + 158 pages, ISBN 978-1-138-65536-2, $140.00)

Reviewed By

Sunder John Boopalan

Independent Scholar

Evidence of Timothy Paul Westbrook's dependence on insights from critical race studies gives him three starting points that influence the trajectory of the book. First, he agrees that much of liberalism does not have a mechanism for ushering in the changes that anti-racism measures necessitate (17). This allows Westbrook to realistically approach the topic of racism. Second, describing his own social location as being informed by an experience of "whiteness from a majority position" (xii), he sets a model for white academics, educators, and administrators interested in the "what can I do?" question. This model, driven by research and data, is important for white-majority decision makers at predominantly white institutions. Third, Westbrook's book, by focusing on faith-based schools, allows the work to speak to themes of spirituality and community in conversation with race.

Observing that "higher education is not immune to the effects of racialization" (1), Westbrook cautions readers about the reality of "resegregation" and "the lack of interracial learning" (4). In making these observations, Westbrook highlights what bell hooks (110) and other commentators have argued regarding racism: racialized thinking and action are permanent and anti-racism efforts, therefore, need to be permanent as well.

Using critical race theory thus enables Westbrook to bring an almost ethical force to the discussion. In doing so, Westbrook weds this ethical force with theological principles. In particular, Westbrook compares theological principles of *Imago Dei* with Critical Race Theory tenets to note points of alignment. Making these connections is helpful for educators in Christian institutions of higher learning.

Students who choose faith-based schools over others do so because their faith commitments matter to them. Generating discussion on the "image of God" theme, the book allows readers to see readily available connections between their faith commitments and the necessary interventions highlighted by critical race theory.

After establishing points of connection between normative theological content and critical race theory, the book meanders through five themes in five chapters, addressing goals for education, adult learning conditions, support systems, faith, and race. Each chapter offers many examples to illustrate the theme in question followed by a critical analysis. In chapter six, analyzing adult learning conditions, for instance, Westbrook notes how his data reveal that students in the study have "responsibilities outside of school" (87). He builds on this to emphasize that the solution, then, is not merely creative scheduling but rather having the will to create sympathetic conditions and support systems to enable such adult learning (94).

Westbrook's book brings an ethical force to the discussion on racism in institutions of higher learning. Educators working within majority-white contexts interested in addressing and redressing the consequences of racialization will do well to engage with this text.

THE WABASH CENTER JOURNAL ON TEACHING

BOOK REVIEW

Online Teaching at Its Best: Merging Instructional Design with Teaching and Learning Research

Linda B. Nilson and Ludwika A. Goodson

San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2018
(xvii + 246 pages, ISBN 9781119242291, $46.00)

Reviewed By

Allison L. Norton
Hartford Seminary

Linda Nilson (Director Emerita of the Office of Teaching Effectiveness Innovation at Clemson University) and Ludwika Goodson (Associate Director of the Center for Enhancement of Teaching and Learning at Purdue University Fort Wayne) are experienced educators and authors who created this research-based guide to prepare faculty for online teaching. While online educational offerings have expanded rapidly at many institutions, faculty professional development in online education has often lagged behind. This practical text contributes to the wider discourse on online education by integrating research on teaching and learning from learning theory, cognitive psychology, and instructional design. The authors argue that while most publications about online instruction are skewed toward the use of technology without integrating learning theory, "good teaching actually transcends the environment" (202). As a result, the book outlines specific ways in which faculty can transfer research-driven teaching practices to the creation of online courses.

After providing a review of the research literature concerning effective teaching practices, chapters 2-7 address a specific practice and how faculty can incorporate the concept into online teaching. These principles will be familiar to faculty with even a basic knowledge of teaching and pedagogy literature, including practices such as "Setting Significant Outcomes" (chapter 2) and "Designing a Coherent Course" (chapter 3). Chapter 5 tackles the topic of motivation. The authors provide examples for capturing student attention, ensuring relevance, fostering social belonging, and encouraging students to set and achieve goals. Chapter 6 focuses on interaction. It shows how meaningful student-instructor, student-content, student-student, and student-technology interactions can be cultivated in an online environment. Finally, a technical chapter on universal design and accessibility (chapter 7) provides helpful guidelines for course design and material preparation to overcome obstacles to accessible content.

Each chapter includes extensive interaction with existing literature, making the book a good resource for additional reading. However, this orientation limits the space in each chapter for practical examples and explicit connections to online education. Few of the specific examples for implementing the principles will be applicable to instructors in religious studies or theology, but the general suggestions will inspire instructors to use deliberate strategies to make their online teaching equal to, or even greater than, their teaching in the classroom environment.

There will likely be a variety of responses to the book. Faculty newer to online teaching, instructional design, and cognitive psychology will discover principles that not only support and inspire quality online education, but also enhance student learning in classroom settings. More experienced faculty may want to see more incorporation of the larger humanistic narratives around what it means to learn. Additionally, instructors in contexts that prioritize teaching for a multi-faith and multicultural world would benefit from integrating perspectives on student and instructor positionality and pedagogies that support culturally diverse and racially just pedagogies with this book's practical orientation.

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BOOK REVIEW

Teaching Islamic Studies in the Age of ISIS, Islamophobia, and the Internet

Courtney M. Dorroll, *editor*

Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2019
(xiii + 238 pages, ISBN 978-0-253-03980-4, $60.00)

Reviewed By

Hussein Rashid

Independent Scholar, NY

The title of this volume comes from the title of a talk by Richard Martin at Wofford College, where Courtney Dorroll, the editor, is based. As it is used by the authors of the book, it is meant to reflect on teaching students who come into classes on Islam informed by the world around them. It is an interesting premise, but is not clearly articulated across the chapters. One of the strengths of the volume is that many of the chapters provide thoughtful engagement with how to teach about Muslims in ways that transcend the political moment the title references. They are examples of good pedagogy in the field of religious studies, as it is applied to Islamic studies.

The volume is split into three sections. The first is titled "Approaches and Theories," although chapters throughout the book address approaches and theories. A chapter by Courtney M. Dorroll, Kimberly Hall, and Doaa Baumi opens the section with a discussion of a virtual exchange between a school in the southern United States and Al-Azhar in Cairo. It is theoretically informed and offers a clear articulation of how the course is scaffolded in response to the theory. In structuring courses that rely on internet exchanges, instructors need to be mindful of students' privacy and safety. They need to inform students of the risk of participating in public, and most likely surveilled, forums. While this caveat is outside the scope of the chapter, it is an important note for those considering similar exercises.

Manuela Ceballos's chapter looks at the thought of twelfth-century Muslim thinker Al-Ghazali and questions of aesthetics and education. One of the highlights of her chapter is her engagement with the aesthetics of anti-Muslim rhetoric, deepening an already rich argument. Other chapters in this section offer detailed examples of ways to think about the classroom experience, including William Hutchins's chapter on the use of texts in translation.

The second section is focused on "Islamophobia and Violence." Laila Moustafa's chapter lays the theoretical groundwork for team teaching courses that address Islam and violence. Nathan French gives a detailed case study on comparing justifications for violence originating from the United States and Al-Qa'ida. It is a strong activity, but a little more context would be helpful. I am not sure that I could teach this case study as a Muslim male. Todd Green's chapter on teaching Islamophobia draws an important distinction between the study of Islamophobia and the study of Islam. He traces the rise of the former discipline and reflects on how it impacts teaching.

The last section of the book, "Applications," focuses more on the practice of teaching than the other sections do. Sabahat Adil's chapter interrogates how to teach the past in the context of the present. There are wonderful provocations in this chapter, and she would have benefited from more space to offer more of her thinking on each point she raises. Kecia Ali offers a reflection on teaching Islamic Law and the thought that goes into creating an upper-level class, particularly when not everyone has the same training. In his chapter, Phill Dorroll offers a way to preempt student questions that are informed by the environment they are in. It is a powerful teaching process that recognizes where students are without validating incorrect information. The final essay in the section, written by Shehnaz Haqqani, is a highlight of the volume. She deftly weaves together engagement with bell hooks, the practice of teaching, and resources that can be used at every point. Her work, as she suggests at the beginning of the chapter, is not just about Islam, but is broader in scope.

This volume has many strong chapters and pushes readers to think about how to structure their classroom experiences. Many of the authors hint at ideas of religious literacy, but none directly reference the work of scholars like Diane Moore or Stephen Prothero. There are few mentions of engaging with the scholarship of teaching and learning in these essays. Overall, the volume should be read by those interested in how Islam is taught in higher education.

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BOOK REVIEW

Achieving Equity and Quality in Higher Education: Global Perspectives in an Era of Widening Participation

Mahsood Shah and Jade McKay, *editors*

Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018
(xxxiv + 356 pages, ISBN 978-3-319-78315-4, $38.00)

Reviewed By

Katherine Cronin Daley

University of Georgia

University enrollments have skyrocketed over the last forty years. For example, University enrollments in Chile, which numbered 175,000 in 1983, exploded to more than 1.2 million by 2015 (174). South African HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) noted a 46 percent increase in enrollment from 2000 to 2008 (243). This expansion of access to tertiary education has changed the educational landscape in considerable ways and has provided unprecedented opportunity for those from lower socioeconomic strata. This fourth volume in the *Palgrave Studies in Excellence and Equity in Global Education* series explores the impact of policies and programs implemented within institutions of higher education to widen access to and facilitate participation by non-traditional students around the globe. Spanning nine countries, everywhere from Turkey to Australia, this volume explores a wide range of programs and policies with similar goals of reform.

The intentions of these HE (Higher Education) programs and policies might be consistent across the globe (widening access and participation especially among underrepresented groups) yet, the context of each case plays a deciding factor in how these programs are implemented. The existing structures of HE in each country or province also profoundly shape how these programs work. For example, the quota policy implemented in Brazil's federally-funded institutions reflects the country's efforts to lessen the significant racial and class divide still prevalent there. Race is also a critical variable in South African HEIs. However, the demand for spots in reputable programs in South African HEIs (89,000 applications for 7,000 spots) is exceptionally high while thousands of spots in private universities in Brazil end up vacant due, in part, to the quota policy mentioned above (244, 221). While both countries are hoping to construct more equitable societies by widening access to nontraditional students and both are dealing with unique, highly charged histories of racial politics, there are many ways in which they differ.

If these case studies demonstrate such discrete situations, what aid can a volume investigating the varied approaches in multiple different locales provide? While each location demands attention be given to the unique social, political, racial, and cultural contexts of their programs, the problems these equity programs encounter are remarkably similar (political resistance, retention, cost of remedial or developmental programs, ambiguous markers of success, class discrimination in the form of vague terminology, and so forth). Wisdom can be gleaned from such studies, despite the idiosyncrasies of their contexts.

Some with vested interests in HEIs fear that widening access means lowering academic standards. Many responding scholars in this volume question the motivation behind such fears as well as the vague terminology deployed in service of these fears. Southgate, Grimes, and Cox, in their chapter on high status professions, explore how vague terms like "quality" and "polish" act as "middle-class proxies" in the gatekeeping of high status programs and professions (medicine, law, and so forth) (301). A number of the contributing authors also challenge the myth of meritocracy, the class hierarchy reflected in access to the most prestigious HEIs, and the numerous hurdles nontraditional students encounter just to get access to selective medical programs.

Considerable attention is also given to the issue of cost of tertiary education. Again, there are no easy answers or quick fixes to be found here. If cost is a deterrent to students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, we might assume that Scotland's free-tuition would be a panacea to all the access ills. However, research shows that "the greatest beneficiaries of free tuition" are those from more advantaged backgrounds (269).

This volume provides much needed context for anyone invested in higher education (staff, faculty, lobbyists, politicians, nonprofits, and anyone committed to equity in education, and social justice). These studies demonstrate that while widening access is a first necessary step towards equity in HEIs, it has proved to not be sufficient.

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BOOK REVIEW

Grounding Education in the Environmental Humanities: Exploring Place-Based Pedagogies in the South

Lucas F. Johnston and Dave Aftandilian, *editors*

New York, NY: Routledge, 2019
(ix + 214 pages, ISBN 978-1-138-54440-6, $140.00)

Reviewed By

Melinda Krokus

Marywood University

On a spring break service-learning trip to El Paso, Texas in 2015, my students were asked by a community organizer, "How do you want to occupy your space in this world?" The essays in this volume, the result of a series of workshops held from 2013 to 2016, provide a pedagogical first step in answering that question by providing viable place-based learning strategies that make the connections between local and global environmental realities palpable while honing the skills necessary for civic engagement. Focused on the South, the authors do ground their research in theory and method so that it is easily transferrable to other landscapes.

The volume is informed by a critical pedagogy of place that extends the "South" beyond white narratives centered on the eleven Confederate States of the American Civil War toward bioregions that encompass the multicultural realities of the Native Americans, Africans, Latinxs, and Asians who have also inhabited its landscape. Rooted in the humanities, e.g. literature, public history, archaeology, religious studies, and theology, these place-based pedagogies also provide a dimension of reconciliation and healing for the region by immersing students in actual, unpredictable, deeply interdependent human and nonhuman lives from Texas to Kentucky and North Carolina to Florida.

The volume is divided into four parts. Part One, "Place, Theology, and Practice," focuses primarily on Christian traditions of nature, place, and sacramental practice, with one chapter including perspective-changing Native American elements. These chapters include detailed assignments using mindfulness and digital storytelling as tools for deep learning. Part Two, "Engaging with Community Through Place," addresses a shared theme of decolonizing American history by affording university students opportunities to be in dialogue with local Native and African American communities on their own ground. This section also offers helpful models with which to integrate sustainability and civic engagement at the institutional, programmatic, and course level. Part Three, "Wounded Places, Healing Places," centers on those places and people who are systemically ignored and actively marginalized, providing powerful examples of transformative community projects that cross boundaries of pollution and pain. Part Four, "Assessing, Concluding, Moving Forward," while perhaps the weakest section, does offer flexible guidelines and general principles for place-based courses.

A discerning reflexivity informs the authors' pedagogical suggestions and choices about course design, assignments, and assessment. The chapters designated "Field Trip" in each section are particularly compelling as they give a rich ecological, archaeological, and ethnographic texture to the South through pedagogies that guide students not only to stand in and empathize with its thickly woven history, but also to be vulnerable to and touched by it. These essays contain a variety of practical ways to explore how to "occupy one's space in this world" in full relationship with place, be that El Paso's Thunderbird formation, Winston-Salem's prisoner re-entry program, or a white supremacist rally in Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

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BOOK REVIEW

Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice, Third Edition

Geneva Gay
New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2018
(xxvii + 350 pages, ISBN 978-0-8077-5876-2, $36.95)

Reviewed By

Carolyn B. Helsel
Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary

Geneva Gay's book, now in its third edition, demonstrates the rich resources available for positively integrating cultural diversity in the classroom. Essentially a textbook for college or masters-level students preparing to teach in the K-12 system, this book offers to scholars in religious fields an in-depth review of the literature concerning the challenges of our current educational models, as well as constructive suggestions for changes teachers can make in their own classrooms. Each chapter is full of references to additional sources, laying out an argument for the importance of culturally-responsive teaching in conversation with theorists and educators from the past century. Beginning with the assertion that the PreK-12 educational system as it exists now is inequitable, particularly for children of color, Gay demolishes the deficit-based models of achievement remediation, instead arguing for a more holistic appreciation for the gifts and strengths children from diverse cultural backgrounds bring to the classroom environment and how teachers can better prepare to act in culturally-responsive ways.

Awareness of cultural diversity and good intentions are insufficient, Gay asserts, pointing readers towards a better way: a success story of student achievement that focuses on cultural-responsiveness. Such culturally-responsive teaching emphasizes caring, communication, curriculum, and culturally-congruent learning styles. Gay writes that caring is the "ideological grounding" of such teaching, in that students learn more and succeed more readily when they are validated and cared for, given high expectations and the supports necessary to build on their strengths (203). While caring may appear obvious, Gay reveals how attentive caring actually is learned and requires practice; the conclusion of chapter three provides lists of ways teachers can cultivate and practice such caring (86-88).

The chapter on communication illuminates the cultural context of language, and how our ways of thinking, speaking, and writing often depend upon the expectations of our ethnic communities. Two examples of communication structures include topic-centered and topic-associative. Gay shows how traditional educational models rely on European American preferences for communication via topic-centered approaches, while many children from other cultural contexts may have grown up valuing different communication skills. The performative and aesthetic aspects that accompany topic-associative modes of communication are often preferred in Latin American and African American discursive contexts, as opposed to the topic-centered approach favored by European Americans which relies on linear logic.

Culturally Responsive Teaching includes specific examples of teachers and educational programs that successfully model this kind of teaching, giving readers a clear picture of what working towards a more equitable learning environment might entail. Among the helpful resources included in the book is a list of songs that demonstrate different artists' renditions of social justice, as well as a list of nearly one hundred authors of color who have written books for children and adolescents. Principles for learning (such as those included on page 204) and suggestions for how teachers can sustain their own growth towards culturally responsive teaching (on pages 244-248), are other examples of the invaluable resources this book provides teachers of today's increasingly diverse classrooms, including those of us teaching in seminaries and university settings.

THE WABASH CENTER JOURNAL ON TEACHING

BOOK REVIEW

Promoting Ethnic Diversity and Multiculturalism in Higher Education

Barbara Blummer, Jeffrey M. Kenton, and Michael Wiatrowski, *editors*

Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2018
(309 pages, ISBN 9781522540984, $119.75)

Reviewed By

Sin Guanci

The Ohio State University

Multiculturalism, diversity, and inclusion are popular topics in the field of education, especially in higher educational contexts. Discussions about the best ways to create and sustain an atmosphere of diversity and multicultural appreciation are currently taking place at universities around the globe, particularly in North America. *Promoting Ethnic Diversity and Multiculturalism in Higher Education* joins the ranks of scholarship that address these discussions.

The editors, Blummer, Kenton, and Wiatrowski, have compiled a collection of articles and studies aimed at examining how learning and culture are connected, for both students and faculty. The book upholds the idea that when there is intentional support for multiculturalism, and for students of minoritized identities, everyone benefits. The book is an excellent resource and the topics covered include: pedagogical methodologies, the use of technology to enhance learning, diverse learning strategies, instructor feedback, training for faculty, student experiences with discrimination, educational policy, academic librarians, and cross-cultural connections.

The contributors represent a diverse array of scholars, including librarians, professors, policy makers, educational administrators, and researchers. They also represent a variety of languages and countries, including the United States, Canada, France, and Romania. Their varied expertise and perspectives offer a plethora of suggestions for institutions wishing to better support multiculturalism.

Scholarship regarding diversity and inclusion in American education often centers around the racial and ethnic diversity of specifically American students without considering the experiences of international students. This book is quite unusual and refreshing, in that more than half of the chapters are dedicated to exploring the experiences of international students or students studying at higher education institutes in countries that are not their nation of origin. Chapter 1 focuses on active learning strategies that instructors can employ to better engage their international students. Chapters 2 and 3 focus on English language learning and include strategies for both students and professors. Chapter 5 offers an in-depth look at one midwestern university's program for helping international students adapt to life in America.

In addition to the heavy focus on international student experiences, there are more universal topics regarding multiculturalism covered in other chapters, such as microaggressions and discrimination faced by students and faculty (chapters 8 and 9), approaches to training faculty and staff for multicultural inclusion (chapters 7 and 12), and inclusion approaches that have been taken in Canada (chapters 10 and 11).

Overall, this book adds new and exciting perspectives to the scholarship surrounding multicultural inclusion in higher education. Its focus on the multiculturalism of and support for international students, in particular, is unique and outstanding, because it is a part of diversity that can be overlooked by university officials.

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BOOK REVIEW

Cultivating Diverse Online Classrooms through Effective Instructional Design

Karen L. Milheim, *editor*

Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2017
(355 pages, ISBN 1522531203, $156.00)

Reviewed By

L. Roxanne Russell
Emory University, Candler School of Theology

The title of this book is very promising. Those designing and facilitating in online classrooms know the importance of cultivating diversity in this space and could benefit from sound advice and evidence-based approaches. This is particularly true in theological and religious classrooms where faculty often grapple with personal and sensitive topics of identity and how we make meaning in the world. Hence, careful attention to cultural dynamics is warranted.

Unfortunately, much of the literature in this area relies on potentially reductive characterizations of culture such as categorized personality traits. These often approach cultural diversity as something that needs to be accommodated in particular groups of people rather than acknowledging the impact of culture across all participants in a learning experience and making room for individual differences. Only a few chapters in this collection buck this trend. Reliance on convenience samples—the researcher's own classes and contexts—is another common shortcoming of research on culture in instructional design. In this collection, only one third of the articles are research studies and all of these rely on convenience samples.

Yet, if new to the topic of considering diversity and culture in instructional design and online learning, a reader will learn common vocabulary in this field, be introduced to commonly used theoretical frameworks, and see a useful range of perspectives on this topic. The book has fourteen chapters divided into four sections: (1) Culturally Responsive Instructional Design; (2) Supporting Student Culture and Diversity; (3) Global eLearning; and (4) Instructional Design Models, Frameworks, and Research. The first two sections are probably the most useful for faculty and academic support staff in theology and religion.

Two chapters are worth highlighting in these sections: "Exploring Social Presence in the Culturally Diverse Classroom" by Debra K. Smith and "Social Presence and Cultural Identity: Exploring Culturally Responsive Instructional Design in the Online Environment" by Bethany Simunich and Amy M. Grincewicz. Both of these articles use social presence to frame their explorations of cultural dynamics and offer helpful cross-referencing of available models and practical course design and facilitation advice. They remind us to ask the most pertinent question: Is the student perceived as a real person? Theological faculty could also benefit from strategies and ideas to create living learning communities in the article "Bridging the Social, Academic, and Cultural Divide for International Students: Using Peer-to-Peer Support Strategies Online" by Kimberly Palermo-Kielb and Christy Fraenza.

As Karen Milheim, the editor, reveals by gathering such a broad selection of resources, our responsibility to students in creating diverse and inclusive classrooms ranges from how one models value systems in a course to how one carries out some of the most tedious tasks such as translation. Throughout this volume, theological educators will find value in the literature reviews, theoretical frameworks, and classroom strategies that help us understand the slippery construct of culture as it functions in online classrooms.

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BOOK REVIEW

Rape Culture on Campus

Meredith Minister

New York, NY: Lexington Books, 2018
(xxi + 149, ISBN 978-1-4985-6514-1, $90.00)

Reviewed By

Jaime Clark-Soles
Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University

While speaking directly into an undergraduate university context, this book should be required reading for anyone involved in education at any level. Employing scholarship from various fields such as pedagogical, feminist, womanist, queer, and disability theory, Minister provides an analysis of where we are with respect to rape culture in America, where we should be aiming to go based on ethical considerations, and how we might get there by means of specific practices in our classrooms.

Minister's book is especially pertinent for those who teach in the field of religion since "religious texts and traditions both perpetuate and destabilize rape culture" (xvi). It contains an introduction, three main parts that each include two chapters, and a conclusion. Minister moves from the general to the specific. That is, Part I, "Untying the Knot of Rape Culture," situates the reader in the culture at large, addressing the relationships between purity culture, violence, and policing. At the risk of oversimplifying her argument for the sake of this brief review, Minister highlights the ways that purity culture is associated with rape culture. Seemingly the domain of Protestant evangelicalism, even the most secular American has imbibed and assumes the terms of purity culture in which a (white) woman's virtue is tied to pristine virginity that is to be protected (by a hypermasculine, even militarized, police force) as it represents hearth and home. So important is this value to the state that it is heavily policed, even on college campuses. "The goal of rape culture is social conformity to the patriarchal order" (31). Institutions (both educational and religious) benefit from that order and their policing strategies propagate it. The problem of rape is reduced to protecting the chastity of individual (white, straight, nondisabled) women from would-be individual rapists rather than situating the problem in a larger context and assessing the ways the institution perpetuates the principles of rape culture even while purportedly combating it.

Part II (Rape on Campus) moves the conversation onto the college campus and interrogates the ways both institutional structures as well as campus programs and policies might contribute to, rather than solve, the structures that perpetuate rape culture. But this section also starts to offer solutions and insist that universities have a distinct opportunity (and call) "to build an alternative world in which rape is not an everyday occurrence" (49). Universities have histories that are built on patriarchal power structures and binary assumptions about gender and other cultural assumptions that may deserve to be questioned as part of the student's education at said institution. Policies and programs are certainly important, but they tend to be problematic in at least two ways: first, they assume that sexual violence is the problem of an individual, not a society or a culture. Second, they focus on intervention at too late a time—the moment of attack or just before. I love this concluding quote to the book:

> The classroom . . . as the soft flesh of the institution, has the potential to transform and challenge rape culture. Rather than focus educational efforts on the moment of violence, including education about consent and bystander intervention, we need to teach broad cultural awareness about the diverse manifestations of rape culture. This broad cultural awareness has the potential to challenge rape culture at its roots rather than at its margins. (133)

How does one challenge rape culture at its roots, one might ask? Consistently, emphatically, and intentionally in the real-life setting of the classroom, which is the subject of Part III.

Part III (Sexual Violence and the Classroom) brings to fruition all of the careful work of Parts I and II like a crescendo. Minister has so compellingly built her case from the start that Part III rewards the engaged teacher immensely. Here it all comes together in such a smart, inspiring, practical way that one actually gets excited about the real effect that her course could have on students and the world they are called to serve or at least engage. She discusses trigger warnings; invites the teacher into "critical pedagogy"; challenges and shows us how to design exercises that foster cultural imagination rather than personal imagination; and suggests practical ways to turn our classrooms "outward." She argues for the transformational potential of experiential, engaged learning done well (while also providing examples of it done poorly) and guides us through questions about how we might assess such assignments:

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> If we are no longer assessing student understanding of reified knowledge, what are we assessing? In evaluating learning that does not perpetuate rape culture, we must measure cultural analysis and forms of knowledge that prioritize the value of understanding social issues from multiple perspectives." (127)

Minister's riveting, brilliant presentation is simultaneously sobering and inspiring; sobering because she intrepidly and incisively diagnoses what ails us as a society (of which we and our institutions are inescapably a part) but also inspiring because she firmly believes in and models the ways that classrooms, as the "soft flesh" of the university, can transform society. Honestly, between her analysis and her concrete, achievable strategies related to how we shape our classes in terms of both content and form, she equips us all to participate immediately and efficaciously in transformative education, no matter our starting point. She has left us with no excuse for timidity or failure. For that we owe her deep gratitude. This book isn't just another interesting armchair read on pedagogical theory. Rather, it will make you change your syllabus and specific assignments for your courses right away.

Finally, the structure of the book makes it easy to use. At every turn Minister clearly indicates her main points, argues them cogently, and then summarizes them succinctly. There are ample visual cues such as subheadings, italics, and numbered points. Between the notes at the end of each chapter and the general bibliography, Minister provides a wealth of further resources in any area that the reader needs to explore further.

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BOOK REVIEW

Disability in Higher Education: A Social Justice Approach

Nancy J. Evans, Ellen M. Broido, Kirsten R. Brown, and Autumn K. Wilke, *editors*

San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2017
(xxvii + 515 pages, ISBN 978-1-118-01822-4, $45.00)

Reviewed By

David A. Schones

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Disability in Higher Education discusses the historical and theoretical approaches to disability education and considers what a "truly inclusive practice across the range of the collegiate experience might look like" (7). Accordingly, the book highlights institutional policies that impact academic performance and promote the success of disabled students and faculty. It also underscores the importance of disability resource officers and campus administration to disability education. The authors contend that a social-justice approach supports "students with disabilities. . . [by] working to change institutional structures and policies that support oppression of those with disabilities" (74).

The book has four sections. Section one focuses on the foundational conceptualizations of disabilities in higher education and offers a "counternarrative" that centers on the experiences of disabled students (13). The section rejects the medical and social models of disability, replacing them with a social-justice model. Notably, these four chapters address neither classroom instruction nor the field of religious studies. Rather, they outline a new theoretical approach for thinking about disability education generally.

Section two examines student and faculty populations that have disabilities. More specifically, the three chapters identify different groups, such as athletes or adult learners, who have members with disabled identities. Like the first section, these chapters do not stress pedagogical tools. Section two highlights the role of the disability resource office in creating an inclusive campus environment for students and faculty.

Section three discusses practice-oriented approaches to disability education for faculty. These five chapters specifically address issues around physical barriers, classroom instruction, and assistive learning technology. Still, the chapters focus primarily on disability theory rather than pedagogical tools. For instance, chapter ten outlines the features of Universal Design (UD), helpfully listing its eight principles in a table. But the chapter does not provide any practical examples of the implementation of UD in course design or classroom instruction. In this sense, section three is most concerned with "the basic concepts associated with the application of UD to instruction" (285).

Section four again focuses on the disability resource office. It identifies the "core activities" (363) of disability resource practitioners and explains how they help students transition into postsecondary education. While this section offers a robust account of the importance of disability resources, it does not directly relate to faculty or course instruction.

Disability in Higher Education expertly critiques the historical and theoretical approaches to disabilities in higher education and offers an alternative framework grounded in social justice and based on Universal Design. This resource is useful for faculty and disability resource officers working closely with students who have disabilities. The book highlights new theories and policies that relate to disability education. However, for faculty who want to learn more about pedagogical tools or implementing UD in the classroom, *Disability in Higher Education* only discusses the broad theory. In short, this book offers an account of the theories and policies that shape disability education but does not address the practical aspects of inclusive universal course design.

THE WABASH CENTER JOURNAL ON TEACHING

BOOK REVIEW

Islam at Jesuit Colleges and Universities

Aysha Hidayatullah and Erin Brigham, *editors*

San Francisco, CA: University of San Francisco Press, 2016
(74 pages, ISBN 978-1944769130, $12.95)

Reviewed By

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School of Divinity

The product of a 2015 conference on "Islam at U.S. Jesuit Colleges and Universities," this slim volume collects the written remarks of seven participants. In her introduction, Aysha Hidayatullah reveals two of the questions which inspired the event: (1) How did her Islamic studies colleagues at other Jesuit schools view their work in relation to the Jesuit mission of those institutions, and (2) How is the growing engagement with Islam and Muslims impacting Jesuit schools broadly? Speaking to these questions and dozens more, this book will prove a useful touchstone for future conversation concerning its title themes.

In an essay on Jesuit history, mission, and identity, John Borelli describes what he calls "the Ignatian charism for dialogue," particularly interreligious dialogue informed by *Nostra Aetate* and The 34th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus (19). This pairs well with Paul Shore's paper offering "snapshots" from the historical journey of Muslim-Jesuit relations. Citing Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Ibn Rushd, Shore suggests the relationship between science and belief can be a fruitful starting point for conversation between Christians and Muslims.

In his chapter, Patrick Ryan, SJ describes his efforts to promote dialogue and mutual understanding among Muslims, Jews, and Christians at Fordham University and the piece pairs well with Isra Yazicioglu's reflections on teaching Islamic studies for six years at Saint Joseph's University. She expresses her belief in the transformative power of religion and the "immense need for talking about religion in a meaningful way" (29). She contends that the creation of a collaborative atmosphere for this kind of conversation among Muslims and Christians is part of the promise of Jesuit universities.

Martin Nguyen offers a broad essay considering how Muslims might be able to do constructive theology at a Jesuit university, the challenges of teaching about Islam in a post-9/11 world, and the type of classroom activities that foster deeper thinking about Islam and Muslim experience. With respect to the last theme, he describes two engaging activities: one where students design a mosque and another where they must memorize *Al-Fātiḥah*, the opening chapter or *sūrah* of the Qur'an.

Thomas Michel, SJ provides a hopeful essay on the common mission of Christians and Muslims in the modern world as brothers and sisters "joined by God for God's own purpose." He writes, "That purpose is that we Muslims and Christians bear witness together, in our very secular and often self-centered society, to the values that come from God's word . . . compassion, hope, generosity, mercy, and reconciliation in a world that often scoffs at such principles" (57). In the closing chapter on "The Future of Islam at Jesuit Universities," Amir Hussain strikes a similar tone with an appeal to the "language of love." He makes a timely plea, "As Catholics and Muslims, we need to stand with each other . . . to speak out when those in your community malign us, just as we must speak out when those in our community malign you" (70). And this captures much of the spirit of the book as a whole. The reader emerges with a sense that there is much important work to be done in service to a future where Muslims and Christians can be better prepared to have meaningful conversations with each other, learn from each other, and speak up for each other as well.

THE WABASH CENTER JOURNAL ON TEACHING

BOOK REVIEW

Rape Culture and Religious Studies

Rhiannon Graybill, Meredith Minister, and Beatrice Lawrence, *editors*

Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2019
(vii + 207 pages, ISBN 978-1-4985-6284-3, $95.00)

Reviewed By

Barbara Thiede
University of North Carolina Charlotte

Feminist scholarship has explored sexual violence in sacred texts and religious cultures for decades—particularly in biblical realms. The burgeoning field of masculinity studies has named ways in which hegemonic masculinity reinforces male dominance and power in sacred texts and traditions. And yet, as editors Rhiannon Graybill, Meredith Minister, and Beatrice Lawrence note in their introduction to *Rape Culture and Religious Studies*, academic analysis of the intersection of rape culture and religion is relatively uncharted territory. While teachers of Religious Studies regularly engage with class, gender, race, sexuality, and ability, classroom conversations are often detached from the rape culture that surrounds them. The #MeToo movement and the withdrawal of Obama-era guidance documents on Title IX and sexual violence have galvanized a public conversation that has not, the editors suggest, found purchase in religious studies classrooms.

Rape Culture and Religious Studies acknowledges that rape culture and sexualized violence is part and parcel of religious traditions. Survivors are sitting in religious studies classrooms, many of whom belong to religious traditions that promote or, at least, make a home for sexual violence. The editors therefore sought to create a volume that would do more than critique the lack of connectivity between religious studies and rape culture; they hoped to offer readers "real-life pedagogical reflections and tactics" (9).

Indeed, teachers in the field will find provocative material in this volume, which will help them rethink and reframe their course content. While not every essay is as trenchant or ground-breaking as one might hope, many are. Several contributors demonstrate how academic analysis of both ancient and emerging sacred texts can be brought into conversation with rape culture. Their essays explore a range of traditions and a variety of sources—often with innovative results. Can the well-known gang rape of the Levite's concubine in Judges 19 be understood as an ancient version of contemporary non-consensual pornography? Does the popular comic *Priya's Shakti*, a text that reformulates Hindu mythology in the struggle against gender-based violence, invite a critique of existing political structure not in its own pages, but because of the way women have publicly responded to its call to "speak without shame"? How does a layered, step-by-step approach to Deuteronomist texts on genocide, slavery, and rape permit students to name how the Bible justifies violence—even in their time? What might students conclude about the intersections of religious texts and traditions with contemporary rape culture as a result?

Rape Culture and Religious Studies defines and contextualizes key issues critical for both teachers and students. Meredith Minister exposes the ways in which the binary of rape and consensual sex relies on myths of self-control and bodily autonomy, fetishizing verbal communication and ignoring the fact that consent, too, involves power dynamics. Rhiannon Graybill calls for teachers to nuance classroom conversations around harm, to uncover the relationship between race and sexual violence and colonialist visions of women as victims, and to acknowledge the ambiguities and ambivalence introduced by sexual pleasure.

Revealing the sexual violence inherent in religious traditions and offering students ways to name, analyze, and understand how this violence intersects with the rape culture that surrounds them is a pedagogical imperative in our time. *Rape Culture and Religious Studies* makes a significant contribution to that project.

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BOOK REVIEW

Even When No One is Looking: Fundamental Questions of Ethical Education

Jan Habl

Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018
(vii + 137 pages, ISBN 978-1-5326-3036-1, $20.32)

Reviewed By

Angela Cowser
Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary

How can we teach a person to know the good, desire the good, do what is good, and to do it "even when no one is looking"? Is it possible to teach virtue? What are the fundamentals upon which an ethical or moral education stands? Whence does moral or ethical awareness arise? Jan Habl's purpose in writing this book is to shape children and adults who through ethical education have a good reason to behave well (moral knowing), behave well towards others (moral feeling), and behave well alone (moral action).

Habl claims that people are suffering from moral malnutrition, ethical deficits, and a decline in social capital. We disagree about right and wrong. We may even refuse to admit fault or guilt, or transfer blame, especially in politics. This state of affairs is tragic, undesirable, and dangerous (4).

According to Habl, the Enlightenment metanarratives of continual upward human progress and cultural diversity as the solution to cultural differences result in the delusion that right knowledge will produce right action. He turns to Czech philosopher and theologian Jan Amos Comenius [1592-1670], with his focus on "samosvojnost" (human narcissism, selfishness, and self-centeredness) which has alienated us from God and from each other, to puncture this delusion.

The book's central hypotheses are: First, because people are both noble and depraved, lifelong moral education is irreplaceable and helps us become who we should be (4). Second, effective moral educators must teach by disciplined example and must enact their teaching through service to others. Third, ethicists who model a critical openness will help shape people who value freedom, independence, self-control, rational reflection, and competence. Fourth, ethical education should start when children are young, before "ill manners and vice begin to nest." And finally, knowledge, skill, and competence can be used for both good and for evil.

The book's hypotheses invite further questions. Is ethical education just for children? What about ethical education for adults? What happens when the chief institutions charged with teaching ethics are themselves ethically deformed? How do those who have been ethically malformed find teachers who will help them reform?

THE WABASH CENTER JOURNAL ON TEACHING

BOOK REVIEW

Educating About Religious Diversity and Interfaith Engagement: A Handbook for Student Affairs

Kathleen M. Goodman, Mary Ellen Giess, and Eboo Patel, *editors*

Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2019
(xiv + 318 pages, ISBN 978-1-62036-609-7, $35.00)

Reviewed By

Liora Gubkin
California State University, Bakersfield

Interfaith studies as an academic field overlaps both religious studies and theology. With a decade of support from Interfaith Youth Core, this field strives to transform students into interfaith leaders with the capacity for "engaging religious diversity to ameliorate tensions or respond to discrimination as well as to build a healthy, thriving civic space" (159). *Educating About Religious Diversity and Interfaith Engagement: A Handbook for Student Affairs* brings together twenty-nine contributors to provide a resource for student affairs professionals and the faculty who educate them.

The book is organized into five parts, beginning with setting the context (three chapters) and ending with foundational knowledge about various worldviews and traditions (five chapters). In between are chapters on "Teaching Ideas for Student Affairs Faculty" (three chapters); "Strategies and Activities for Student Affairs Practitioners" (three chapters); and "Using Case Studies to Engage with Religious Diversity and Build Interfaith Leadership" (five chapters).

The book is filled with practical resources to support student affairs faculty and staff who want to engage religious diversity. Part Two provides detailed examples of courses, lessons, and activities for integrating religious diversity material into already-established student affairs curriculum or for creating stand-alone student affairs graduate courses focused on worldview diversity. Part Three showcases successful programs including two chapters with brief write-ups submitted by faculty and staff from universities throughout the country. Part Four includes a helpful opening chapter on pedagogical considerations and multiple case studies.

Parts One and Five bookend the practical resources. Some may consider it odd to place "Foundational Knowledge," which contains basic information about several identity worldviews students may bring to campus, at the end of the book. This organizational choice helps undercut the misperception that one must be an expert on a religion before one can engage in religious diversity education. Furthermore, each chapter in Part Five is limited to focus on what a student affairs professional should know to support students. The authors attend to diversity within traditions and the likely numerical and cultural minority status of non-Christian students who are developing their adult identities.

In "Social Justice and Interfaith Cooperation," Eboo Patel and Cassie Meyer examine two approaches to engaging religious diversity. Somewhat controversial for some, they argue for focusing on religious pluralism rather than social justice to build interfaith cooperation. Patel and Meyer acknowledge there is a risk when educators attend primarily to the complexities of students' multifaceted identities without a focus on power dynamics and relative privilege, but they assert the benefit of building relationships across difference is worth the risk. Regardless of where one stands on the issue, this chapter is worth reading for its careful posing of the challenges one faces when religious identities and social justice commitments appear to be in conflict.

Educating About Religious Diversity and Interfaith Engagement: A Handbook for Student Affairs is a valuable resource for Interfaith Leadership education. The wealth of concrete examples and the extensive reference sections that conclude many of the chapters make this an important resource for student affairs professionals and any other educator interested in cultivating Interfaith Leadership on college campuses.

THE WABASH CENTER JOURNAL ON TEACHING

BOOK REVIEW

Building Womanist Coalitions: Writing and Teaching in the Spirit of Love

Gary L. Lemons, *editor*

Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2019
(xi + 246 pages, ISBN 978-0-252-08421-8, $28.00)

Reviewed By

Courtney Pace
Prathia Hall Scholar in Residence of Social Justice History
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As womanist scholarship has blossomed and transformed nearly every liberal arts discipline, many scholars find themselves drawn to womanism and wonder if they can participate in its liberating spirit. The question of who can be a womanist has many different answers, ranging from limiting participation to only Black women all the way to including any who share its values and commitment to liberation for all people.

Gary L. Lemons's volume begins with this very question, necessarily so, to explain why he is an editor of a book on womanism as pedagogical methodology. He details his exposure to womanism and its transformative influence on his life and work. Blessed by AnaLouise Keating and other womanists to pursue editorial leadership of this volume, Lemons offers a moving description of womanism rooted in its historical and early literary beginnings. He emphasizes its grounding in the liberating force of self-love, which is the rejection of oppressive metrics of self in favor of a celebration of Black women's selves. For Lemons, the core of womanist identity is love, for self and for others, which his volume proposes as a pedagogical methodology for the transformative and transgressive classroom.

Building Womanist Coalitions features scholars from a variety of disciplines describing their encounters with common texts—particularly the works of Alice Walker and Audre Lorde, *This Bridge Called My Back* by Gloria Anzaldúa, *Colonize This! Young Women of Color on Today's Feminism* edited by Daisy Hernandez and Bushra Rehman, and *this bridge we call home* edited by Gloria Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating—and how these have shaped them as scholars and teachers. Each contributor offers examples of womanism enacted in their classroom and its impact on students. From poets, thespians, theologians, and ethicists to historians, political scientists, lawyers, and activists, representing significant racial, regional, and age diversity, contributors demonstrate the power of womanist pedagogies in their disciplines and offer hope for its transformative role in human society.

Building Womanist Coalitions is a helpful resource for an instructor interested in better understanding womanism and incorporating womanist readings and or methodologies into the classroom. This book will no doubt encourage readers to dig deeper into womanist bibliographies in general and within their particular disciplines, and it provides concrete examples of womanist pedagogy embodied and practiced in the classroom.

For faculty in religious or theological higher educational settings, this volume consistently engages spirituality as a necessary component of womanism. It presents spirituality as separate from, though not altogether disconnected from, organized religion, and as essential to students' intellectual formation. Some contributors wrestle with the spiritual components of womanism, while others readily embrace its invitation into African and Asian faith practices.

For admirers of womanism who do not identify as womanist, this volume offers conversation partners from a variety of perspectives who share admiration for the transformative nature of womanism and seek to shape their teaching around its wisdom without violating its sacred boundaries. This book gives pro-womanists concrete ideas for sharing womanism with students appropriately and for deepening their own engagement with transnational womanism and its applications.

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BOOK REVIEW

Dynamic Discernment: Reason, Emotion, and Power in Change Leadership

Sarah B. Drummond

Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2019
(xx + 171 pages, ISBN 978-0-8298-2045-4, $18.00)

Reviewed By

Karla L. McGehee
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

Sarah Drummond opens her text with a story that immediately draws readers into the powerful dynamics at play when a community of faith experiences change, controversy, and potential crisis. She weaves brief and pertinent stories throughout her book, encouraging readers to consider their own contextual dynamics with respect to change and how they react and adapt to this change. Drummond's desire is twofold: to challenge leaders to have healthy responses in the midst of change and to create a common vocabulary to define the dynamics of change so that all parties involved can work cooperatively instead of in opposition. The title *Dynamic Discernment* is purposeful. Dynamic intimates movement and engagement within an ever-changing community; discernment conveys that the goal of change is for organizations and communities to more closely resemble what God desires, not what the leader desires.

The book consists of five chapters, with the middle three chapters respectively devoted to the dynamics at work in an organization facing change: reason, emotion, and power. A theoretical concept is outlined in each chapter, which is then connected to a leadership practice. Drummond concludes the chapters with a fictional case study and workshop-style exercise to help the readers relate to and work through the change dynamic within their own organizational context. Throughout the book, the author shares her experiences as a seminary dean when the school transitioned from a freestanding institution to merger with a larger divinity school. She also recounts change experiences within her faith community. Drummond's transparency and skill in relating her own journey of discerning the dynamics of reason, emotion, and power—what she calls "change dynamics"—during significant and, at times, unsettling change lends both credibility and practicality to the discussion.

Her discourse on the three change dynamics is insightful and well-informed. Integral to the dynamic of employing reason during a time of change are visioning, making a time line, and creating an evaluation plan. To guide the reader, Drummond uses John Kotter's stages of change and considers each step in light of a faith-based community. When she turns to the dynamic of emotion, Drummond relies quite heavily on the work of Edwin Friedman, who promoted the "separate-yet-together" emotional mentality. To navigate change in a healthy manner, a leader is to refrain from being enmeshed with others; a leader must know where she "ends and another begins." Finally, the author discusses power, the third change dynamic, by focusing on its correct use, which is to liberate others and not to enact oppression. In a liberating stance, the leader engages in intentional dialogue, creates genuine relationships, and fosters effective community building.

According to Drummond, the twenty-first-century leader is charged with "planning, guiding, and anchoring change." To do this, a leader is to consider the three change dynamics of reason, emotion, and power—considering how each is employed, perceived, and at play throughout the change process.