THE WABASH CENTER
JOURNAL ON TEACHING

Changing Scholarship

Volume 4

Issue 1

March 2023

THE WABASH CENTER JOURNAL ON TEACHING

An open access, digital journal on teaching in religious and theological studies.

Published by The Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion
Hosted by *Atla*

Published online
https://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/journal/

JOURNAL DESCRIPTION

The Wabash Center Journal on Teaching (JoT) is a multimodal publication focused on the scholarship of teaching in the fields of religious and theological studies, in both undergraduate and graduate educational contexts. Each issue is theme-driven and includes various forms of media—such as articles, poetry, visual art, videos of performing art, and music—in service to critical reflection on teaching.

THE WABASH CENTER JOURNAL ON TEACHING

Changing Scholarship

Volume 4 ISSUE 1 MARCH 2023

Publisher's Note....4
Nancy Lynne Westfield, PhD.,

Editor's Note....5
Donald E. Quist, PhD.

Dreams / Indigenous Futuring in the Theological Classroom....6
Anne Carter Walker

Teaching a History that I Never Learned....18
William Yoo

Journals and Journeys Through the Bible: Using Learning Journals in Teaching Biblical Studies....26
Steed Vernyl Davidson

The Mother of Teaching....34
Ralph Basui Watkins

Centering Black Women: Embodied Ethics and Womanist Ethnographic Pedagogy....42
Monique Moultrie

Pornographic Provocations, or Kyles in the Classroom....50
Courtney Alma Bryan

On Entanglement, Eradication, Obstruction, Discomfort, and Vigilance....56
Richard W. Voelz

#ISKOLARStoo (poetry)....62
Rolf R. Nolasco, Jr.

Teaching Can Be Dangerous: Embodied Learning in Carceral Spaces (poetry)....64
Sarah F. Farmer

Broken: A Story of Black Transformation in Search of Thick Love, Or, Loving Black Men in the Religious Studies Classroom....70
Joseph L. Tucker Edmonds

A Lesson in Magic....76
Brian Bantum

bell hooks, Black Feminist Thought, and Black Buddhism: A Tribute....80
(originally published in Journal of World Philosophies)
Carolyn M. Jones Medine

Thriving (Not Just Surviving) for All: Re-envisioning Theological Education....88
Debra Mumford

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

■ **Nancy Lynne Westfield**
The Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion

Does institutional change occur with intention, planning, and strategies? Does change occur by reaction to societal phenomena--by meeting the moment of crisis? Perhaps change is dampened, abated, or calibrated by institutions who can rely upon over-ample endowments?

Some days I find these kinds of questions exciting. Other days, I find these sorts of pursuits exhausting. Every day I find the challenge of change in higher education and theological education to be the hard work for those of us committed to teaching and the improvement of our schools.

We struggle within the religion academy to shatter the illusion that the better/best scholarship flows from institutions which reject change, that remain unchanging. Many colleagues resist change in their basic habits, practices, institutional policies, and infrastructure of teaching and the teaching life. Resistance to change, for so many faculties, is a way of life. The notion that the better/best production of knowledge emanates almost exclusively from the hallowed halls of the oldest and most unchanged educational institutions, with ivy-covered walls and reverence for their own traditions, rituals and rites of passage, is too often unflappable thinking. Yet, our colleagues in Marketing and Communication tell us that photos depicting professorial men wearing corduroy blazers with patched sleeves and smoking pipes while eager young men look-on in anticipation of groundbreaking lectures is no longer the ideal, nor the aspiration, for in-coming classes. What if change to meet the needs of the future learners is the missing or illusive question?

We must discuss the fact that scholarship has already changed, irrevocably. The COVID pandemic, the increasing shrinkage of the population of age-eligible students, the volatility of U.S. economics, the rising disdain for an over-educated workforce, and the growing lack of trained administrators equipped for change management, has brought, and continues to bring, acute change to the enterprise of education.

We in academia are now grappling more than ever with the fundamental aims of higher education and theological education. We may not agree upon a vision for our shared future. However, we hope this issue on changing scholarship will broaden discussions, providing a wider lens, and talking points for reflection, new imagination, and the planning of strategies to share the risk of changing scholarship.

EDITOR'S NOTE

■ **Donald E. Quist**
The Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion

This volume began taking shape in the early months of 2022. I was invited to co-lead an intensive, four-day writing colloquy with one of my friends, Sophfronia Scott. And because she is a brilliant writer, teacher and human being, I agreed. I was then introduced to Dr. Nancy Lynne Westfield and The Wabash Center, and the organization's renewed commitment to changing scholarship. In line with that resolution, the colloquy gathered a group of educators in Religious Studies and Theology with the intention to produce a volume of work that explored the shifting landscapes of their vocation. Sophfronia and I encouraged the authors to lean into their own creativity, artistry and vulnerability. We asked them to reject the false objectivity dominant in academic writing for a more subjective and personal approach, centering and validating their own lived experiences as evidence in support of their theses.

When the colloquy ended, I was invited to continue working with the contributors and stepped into the role of Editorfor the Wabash Center's Journal on Teaching. With the aid, support and expertise of Editing Assistant Rachel Mills, Creative Director Reggie Dupree, Copy and Page Proof Editor Karen Myers, our generous Editorial Board, and the entire Wabash Center staff, this volume--and the compassionate and collaborative process leading to its assembly--serves as reflection of changes in the academy. This issue is a kind of guidepost, signaling pathways to new approaches to scholarship.

Ideally, this issue raises more questions than answers. Hopefully, these diverse pieces appeal to and impact educators across disciplines and varying fields of study. With this entry, we aim to prompt discourses that reverberate and shake colleagues into reimagining what might also be possible in the wake of so many challenges to what was once status quo. Yes, these are times of turmoil, turnover and strife. However, the pages that follow offer aspirations. In these collected narratives of educators doing their best, self-interrogating, re-envisioning, we present their discoveries as potential models for finding better ways to teach, learn and live.

Dreams (a poem) Indigenous Futuring in the Theological Classroom (prose)

Anne Carter Walker
Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary

Abstract

This poem illustrates the author's struggle with identity formation, performance of identity, and (mis)recognition as a bicultural Cherokee/Dutch Irish educator in the theological academy and identifies dreams as a source of recovery of identity for the author. The prose that follows the poem describes the power of dreams in Cherokee and other Indigenous cosmologies and meaning systems, and identifies three ways in which Indigenous dream and other sources of Indigenous knowledge might be practiced implicitly and explicitly in the theological classroom.

Keywords

Identity, Indigenous knowledge, Dreams, Theological classroom

DREAMS

A new class of students, a new seminary full of colleagues, a new gathering of scholars

How will they read me?

Colonizer and colonized running through my bloodstream
I need to display how white—and not white—I am at the same time

Isn't that the task?

I am both of those things—BOTH of those things

Tension and relationship
Pushing and tugging

One piece of who I am trying to snuff out the other

To literally kill her

Whole person trying to stay alive through her dreams
My whiteness leads to overperformance of my Cherokee-ness
Not as like,

Look at me, I'm wearing turquoise and braids.
See my "Phenomenally Indigenous" t-shirt???
I'm Cherokee.

That feels like playing Indian in an old-timey Vaudeville act
But like,

in every space I enter I have to
define again and again
what it means to be Cherokee

Still Vaudevillian
Vaudeville depicts some strange stereotype of the American dream

Hmmm
Do I have to do that?
What would it look like to NOT
do that?
Is that a denial of my whiteness?
Is that a denial of my ancestry?

The tension
The tension

How to engage the tension
The tension will always
Be there

Dreams provide relief

I see Dad
Trula
Kay
Pet
Grandmothers all

They give me strength to stand in self-knowledge as a place of wholeness
Then, waking life
Back into the physical world

"If we'd known you were Cherokee from the beginning we would have engaged you differently."

What? How???

"I've always had great respect for Native American people."

Thanks?

"My grandmother always said we were Cherokee, but no one in the family wanted to recognize it."

Oh.

"Sometimes you look Native American and sometimes you don't."

Is that a compliment?

"Black Elk Speaks talked about how Indigenous people experienced dreams. They didn't experience them like we do today."

Experienced?
Past tense?
Who is "we?"
Who is "me?"

Is there anything more whole than dreams?

INDIGENOUS FUTURING IN THE THEOLOGICAL CLASSROOM

My dad had vivid dreams, full of adventure. He once fell out of bed with a thud, my mother tells, shouting, "I hit my head!" He dreamed he was Robin Hood, cavorting through the forest, fighting off foes as he stole from the rich to give to the poor. Dad's adulthood dreams of becoming Robin Hood, Tarzan, and Zorro often harkened to his childhood in the woods of Eastern Oklahoma, where he would pretend to be the hero in every story, saving his younger sister from certain peril.

In addition to being the source of great adventure, dreams were also the place where my Dad rekindled connection to his kin. His mother, Trula, and his grandmother, whom he called "Pet Mama," would come to him in dreams. Trula and Pet are our family's Cherokee matriarchs. They both loved reading, shared a sharp wit, and insisted upon telling the truth about history. They wanted to reclaim Oklahoma as Indian Territory and to facilitate reparations for the atrocities committed by the United States for the historic Trail of Tears. Trula and Pet invested deeply in my Dad's intellectual development and growth as a leader. For them, investing in Dad was a means of creating new trails for Indian people in Oklahoma. After both Trula and Pet had passed, Dad would tell of their presence with him during sleep, where they would comfort and encourage him.

Dad eventually became a leader in higher education in Oklahoma and in 2000 he received the Cherokee National Medal of Honor. He suffered a debilitating stroke at the age of fifty-seven. During the early days of intensive care for Dad's stroke, our family friend, Potawatomi/Muscogee (Creek) artist and healer Minisa Crumbo would bring Ayurvedic medicine into the ICU to treat him. During one of Minisa's visits a nurse exclaimed, "What is she doing in there??? Do I see smoke?" (Indians often snicker at the alarm that emerges when practitioners of Western medicine encounter alternative ways of healing.) Following Minisa's visit, Dad told us that Pet had been present with him. He felt her face close to his as he lay in the ICU bed: "Boy," she'd always called him Boy, "you're going to be okay." Dad cried. In his dream, conjured through ceremony, Pet Mama arrived as a source of comfort and reassurance. Dad's dream gave comfort to all of us as we inhabited the ICU waiting room, day after day, while he lingered in the space between life and death.

Ever since my dad's prolonged debilitation and eventual passing, I have struggled to understand my role in this lineage of everyday Cherokee freedom fighters. I never knew Pet England, and my life with Trula Tosh Jackson Walker only lasted three years. My Dad, Jerald Carter Walker, became debilitated early in my

adult life, so I never had the opportunity to talk with him about what it meant to be the descendant of both white Oklahoma farmers and Cherokee suffragists—about how to pursue freedom when who you are is all mixed up, the lineages of both colonizer and colonized residing in your bloodstream. My adult struggle—as a descendant of these people, as the mother of a Cherokee/Choctaw/Dutch Irish child, and as a theological educator—is how to make sense of the clash of these warring epistemologies within myself. What sources of knowledge are available to help me understand the legacies of my ancestors—the traumas they experienced that live in my body today, and the resources they developed to respond to the threat of being blotted out? How can I draw upon these resources myself to combat the white supremacist antagonism that exists within my being? How can the theological classroom become a space for anti-colonial praxis, given these tensions?

My dreams (both during sleep and in an awakened state) are where my relationships with Dad, Trula, Pet, my maternal grandmother Katherine Samsell Canfield, and all of my other ancestors, find life. Dreams where I encounter my ancestors help me to make sense of a world that demands creative adaptation and protection of kin. Our ancestors, the Cherokees who originated in Tennessee, North Carolina, and northern Georgia, and who walked the Trail of Tears, lived in a time where creative adaptation was essential for survival and preserving the lives and stories of our kin essential to existence. A spirituality that includes dreams, visions, and communing with our ancestors has protected Cherokee people for generations. Dreams are the place where I cull the knowledge of my ancestors, to understand how I fit into this lineage of resistance, creativity, and change.

Indigenous Dreams, Indigenous Futuring

This piece is about engaging Indigenous dreams as a legitimate source of knowledge in the theological classroom and as a source of creative adaptation for Indigenous faculty and students. Most of the time, Indigenous knowledge is not recognized as a primary source in the theological academy. I dream of centering Indigenous knowledge as a valid source of wisdom—present in dreams, stories, song, dance, and more. Centering Indigenous dreams defies the dominant conception of what counts as valid knowledge in a scholarly community so influenced by coloniality and enlightenment notions of the real. This essay, then, is an anti-colonial dream in that it defies what dominates—it dreams of the creation of new spaces for teaching in which Indigenous knowledge might contribute to how we understand the real.

Drawing from my own Cherokee ancestral well I want to explore a Cherokee cosmology that gives birth to this understanding of dreams as real. I want to understand more deeply how the Cherokee cosmology that animates my relationship with Dad and my grandmothers intersects with my life as a theological educator. And I want to explore the implications of enlivening dreams as a source of knowledge in the theological classroom as it contributes to our practices of teaching and learning. Because, the truth is, though we're tiny in numbers (due to the aforementioned repeated attempts at extermination of our people and our cultures), Indigenous people from tribes that span North and South America are in the theological classroom. I want to actively dream about a future for theological education that centers Indigenous knowledge. I want to move theological education away from the casual attempts to engage Indigenous knowledge in the classroom as a sort of handmaiden to Christian theology when it seems cool, convenient, or like some sort of academic act of benevolence. I want Indigenous knowledge to exist as a central point of reflection about how generations of people have utilized dreams as part of the system of meaning making that has continued to preserve our existence amidst the colonial project that seeks our extermination.

I am referring to dreams in a number of ways here—for, though coloniality and "scholarly" lines of argumentation would have us pick one approach to attending to a concept in academic writing, I am working here with dreams as a multiform expression of Indigenous knowledge and human experience. Dreams are those cognitive and precognitive experiences of meaning making—which emerge in waking life and when we sleep, through ceremony and in daydreams—as an expression of aspiration, of hope, healing, and perseverance, and as a partner in actualizing flourishing for humans and the natural world. Indeed, I am talking about the experience of dreams that many of us have during sleep (as my dad did), as well as the (day)dreams that emerge when we develop hopes and aspirations for ourselves for today and for future generations. I am also talking about the dreams of flourishing that we create through art, story, dance, and music, which allow us to imagine worlds that may have not yet come to fruition. I am talking about dreams as the visions conjured during ceremony, which invoke ancestral wisdom and sources of healing. I am talking about dreams, also, as an expression of vocation: of that thing which we can't not do, because it is soul work. And I am talking about dreams as Indigenous futuring—as medicine that assists us in creating a future that finds us alive and flourishing. In this sense, dreams are about aspiration and actualization.

This is a dream in the sense that I am envisioning something that is not yet—I am doing the work of Indigenous futuring. Dreams are medicine. Dreams have had the very real effect of helping Indigenous people to survive the colonial project. Because of dreams, we are still here. Because of my father's dreams, because of Trula's dreams and Pet's dreams, a future exists in which my Cherokee/Choctaw son knows who he is, knows where he comes from, and is able to utilize the resources of his ancestors and his community toward his own flourishing and toward the flourishing of his cousins.

Dreams, according to Navajo blogger Jaclyn Roessel, "remind [us] of the power we have yet to tap." Indigenous futuring is "the restoring and acknowledgement of our sovereignty as Indigenous people to project and dream a future where we will not only exist but a future in which our dream medicine will continue to heal us." Our sovereignty. Our SOVEREIGNTY. Is it not within my sovereignty as a member of this great tribe of Cherokee people to bring forth Indigenous knowledge in the theological classroom as a source of truth, regardless of who around me might accept that truth as real? To dream is to commune with our ancestors and to vision a future in which Indigenous people and Indigenous knowledge are centered. This is a future where we not only exist, but where our ways of being are centered, alive, and very much real.

Understanding Indigenous Dreams

For many Indigenous people—including the Cherokee—dreams are not simply precognitive. Dreams are where the imagined and the real intersect. This is the medicinal power of dreams: they provide vision and then facilitate an embodied future. Dreams are where our vision for the future and our future intersect.

Because of the Cherokee people's complicated history as a tribe and in relation to the U.S. colonial project, our story lacks the kind of purity that scholars often desire for objects of academic study. Ethnographers and other scholars have attempted to study the structures of a Cherokee cosmology as it existed prior to Removal, but the push toward assimilation to white and Christian ideals, along with a 19th century split in the tribe, makes for a complicated Cherokee history. There is no original Cherokee cosmology upon which to hearken back, no pure way of being to which to return. Overlay this messy history with the non-Indian ethnographer's intent toward scholarly objectivity—observing Cherokee culture and practices from the impossible space free from colonial influence—and understanding Cherokee cosmology as some sort of pure or precolonial, authentic thing becomes nearly impossible.

Through their scholarly work, writers like Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo/Sioux), Lee Irwin, and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg) help us to shape a picture of an Indigenous cosmology of dreaming that, I believe, can lead us toward a fruitful future. This is a picture that weaves together a broad understanding of Indigenous dreams, via Gunn Allen and Simpson, with a specific understanding of the ways Cherokees utilize dreams, via Irwin. In describing this Cherokee Indigenous cosmology, I will engage both the general (Indigenous) and the specific (Cherokee), because as Simpson notes, "Although Indigenous peoples share many fundamental beliefs, our cultures are diverse."

Through study of ethnographic accounts of Cherokee practices during the colonial period when the Cherokees resided along the U.S. Southeastern woodlands, along with study of spiritual guide books belonging to Cherokee shamans, Lee Irwin describes Cherokee cosmology as presenting an antagonism that exists between the human world and the natural world. Because of humanity's consumption of nature, ceremony is enacted in order to resolve the conflict between humanity's situation as part of the natural world and as a consumer of the natural world. Counter to classically white and Christian cosmologies that begin with some sort of "original harmony" or "paradise," Irwin notes that Cherokee cosmology seeks to find balance, relationship, and harmony between the human world and the natural world through healing rites and rituals. This is a "constant negotiation of relationships," between the human, natural, and cosmic realms. The healing rituals practiced by Cherokee shamans engage a cosmic realm governed by a female power, along with other cosmic ancestors. This cosmic power, called Agawela, is often referred to as the "Old Woman," or the "female power of the above." In order to bring the human and natural world into harmony following the human killing of animals or the disruption of nature, in order to sustain the tribe, ceremony is practiced, in order to restore harmony. Dreams are one element of ceremony that is employed by the Cherokee.

Irwin describes Cherokee dreams as "heralding events" that facilitate encounters between the dreamer and the cosmic realm. As a means of Cherokee healing, dreams are imbued with "sacred powers" that assist humanity in the continued struggle to remain alive. "Dreams were the experiential basis of Cherokee healing," Irwin writes. "The dream was a reality, not an image or indication, but a fully potent manifestation of the sacred powers that contested the behavior and motives of human interaction. Irwin further describes the function of dreams as an invitation to actualize a particular future, and dreams function as visitation by our ancestors who inhabit the cosmos. For Cherokees, these cosmic ancestors represent the animal clans upon which we organize our lineage.

Simpson also describes the function of dreams within Anishinaabe tribal culture: "the physical and the dreamed world are one . . . equally real." Within the context of teaching and learning in the Indigenous community, Simpson describes the function of dreams as an educational resource in which kinship, spirituality, and education are fused: "Dreams [are] repeatedly shared, interpreted, and used to make decisions . . . [dreams] determine how I've lived all my life, and how my parents lived." In describing the function of the dreamer, Paula Gunn Allen draws from the Kashia Band Pomo Indians. Also located in the matrilineal system, The Dreamer, as Gunn Allen describes her,

is the center of the psychic/spiritual unity of the people. She is the center, the hub of the wheel. It is by virtue of her gift, her ability, that the people live and are people, connected to one another in ways more than mere language, culture, or proximity can assure.

I name these elements of dreams within Indigenous cosmologies so as to illuminate their significance for me and for other Indigenous people (though other Indigenous people may experience dreams entirely differently than I do). Dreams function as a source for religious meaning making, helping to orient us in relationship to the natural world and to the cosmos. Dreams help us to determine our place, they help us to find wisdom about how to remain alive, and—through communion with our ancestors—they continually illuminate who we are. Dreams also have practical relevance. Dreams provide the vision and wisdom to move the aspirations provided by cosmic entities and our longing for wholeness to fruition, and via the dreamer, provide the literal gift and ability for our people to continue to exist. In both religious and practical ways, dreams facilitate our very being.

Indigenous Dreams as a Source of Knowledge for the Theological Classroom

What would it look like for Indigenous wisdom captured in dreams and for other sources of Indigenous knowledge to become a visible presence in the theological classroom? How might this open up new avenues for healing, and for life, for our Indigenous and non-Indigenous students? What is presented here are pedagogical dreams. These are dreams of the ways I have begun to imagine and—little by little—seek to embody Indigenous knowledge in the theological classroom.

1. The theological classroom as a space where education, kinship, and spirituality are fused; where Indigenous cosmologies are recognized and given explicit space.

I want to invite Indigenous students to name a meaningful cosmos, instead of sitting quietly in a classroom which operates under the implicit assumption—perhaps backed by a theological school's mission statement—that a triune God is the center of all that is. I want to invite both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students to wrestle with the intersections of Christian theologies and Indigenous meaning systems as part of the implicit mission of a Christian seminary education.

I want to invite my students to name the great number of meaning systems and structures that reflect kinship, the notion that we are all relatives—that we are kin to one another and to the natural and cosmic realms, and that our meaning-making systems can either contribute to that connection and to life or can drain significantly from our connection to that and other sources of life. I want to provide recognition for all of my students that what we might consider pre-cognitive is indeed very real, contributing to our survival and flourishing.

Simpson writes that precolonial learning for Indigenous people was a practice that spanned generations, where children, elders, ancestors, and the natural world served as both teachers and learners, facilitated through practices of meaning making such as storytelling, dreaming, and ceremony. To this day, Indigenous students bring into our sanitized classrooms an entire cosmic realm that is present with them. They bring ancestors whose stories are captured through oral tradition and passed along from generation to generation. So often, the presence of these ancestors, their practices, and the stories they have told are sources of knowledge that remain invisible, unnamed, or dismissed in our classrooms.

I want my theological classroom to give recognition to and even invoke this constellation of life, which serves as the meaning structure that facilitates Indigenous students' learning as well as their overall flourishing. When I invite students to introduce themselves on the first day of class, I want to provide space for them to name the ancestors and communities who contribute to their identities, their practices, and their very being in the world. I want those cosmologies, ancestors, communities, and children brought to life through my students' expressions of identity and truth. I want them to identify, narrate stories about, and embody the practices of meaning making, of traditioning, and of healing that have helped to preserve their existence.
I want my classroom to give recognition to the fact that family is everything for Indigenous people, and therefore having children in and around the learning space is an extension of Indigenous kinship. In virtual space, this means not placing "no children" restrictions upon students who might be caring for children at the same time that they are attending class. In the physical classroom, I want to provide hospitality for the possibility that nuclear-family and extended-family children may need to come along with students to class every now and then. I want to provide space for children to feel comfortable in the classroom. I remember one of my doctoral professors holding the newborn daughter of one of my student colleagues while she taught, allowing the student to both tend to his baby and to his work. For me, this modeled the kind of hospitality that invites whole people—messy, crying, curious, playful people who require care—into the teaching and learning space. I am certainly not calling for all theological professors to provide direct care for the students in their classes, but I do want my Indigenous students to know that their bodies and souls, and all of their loved ones (whether physically present or not), are welcome in the learning space.

2. Educational practices provide recognition of and usher in engagement with multiple sources of knowledge, present in kin, ancestors, dreams, ceremony, nature, song, dance, and art.

Through pedagogical practices of recognition that invite students to name meaningful cosmologies and communities, I want to make space for and facilitate dreams of vocational flourishing for Indigenous students and for all others who occupy the natural world. I want to demonstrate engagement with spiritual and pedagogical practices that invite students to encounter cosmic and ancestral wisdom. I want students to talk about dreams—both those that we encounter during sleep and those that arise through our relationships and aspirations—and facilitate class activities that embody those dreams via storytelling, visual art, cooking, dance, poetry, gardening, weaving, and musical jam sessions.

I want to create kitchen-table spaces where out of conversation, story, and dreams emerge generative themes that become sources of data for research. I want these spaces to invite students to become both teacher and learner, mentor and apprentice, and to consider those everyday teachers—both human and beyond—that provide wisdom. Indeed, these are not only spaces where students are invited to dream, share, and eat, but also spaces where we can "plan and organize toward social and environmental justice."

In short, I want to create space in the theological academy for students to name, develop, and enact their dreams. I believe this naming, developing, and beginning to live into our dreams supports a vision for a future of ministry that is about repair and restoration, and generates innovation and change that is rooted to our histories, our communities, and our ancestors.

> 3. Student research can draw from multiple sources of knowledge: writing assignments are supportive of circular, non-linear thinking, and primary resources derived from oral, ancestral, and spiritual traditions.

Lorisia MacLeod, a librarian at the Alberta Library in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada has developed citation templates for Indigenous oral teachings that allow the writer to record information that is not accounted for in citations for personal communications, which have often been used to cite oral teachings. Available for both APA (American Psychological Association) and MLA (Modern Language Association) style citations, MacLeod's work breaks ground for validating in academic discourse the ways that Indigenous meaning is generated and inherited orally from generation to generation. These developments prompt me to consider how we teach our Indigenous students to write. So often, we deduct credit from our students' work if the writing does not reflect a Western, linear, logical structure, starting with a thesis statement, followed by several well-developed points to support that thesis statement, ending with a conclusion. My Indigenous students often write in more of a circular, story-based structure, rather than a linear line of argumentation, and their summative work for many classes sits at the intersection of autoethnography and theological construction. I want to validate the meaning structures of my Indigenous students, and to continue to provide them scholarly tools that validate oral knowledge production and story-based knowing as valid theological scholarship.

A Visit from Dad

I recently had a dream in which my dad was present. In this dream, we were at our family cabin in Delaware County, Oklahoma. Dad had died, and as is customary in many Indigenous communities, his body was placed in a casket and kept in our home for a number of days prior to burial. My mother, my sister, my aunt and I stayed close to Dad's body. We ate, we chatted, we listened to Bob Wills and Gene Autry (Dad's favorite country singers) and talked about Dad. The communion with Dad's body was a chance to allow the reality of his death to settle in, to become part of our new reality.

At one point during this dream, I opened the lid of Dad's casket to view his body. Next to Dad snuggled a little girl with dirty-blonde hair. She was comforted in the arms of her father. Both Dad and the girl opened their eyes and looked up at me. Then, they snuggled close to one another and closed their eyes.

I believe this dream was real. It was a visit from my father. Since my early adulthood, when Dad became debilitated, until I reached midlife, when I began to struggle to understand who I am as this contradictory, Cherokee and white mixed-race person, I have longed for Dad's wisdom and care. I have needed to hear Dad's voice, perhaps the only voice that might understand the contradictions I wrestle with. I've needed to know that someone else understands the particular tension that exists in being me. In that final gaze into the casket, seeing myself snuggled tightly next to my dad, I heard him say, "You know who you are, Ahnawake. Be that person."

In essence, I have longed for the comfort and strength that my father displayed during his most able years to buttress me as I've undertaken my own journey of meaning and purpose. Indeed, Dad was the child of a white farmer, people who came to Oklahoma to claim land originally designated as Indian Territory. But he was also the son of Trula Jackson, the grandson of Pet England and Toshie Jackson, descendants of generations of Cherokees who have utilized dreams for self-understanding, for the restoration of harmony, for healing and strength amidst terrible hardship. This visit from Dad gives me strength, and propels me ever onward to find strength in the fact that I, too, am a descendant of Trula and Pet. Because of this dream, I move ever toward the possibility of embodying Indigenous knowledge in my home and in the theological classroom.

About the Author

Anne Carter Walker (Cherokee Nation) resides in Muscogee (Creek) Nation, Tulsa, OK, and is Director of Theological Field Education and Affiliate Assistant Professor of Practical Theology and Vocation at Phillips Theological Seminary, Tulsa, OK.

Notes & Bibliography

[1] John G. Neihardt and Philip J. Deloria, Black Elk Speaks (Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 2014).

[2] Pet England was married for a short time to Toshie A. Jackson, my grandmother's father, and later married George Brunson. For that reason, I use her maiden surname, England, here.

[3] Leanne Simpson, "Stories, Dreams, and Ceremonies: Anishinaabe Ways of Learning," in Tribal College Journal of American Indian Higher Education, 11:4 (Summer 2000), 1-6.

[4] I am a citizen of Cherokee Nation, Tahlequah, OK. It is important to name my tribal affiliation, because thousands of individuals and "more than 200 non-recognized organizations" self-identify as Cherokee (Lindsey Bark and Chad Hunter, "Tribe to request that Cherokees referred to by enrollment, affiliation," in Cherokee Phoenix, March 1, 2022, 3). Naming my lineage through Cherokee Nation signifies that I am the descendant of those people recognized by the Cherokee Nation as having lineal connection to a Cherokee ancestor listed on the Dawes Rolls: Final Rolls of Citizens and Freedmen of the Five Civilized Tribes. For more information on the Dawes Rolls, visit the National Archives or the Oklahoma Historical Society. Cherokee Nation is the largest of three federally recognized sovereign Cherokee tribes in the United States.

Bark, Lindsey, and Chad Hunter. "Tribe to Request that Cherokees Referred to By Enrollment, Affiliation." Cherokee Phoenix, March 1, 2022, 3.

[5] In the manuscript for her unpublished work, "AFTERTHOUGHTS for 'Doing the Work Our Souls Must Have,'" Katie G. Cannon writes, "Doing the work our souls must have with a deep kneading of spirituality and social witness urges folk to believe in and live into a richer future, to earn and appreciate our histories, and reminds all of us that we do have the resources to overcome the power of sin when we lean in to the power of our ministries and witness we receive from God. When we do so, justice claims, our search for meaning and a healthy sense of self, and salvation are subsumed under the overarching category of liberation as we integrate the pieces of our lives into a tapestry of lived possibilities." Cannon's understanding of soul work is consistent with a view of vocation that tells the truth about history, draws from spirituality, and seeks liberation for God's people. This urging of "folk to believe in and live into a richer future," speaks to the function of dreams, an essential part of an Indigenous spirituality, as part and parcel to vocational and existential flourishing. Katie G. Cannon, "Afterthoughts for 'Doing the Work Our Souls Must Have,'" 2009, scanned manuscript from the Katie G. Cannon Archives, Presbyterian Historical Society, https://digital.history.pcusa.org/islandora/object/islandora%3A174979#page/5/mode/1up.

[6] Jaclyn Roessel, "Dream Medicine and Reflections of the Future," Grownup Navajo (blog), April 22, 2018, https://grownupnavajo.com/2018/04/22/dream-medicine-and-reflections-of-the-future/.

[7] Roessel, Grownup Navajo.

[8] Lee Irwin, "Cherokee Healing: Myth, Dreams, and Medicine," in American Indian Quarterly 16, no. 2 (Spring 1992), 237-257.

[9] As an North American Indigenous scholar, I feel constantly compelled to educate others about the fact that some sort of beautiful, pure, essential Indigeneity that often exists in the minds of non-Indians is not real, because Indigenous history and culture are often exoticized, commercialized, and exploited by mainstream North American culture (including the theological academy). Highlighting this messiness for non-Indian people every time I enter a new space is exhausting. Our stories, our histories, our practices as they exist in the everyday lives of Indigenous people (like me) are real. Part of my project of Indigenous futuring is to invite you to see the real, to grapple with its messiness, and to find in this mess some truth (however partial) for our collective work.

[10] Simpson, "Stories, Dreams, and Ceremonies," 1.

[11] Irwin, "Cherokee Healing," 240.

[12] Irwin, 240.

[13] Irwin, 240.

[14] Irwin, 241.

[15] Irwin, 241.

[16] Irwin, 241.

[17] Irwin, 247.

[18] Irwin, 247.

[19] Irwin, 248.

20 For more information on the Cherokee clanship system, see "The Cherokee Clan System," Phoenix Archives, February 10, 2006, https://www.cherokeephoenix.org/education/the-cherokee-clan-system/article_a88fcc42-f3f8-5f33-b575-8cff7d3bffd2.html.

[21] Simpson, "Stories, Dreams, and Ceremonies," 3.

[22] Simpson, 4.

[23] Paula Gunn Allen, The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 204.

[24] Gunn Allen, The Sacred Hoop, 204-205.

[25] Simpson, "Stories, Dreams, and Ceremonies," 1.

[26] Early in the COVID-19 pandemic, as my family was quarantined at home together, two parents with full-time jobs and a second-grader in the house, I found myself increasingly anxious about how to appear professional in Zoom meetings with my son so in need of my presence and help. I read the article, "Traditional Kinship Practices at Home: Being Child-Centered During the Pandemic," by blogger Andrea Landry. Landry encouraged Indigenous mothers to remember the importance of kinship in traditional Indigenous meaning systems. She reminded me that, for generations, Indigenous women have had children right next to them—even strapped to their bodies as babies—while working. She writes, "The idea of children being seen as a disruption to daily living was non-existent." Reading Landry's work was freeing for me. It became the beginning of my willingness to put down my anxiety of professional appearance, and to realize how fruitful for my son, me, and my work it would be for my son and I to co-exist as we pursued our work together. Andrea Landry, "Traditional Kinship Practices at Home: Being Child-Centered During the Pandemic," Indigenous Motherhood (blog), March 16, 2020, https://indigenousmotherhood.wordpress.com/2020/03/16/traditional-indigenous-kinship-practices-at-home-being-child-centered-during-the-pandemic/.

[27] Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, (New York: Continuum, 1994), 83.

[28] Jennifer Ward, Cindy Gaudet, and Tricia McGuire-Adams describe the creation of "kitchen-table-style dialogue" where Indigenous women scholars "sat, talked, ate, and visited," as a means for expressing "communal responsibility" and generating data for research. Ward, Jennifer, Cindy Gaudet, and Tricia McGuire-Adams, "The Privilege of Not Walking Away: Indigenous Women's Perspectives of Reconciliation in the Academy," Aboriginal Policy Studies 9, no. 2 (2021): 3-24.

[29] Kim Anderson, "On Seasons of an Indigenous Feminism, Kinship, and the Program of Home Management," Hypatia 35 (2020): 211.

[30] Katherine Kornei, "Academic Citations Evolve to Include Indigenous Oral Teachings," Eos: Science News by AGU 102 (November 9, 2021), https://eos.org/articles/academic-citations-evolve-to-include-indigenous-oral-teachings.

[31] This is not what actually happened when my father died. He passed in the nursing facility that had cared for him for many years, and was cremated shortly thereafter. This dream, in one sense, was a retelling of the story of his passing—of how I long to have cared for my father in the midst of his passing.

[32] Ahnawake is the Cherokee name given to me by my grandmother, Trula Tosh Jackson Walker. It means "Bright Eyes."

Teaching a History that I Never Learned

William Yoo
Columbia Theological Seminary

Part One

When my eldest child, Maddy, was four, she asked me a question about U.S. history. At the time, I was a graduate student at Emory University experiencing the highs and lows of working on my dissertation. Some days, I came home from my study carrel on the sixth floor of the campus library feeling victorious after a day in which my fingers typed persuasive arguments and penetrating insights. Other days, my daughter encountered a desolate father who struggled to make sense of his copious notes and staggered about in a maze of confusion.

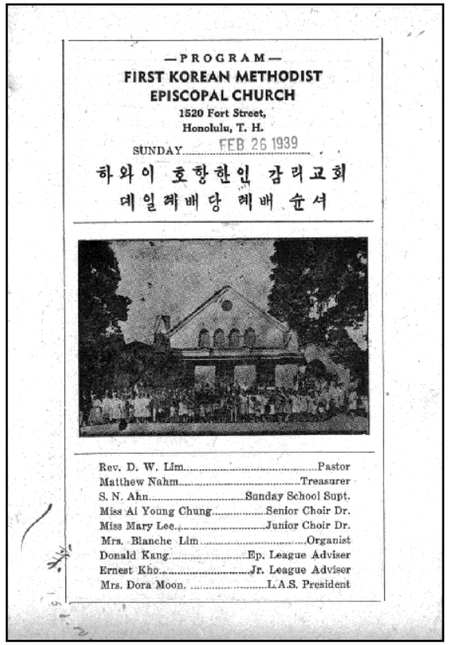
I don't remember how I was feeling when Maddy approached me with her question. But I have not forgotten our conversation. Maddy was learning in her preschool about Rosa Parks and the Montgomery bus boycott from 1955. Her teacher's lesson helped her understand that racial segregation was wrong because of the concrete and visual example of a bus with white passengers in the front and Black passengers in the back. Maddy shook her head and frowned when she told me that Black passengers on crowded buses were often forced to give up their seats to white passengers. She then asked, "Where would we have sat on the bus?" As a third-generation Korean American, my daughter has always been proud of her Korean heritage. But she has also been puzzled at times, wondering how she fits into the larger American story of racial discrimination and white privilege. I tried to explain to her that restrictive immigration laws made it unlikely that a family like ours would have been in Alabama in 1955. But if we were there, I told her that I honestly did not know where we would have sat. If we were working-class immigrants like her grandparents, we probably would have sat in the back. If we belonged to a family of financial means or elite social standing, some white bus drivers and passengers may have let us sit in the front. I ended our conversation sharing that maybe the best answer is to hope that we would have sat in the back alongside African Americans and joined in their struggle for equality even if some white people allowed us to sit in the front with them.

In the 1880s, one of the first Korean immigrants to study in the United States, Yun Chi-ho, was startled when the white-owned hotels in Kansas City refused him lodging during an overnight stop on his train from San Francisco to Nashville. Yun was a bright young intellectual and a well-traveled polyglot with transnational experiences across Korea, Japan, and China before coming to the United States in his early twenties. In China, Yun converted to Christianity at a college founded by white American missionaries. He was celebrated as the first Korean convert of the missionaries' denomination, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and some of them saw in him a mighty Methodist leader because of the young Korean's academic prowess and religious sincerity. In 1888, one of these missionaries paved the way for Yun to study theology as the first international student at Vanderbilt University. But on his way to Vanderbilt, an ocean away from his missionary mentor, Yun endured a long and humiliating night as an anonymous Asian immigrant sleeping uncomfortably with his luggage in a railroad station because of his skin color.

In 1914, Wu Tingfang, a Chinese diplomat in the United States, recounted his discomfort on public transportation across the southern states in his memoir, America through the Spectacles of an Oriental Diplomat. Unlike Yun, Wu was welcomed to sit with white passengers. At one railroad station with segregated waiting rooms, the porter assisting Wu with his luggage led him without hesitation into the whites-only area. As Wu looked at the two rooms, one with white travelers and the other with Black travelers, he could not help but feel like he did not belong. At that moment, Wu remembered his conscience whispering that he was in the "wrong place" because there was no designated area for "people of my complexion."

Maddy's grandparents were neither theology students nor diplomats. Approximately twenty years after the Montgomery bus boycott, they emigrated from South Korea to the United States. Her mother's parents resided in Richmond, Virginia, and her father's parents went to Long Island, New York. They worked in small Korean-owned businesses, lived in crowded apartments with other recently arriving family members and friends, and endeavored to learn English to better communicate with their customers and neighbors. After a few years, they combined their earnings with additional money they had borrowed from informal lending services in Korean American immigrant networks to open their own small businesses. When Maddy's father was a teenager, his mother took him to the busy Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) station where she worked selling cigarettes to passengers commuting to and from Manhattan. She fondly told him that this was one of their first jobs together when he was a toddler. Every weekday morning, he accompanied his mother to work and sat on the counter to collect the money and give the cigarettes to the customers. It was also where Maddy's father learned the English language. Whereas Maddy's first words were mama and shoe, Marlboro and Winston were among the earliest words in her father's English lexicon.

Maddy's grandparents also started to go to church in the United States. Her mother's parents joined a Presbyterian congregation in Virginia and her father's parents attended a Methodist church in New York. None came from Christian families, but they, like other Korean American immigrants, found that their churches were important hubs for cultural, religious, and social community. The church offered spiritual refuge, racial solidarity, and human dignity in their new country. Worship presented occasions to express one's deepest desires, hopes, and dreams in the mother tongue. For many worshipers, Sundays were also the one day each week they could wear formal attire to look and feel like their best selves. Their blue-collar jobs at grocery stores, construction sites, laundromats, and other small businesses did not afford them opportunities to dress respectably. Church members referred to one another with honorifics and were careful to use titles, such as jipsanim (deacon) or janglonim (elder), even in casual conversation.


—PROGRAM—
FIRST KOREAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH
1520 Fort Street,
Honolulu, T. H.
SUNDAY FEB 26 1939
하와이 호항한인 감리교회
데일례배당 례배 순서

Rev. D. W. Lim ..... Pastor
Matthew Nahm ..... Treasurer
S. N. Ahn ..... Sunday School Supt.
Miss Ai Young Chung ..... Senior Choir Dr.
Miss Mary Lee ..... Junior Choir Dr.
Mrs. Blanche Lim ..... Organist
Donald Kang ..... Ep. League Adviser
Ernest Kho ..... Jr. League Adviser
Mrs. Dora Moon ..... L.A.S. President

Figure 1: First Korean Methodist Episcopal Church: Program (used with permission from The Reverend Soon Hyun Collected Works, University of Southern California Digital Library Korean American Digital Archive)

Sometimes, power struggles between church members overrode the principles of the gospel in Korean American immigrant churches. One charge against Korean and Korean American Christianity is the ubiquity of infighting and division within local congregations. The accusation is that Korean American Christians care more about the business of the church than the witness of Jesus Christ. One white Presbyterian, Samuel Hugh Moffett, was critical of what he saw as the Korean propensity toward rancorous and egotistical conflict in church life. He once bitterly asked where else would Christians find "a Jesus Presbyterian Church and a Christ Presbyterian Church" but among Koreans. My counterargument is twofold. I do not believe that ecclesial schism is unique to Christians of Korean descent because it is in fact a common thread throughout world Christian history, especially in the West. By the early 1970s, white Presbyterians in Moffett's own tradition divided into at least three different denominations called the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (UPCUSA), the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS), and the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). And while the internecine disputes in Korean American churches are indeed harmful and not at all admirable, what they also reveal is how much the church matters as a religious and social institution in the Korean American community. People fight over treasure, not trash.

Worship programs from the earliest Korean American immigrant churches in Hawai'i from the 1920s and 1930s illustrate the importance of the church as a center for religious worship, cultural belonging, and economic networking. On the front page of one program from the First Korean Methodist Episcopal Church in Honolulu, the names of several lay leaders, such as the Sunday school superintendent, organist, and church treasurer are listed (see figure


C. H. CHANG
Executive Secy.
C. W. CHUN
Social Hall Furniture Fund
W. K. AHN
Honory Secy.
W. Y. CHOO
Korean Hymns
JESSE L. LEE
Sun. Evening
SUNG SIKH WHANG
Dog Secy.
Pacific Choice Grocery Shop
Medical Tailor
JOHN SUANG SU
KONG JOO SAR

Figure 2: Program for Service, Korean Methodist Episcopal Church, Pastor Soon Hyun (used with permission from The Reverend Soon Hyun Collected Works, University of Southern California Digital Library Korean American Digital Archive)

1). A different program includes the names of several local Korean small business owners on one of its pages, including two furniture stores, a grocery store, a drug store, and stores for dry cleaning and shoe repair (see figure 2).

The program in figure 2 also displays two shaking hands beneath interlocking flags from Korea and the United States. This image represents multiple layers of identity and points to a larger story and struggle of immigration, race, nationality, belonging, and faith. It is a story of exclusion and inclusion in which one encounters the broken promises as well as the hopeful possibilities of Christian theology and American democracy. With delight and conviction, I relish teaching the histories of Korean American Christians, alongside the histories of other Christians of color, in my seminary classroom. But I am teaching a history that I never learned.

Across North America and Asia, Koreans, like other Asians, were simultaneously treated like a fertile harvest for white missionary conversion abroad and dirty weeds to be excised from the white-dominant republic at home. Asian women were also fetishized as alluring sexual objects. In 1920, the Missionary Review of the World, a popular Protestant magazine about U.S. world missions, published articles about the Asian "mission fields" with titles such as "The Problem of China" and "The Burden of India" (figure 3) The cover of one monthly issue features a young Asian child in traditional garb enacting the Macedonian call in Acts 16:9–10. With outstretched arms, the child's message is, "Come Over into Asia and Help Us" (figure 4).

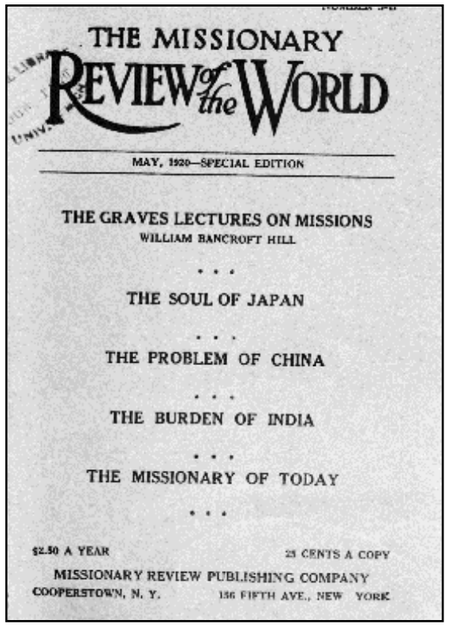

THE MISSIONARY
REVIEW of the WORLD
MAY, 1920—SPECIAL EDITION
THE GRAVES LECTURES ON MISSIONS
WILLIAM BANCROFT HILL
THE SOUL OF JAPAN
THE PROBLEM OF CHINA
THE BURDEN OF INDIA
THE MISSIONARY OF TODAY
$2.50 A YEAR
25 CENTS A COPY
MISSIONARY REVIEW PUBLISHING COMPANY
COOPERSTOWN, N. Y. 156 FIFTH AVE., NEW YORK

Figure 3: "Mission Fields." (public domain, downloadable from The Missionary Review of the World, May 1920, Special Edition)

Figure 4: "Come Over Into Asia And Help Us" (public domain, downloadable from The Missionary Review of the World, Volume 43, May 1920)

In 1891, Yun Chi-ho attended gatherings in Nashville promoting U.S. missions in Asia. Yun was invited to speak briefly after several addresses from white missionaries working in China, Korea, and Japan. He publicly expressed sincere gratitude for their ministry, but Yun privately disliked the racially and spiritually condescending undertones and overtones within some of their remarks, which depicted Koreans as hapless heathens and benighted brutes. Yun also abhorred the phrase, "Come over and help us," because it robbed Koreans and the people from the other foreign nations where the missionaries labored of their agency and presented them as inferior human beings. But Yun grew to hate the racial epithet, "Chinaman," even more than illusions to the Macedonian call. In his diary, he complained of being called a "Chinaman" throughout the southern towns and cities he visited. White women, men, and even children shouted the derogatory term to abuse, antagonize, and assail him. In 1886, one manufacturing company in Illinois advertised their new laundry detergent with an image of Uncle Sam kicking a Chinese man in the buttocks, with the words "The Chinese Must Go," to signify that their product made the presence of Chinese American launderers obsolete (figure 5.)

But this is all a part of a history that I never learned. In high school, Asian Americans were not featured in my classrooms and other people of color made occasional appearances. In comparing my high school education to a play on a stage or a television sitcom, I remember Indigenous persons from the Wampanoag Nation as background actors in lessons about early European settler colonialism in North America. Nameless Black persons served as extras in lessons about slavery and the Civil War. A few other Black persons, such as Shirley Chisholm, Martin Luther King Jr., and Thurgood Marshall made memorable entrances and shone brightly for one or two scenes. There was no fullness, nuance, and complexity in these scripts. The barely sketched stories of people of color evinced dim outlines defined by the anonymous forces of racial oppression. Racism was tragic and real, but it was also a mysterious and unexplained evil. Black people suffered from racism, but white people were somehow not responsible.

Figure 5: "The Magic Washer, manufactured by Geo. Dee, Dixon, Illinois" (downloadable image is in the public domain from The Library of Congress)

My Christian education was no better and maybe even worse. I grew up in the shadow of white evangelical teachings that positioned racism as a spiritual sin that could only be eradicated by spiritual means according to reductive scriptural interpretations about prayer, forgiveness, meekness, and divine illumination of the individual human heart. But as racially minoritized persons in predominantly white neighborhoods in Long Island, my churchgoing friends and I mostly rejected this approach as teenagers because it seemed too simplistic to only pray about the racist bullying we were subjected to in our schools. When the pastor's son was suspended from his high school for punching a white student who was verbally abusing his younger sister, the members of my church praised his courage and confrontation. The pastor proudly preached about his son's act of self-defense and retribution. My mother exulted when giving me a (literal) blow-by-blow recounting of the incident after the worship service.

But Christianity was separated from the sinful realities of U.S. history in my journey of faith. Christians were responsible for much of everything that was good, such as the abolition of slavery and immigration reform. However, Christians were never the perpetrators of settler colonialism, sexism, racism, and other injustices. The pedagogical approach was not necessarily one of willful disinformation. Rather, the lessons were evasive and utilized the methods of absence and silence rather than outright falsehood and denial. There is no need for a reckoning when you never learn the truth.

Part Two

What is historical truth? Who determines the topics and subjects that really matter? In The Writing of History, Michel de Certeau makes an argument that is both provocative and obvious. Certeau states that historians are powerful individuals because they control the past. Historians claim for themselves an authority derived from their academic status and research access to primary sources, such as archival records, and make interpretations that may illumine or distort communities, events, institutions, nations, and persons. Certeau observes that the past has no agency when it is conjured into the present in an historian's writing or teaching. The dead cannot speak apart from the historian. They have no ability to challenge or correct what the historian says about them. Certeau traces the advent of Western history in the Americas to the Italian navigator Amerigo Vespucci's arrival in South America (figure 6). The moment is remembered in one sixteenth-century allegorical painting as an encounter between an intrepid explorer wearing a suit of armor, bearing the "European weapons of meaning," and an almost nude Indigenous woman reclining in a hammock with "a body which awakens a space of exotic fauna and flora" for colonization and exploitation.

Figure 6: "Allegory of America, ca. 1587–89," by Jan van der Straet, called Stradanus (in the public domain, from the Metropolitan Museum)

Although the subjectivity of history is apparent in this painting, Certeau's proposition about the power of the historian over the dead runs counter to some traditional understandings of church history. My introduction to church history as a teenager entailed a brief overview of a few notable individuals, such as the vigorous prayer life of John Wesley and the sacrifices of those white Protestant missionaries who ministered in what was depicted to me as the wilds of a premodern Korea, but the educational experience was like watching a highlight reel of isolated moments devoid of context and light on content. Church history was presented to me as an objective retelling of the facts with inspirational lessons to spur believers on toward love and good deeds. Historians were neither mighty nor malicious. They were simply conduits who taught and wrote about what happened. But the goal of history was to identify uplifting examples of heroism from faithful Christians in the past and imitate them as much as possible. Historians had no ability to make the dead speak or come back to life. Only Jesus had resurrection power.

The church history that I learned had set strict boundaries that prohibited any criticism of Christianity as responsible for oppression. One explanation for why some professing Christians committed terrible acts of hatred and violence was to offer the claim that they were not really Christians anyway. Another conclusion conceded that they were nominal Christians who had misconstrued scriptural teachings due to a lack of education or the pernicious influence of their respective cultures. And there was an immediate pivot to the "real Christians" who boldly pursued justice and bravely defied cruel authority figures. The persecution of Protestants in the Americas was rare, and when it did occur it was often an internecine phenomenon, such as when the Puritans banished their church members, Anne Hutchinson and Roger Williams, from Massachusetts in the seventeenth century, but the topic of persecution against Christians nonetheless was frequently overemphasized. One enduring lesson was that white Protestants from England were among the first immigrants in the "New World" and they had risked their lives to freely practice their faith away from what they deplored as the nefarious reach of the Roman Catholic Church and deemed as the unacceptable theological compromises within Anglicanism.

Yet there was little mention of the Indigenous communities that lived on the land where these immigrants arrived. The history lesson skipped over how the Pilgrims, upon disembarking from the Mayflower, plundered food from meticulously prepared Indigenous stockpiles to survive their first winter in "New England." The Pilgrims were prepared to worship, but they did not know how to produce their own crops. They had limited capacities for fishing and none for farming in what was strange and foreign terrain. After one armed group of Pilgrims returned with ten bushels of maize and a large metal kettle, all of which they had stolen, Edward Winslow, a leader within the Plymouth colony, attributed this haul as a sign of divine favor and conceded: "And sure it was God's good providence that we found this corn, for else we know not how we should have done." Just as they had "found" the food by thievery, white Protestants would come to own Indigenous lands through coercive, unjust, and violent means, but these realities did not appear in my history books and lessons.

Instead, my learning experience in church history focused almost exclusively on doctrine. I did not learn about the annihilation of Indigenous communities, such as the Pequots across Connecticut and Massachusetts with violent warfare in 1636 and 1637, but I spent many hours deciphering Puritan debates on soteriology and their concerns about antinomianism. In the same year that a militia of white Puritans killed nearly every person in a Pequot village, including children, women, and the elderly, Anne Hutchinson was put on trial for her Christian teachings that the Puritan authorities denounced as heretical. In seminary, my classmates and I scrutinized accounts of this trial to precisely identify the differences between Hutchinson's strict emphasis on God's saving grace and how the Puritan clergy preached about good works as evidence of one's divine election. We invested many hours tracing the various ways that Puritans understood justification, sanctification, and how these two doctrines related to one another.

But I never learned about the massacre of the Pequots and the Puritans who killed them. One legal scholar, Steven M. Wise, argues that this wicked act of violence was "a critical part of the Puritans' genocidal 1636–37 Indian war," in which the militia leader, John Underhill, ordered the slayings of approximately one thousand Pequots with the rationale that he had "sufficient light from the Word of God for our proceedings" with the assurance that "sometimes the Scripture declareth women and children must perish with their parents." Perhaps it is more accurate to state that my education in church history entailed a selective focus on some doctrines. We isolated the writings of a few white Protestant clergypersons and placed ourselves in a hermeneutical space with them that was indeed like a hermetic seal. Our study of the theological works of Jonathan Edwards needed to be preserved and protected. There was simply no use, and certainly not enough time in an academic semester, to consider the beliefs and doctrines that white Protestants employed to justify their wanton abuse and cruel mistreatment of Indigenous persons. I learned that every church history professor makes difficult pedagogical decisions. Church history professors cannot possibly cover everything, so they determine which dead persons to bring back to life in their classrooms.

When Maddy first encountered the history of racism in the United States at four years of age, her moral sensibilities intuited that something was wrong. The simple image of racial segregation on a bus, with white passengers granted access to the front seats and Black relegated to the rear seats, was reprehensible. Maddy would later see in middle school other obvious images illustrating the inequities and injustices of racial segregation, such as pictures of water fountains and schools for white persons that were vastly superior to those for Black persons. It is likely that all the students in Maddy's classrooms joined her in shaking their heads in disapproval. But I wonder how many children also questioned how the "yellow race," as Asian Americans were often designated in the United States, fit within a world of white supremacy and anti-Black discrimination.

In 1968, the president of San Francisco State College, Samuel Ichiye Hayakawa, a Canadian-born Japanese American, attempted to divide a coalition of students of color demanding more racial inclusion and ethnic representation at their school. These students were in the middle of the longest strike on an academic campus in the history of the United States when Hayakawa pointed to the Asian American students as an example of a "model minority" for the other students of color to follow. In touting Asian Americans as a diligent people who were too busy focusing on achieving success to devote their energies toward protesting racism, Hayakawa sought to differentiate the students of Asian descent from their Black, Indigenous, Hispanic, and Latina/o peers and perhaps cause ferment and discord among the student activists. The Asian American students were enraged, but their fury was solely directed at Hayakawa. The college president was derided as a "banana" (a derogatory term accusing an Asian American of being yellow on the outside and white on the inside) and the entire coalition resolved to remain united until they achieved their goal. It took approximately five months, but the students ended the strike when the college agreed to form the first department of Ethnic Studies in the nation.

Hayakawa retired from the presidency at San Francisco State College in 1973, but his decisive actions against the student protest, including his evocation of Asian Americans as a "model minority," were remembered for many years. Some Asian Americans continued to publicly decry Hayakawa's usage of the "model minority" as a deleterious wedge separating Asian Americans from other persons of color. Yet other Asian Americans quietly agreed with Hayakawa and thought the best approach to overcome racial discrimination was to work so hard that there was no time to think about the oppressions afflicting their community and other communities of color. The most important color was not black, brown, red, white, or yellow, but green. Earning money was understood as the fastest and surest pathway to freedom and stability. Three years after his retirement from higher education, Hayakawa was the Republican Party candidate for the U.S. Senate in 1976 and won a tightly contested election in California.

In the Senate, Hayakawa lambasted bilingual initiatives in public school education and proposed a constitutional amendment to make English the official language of the United States. His rationale underscored how English proficiency was a crucial factor that helped immigrants succeed. Hayakawa believed that learning English was imperative for immigrants to flourish and so he urged his senatorial colleagues to establish the centrality and primacy of the English language at the federal level. The proposal failed, but other lawmakers have taken the baton from Hayakawa and continue to seek similar legislation. In 2021, a Republican member of the House of Representatives from Texas, Louie Gohmert, sponsored a bill, "H.R. 997 – English Language Unity Act," that sought "to declare English as the official language of the United States" and "establish a uniform English language rule for naturalization." The bill was not passed, but twenty-seven other Republican members of the U.S. Congress agreed to be cosponsors in support of it.

Hayakawa is a notable Asian American. Although he is not a household name, the legacy of his efforts to position Asian Americans as a "model minority" endures. In 1970, the New York Times featured an article on its front page that explained how Chinese Americans and Japanese Americans were "an American success story" with the audacious claim that these communities of color no longer experienced racial discrimination in the United States. One of the persons interviewed for the story was J. Chuan Chu, an immigrant from China who arrived during the Second World War and initially struggled to find housing because of his race. But Chu eventually graduated from the University of Pennsylvania and climbed the corporate ladder to an executive position in a large information systems company. Chu reflected on his journey from impoverished migrant to the Ivy League and promised, "If you have the ability and can adapt to the American way of speaking, dressing, and doing things, then it doesn't matter any more if you are Chinese." Racism was real, but Asian Americans could overcome it through hard work and assimilation.

I did not learn about Hayakawa and I do not remember hearing the phrase, "model minority," during my childhood, but the lessons about the importance of diligence and academic achievement were paramount. My parents did not necessarily see my education, such as learning English and history, through the lens of assimilation. But they viewed it as transactional. My education was the pathway to economic success and social elitism. In the summer months beginning when I was nine years old, I regularly walked 1.2 miles to the local library and stayed there for several hours in the company of books and magazines about animals, sports, famous people (especially U.S. presidents), foreign countries, and science fiction. While I fell in love with reading and my mind was growing in curiosity and critical thinking, my parents were enamored with the outstanding grades on my report cards. As first-generation immigrants, they had dreams of whiteness for their eldest son. But their aspirations were more closely connected to class, not race. They yearned for me to have a white-collar job. With their small dry-cleaning business, they were intimately familiar with the attire of white-collar professionals. They laundered, pressed, starched, and tailored the blouses, dress shirts, skirts, suits, and ties of their white-collar customers. They envisioned their son would one day join the ranks of their clientele.

There was a time in my life, during my collegiate studies, when I was embittered toward my parents for what I criticized as their myopic vision. I detested their wishes for my life. I told them that what matters most in life is not material wealth or social prestige. I had a higher calling. I wanted to be a pastor who helps people. My parents were devastated with this new disruptive development. They had only thought in the binary of

blue-collar and white-collar. The introduction of a third collar, the clerical collar, caught them completely unaware. My mother's fervent prayer life intensified. She went to church daily to participate in the early morning worship services. At her church, as in many other Korean American congregations, there were daybreak gatherings with singing, scripture reading, preaching, and praying aloud in a practice known as tongseonggido (united vocal prayer). My mother wept and beseeched God to change her son's mind so that he would not enroll in seminary after college. Other church members offered my mother their emotional and spiritual support. They prayed alongside her and hoped that the cries of the faithful would be heard in the heavens. One time, when I returned home from college to worship with my mother, an elderly woman pulled me aside and rebuked me in the sanctuary for breaking my mother's heart.

But two decades later, as I reflect now upon these tumultuous years of familial conflict, I confess that I was the narrow-minded one. I had spent many Saturdays of my childhood at the dry cleaners with my parents and witnessed firsthand their hard labor. I saw my father press garments in the sweltering heat and my mother hunched down tailoring clothes at a sewing machine. They were always busy, but they also made sure to drive me to tennis matches, violin lessons, and SAT prep classes. When I was a teenager, my mother accompanied me to our local Marshalls and TJ Maxx stores to buy the designer clothing I wanted. My parents were always stressed about money, but somehow there was enough for the Vuarnet t-shirt I just had to have and the countless courses to prepare for this and that standardized exam. What did all this cost my parents? How many blouses did my father have to press? And how many pants did my mother have to alter? They rejoiced when I received my acceptance letter to an Ivy League institution, but three years later I had returned home to deliver news that absolutely crushed them. When I shared my plans to enroll in seminary, it felt to them like a wrecking ball was destroying the most precious building they had built. In the Harry Potter novels, there exists a magical device called a pensieve that allows one to store and access one's memories with precision. Whenever I recall these sad conversations and angry fights from many years ago, it is as if I am in possession of a pensieve, because I remember these episodes with near perfect accuracy and a frightening lucidity. When I access these memories, all I want to do is apologize to my parents. I do not regret the decision I made, but I am deeply sorry for the pain that it caused.

When Maddy visits her grandparents, she is unaware of this history. I have yet to tell her these stories. But Maddy is interested in learning more. One of her history assignments in middle school required students to interview a person who was born at least seventy years ago and give a report about the interviewee's childhood. Maddy chose one of her grandmothers. After completing her assignment, which included an oral presentation in her class, Maddy proudly told me that several fellow students found her project among the most fascinating because it was about a person who grew up in another country.

I am hopeful because Maddy is learning that her grandmother's Korean American story matters. And Maddy is discovering more about Asian American history within and beyond the experiences of persons of Korean descent. One of her ongoing queries is about Asian American activism in support of African Americans. In the summer months of 2020, during the protests seeking racial justice and policing reform in response to the killings of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd, my spouse and I introduced Maddy to Grace Lee Boggs and her courageous advocacy alongside African Americans in Detroit's Black Power movement in the 1950s. In some of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's files on Lee Boggs, who is Chinese American, she was listed as "probably Afro Chinese" because of her marriage to a Black man, James Boggs, and her ubiquitous presence on the frontlines in struggles for civil rights and labor justice.

Approximately four hundred miles from Detroit, Syngman Rhee, a Korean American Presbyterian pastor, was a campus minister at the University of Louisville in the 1960s. Rhee joined Black students from the university and other Black activists in the city in their protests opposing racial segregation. Rhee supported the civil rights movement, but he was nonetheless surprised when a small group of African American university students approached him to serve as the faculty advisor for a Black Student Union. Rhee responded, "Why are you asking me to be your faculty advisor? You know I am not black." The students shared, "Yes, we know you are not black, but we saw you out on the street demonstrating together with us for our civil rights." Rhee then agreed to be the first faculty advisor for the Black Student Union at the University of Louisville.

In Angie Thomas's award-winning young adult fiction novel, The Hate U Give, there is a poignant moment of racial allyship between the main character, a sixteen-year-old Black woman named Starr Carter, and one of her closest friends from school, an Asian American woman named Maya Yang. Starr and Maya are among the few students of color at their predominantly white school, and they pledge to support one another after they each experience racial discrimination from a white student.

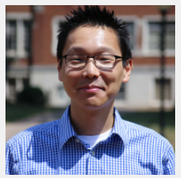
Thomas's book is on Maddy's summer reading list. I am delighted that Maddy wants to read a novel in which a Black author brilliantly captures a young Black woman's painful plight, intricate processing, and bold pursuit of racial justice after she witnesses the killing of a young Black man at the hands of a white police officer. Starr encourages Maya to speak up when a white student ridicules Maya with the barb that Asian Americans like to eat cats. Maya backs Starr when this same white student questions Starr's increasing public activism against police brutality. Maya reminds Starr, "We minorities have to stick together, remember?" But ultimately, Thomas's novel is about African American childhood and therefore Starr Carter's story. Maya Yang is only a supporting character in this tale. Maddy must therefore seek other resources to learn about the beauty, depth, wonder, and complexity of Asian American life.

The testimonies of Grace Lee Boggs and Syngman Rhee provide counternarratives to the legacy of Samuel Ichiye Hayakawa and the weaponizing of the notion that Asian Americans are a "model minority" for other communities of color to imitate. Maddy still wants to know how Asian Americans navigated the racialized binary of white supremacy and anti-Black discrimination, but she also has other rich, hard, and profound questions about Asian American history. As Maddy matures, she seeks to learn more about Asian American cultures and transpacific journeys from East Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia to the United States. In addition to contemplating where a family like hers would have sat on an Alabama bus in 1955, Maddy yearns to read works from Asian American authors, engage Asian American artistry, and glean the creative resilience of first-generation Asian American immigrants. Black allyship is an important part of the Asian American story, but it is one of many lessons that Maddy wants, and needs, to learn. Maddy is more than a supporting character. I desire for Maddy to know that she, and we, are main characters, with our own worthy histories to claim and wondrous futures to forge.

I am teaching a history that I never learned. It is a history that is both more complicated and more beautiful than I encountered. The search for heroes is one component of teaching history, but too many classrooms stop there. The fullness of the Asian American story can only be found when excavating many layers of conflict and courage as well as stumbling and striving. It is a story of dreams deferred, dreams denied, and dreams come true. Teaching Christian history also demands an honest confrontation with the past. In my classroom, I present the stories of Christians in both the margins and mainstreams of their denominations, societies, and traditions. It is a joy to analyze how some Christians interpreted the Bible to lead faithful congregations in proclaiming good news to the poor and enacting liberation for the oppressed. But we also must confront the deep wounds of racism, sexism, classism, nativism, and heterosexism as well as the responsibility of other Christians in propagating and exacerbating these terrible injustices. I am learning that history can only illumine when it inspires and infuriates us. Hopefully, my students are also understanding this truth. As the semesters go by, I can never be sure what exactly my students remember from my teaching. But I think Maddy is getting it.

Notes & Bibliography

[1]Wu Tingfang, America through the Spectacles of an Oriental Diplomat (New York, NY: Frederick A. Stokes, 1914).
[2]Wu. America through the Spectacles of an Oriental Diplomat, 85.
[3]Samuel Hugh Moffett. The Christians in Korea (New York, NY: Friendship Press, 1962), 25.
[4]Michel de Certeau, The Writing of History (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1988).
[5]Certeau, The Writing of History, xxv.
[6]Charles C. Mann, 1491: New Revelations of the Americas before Columbus, (New York, NY: Vintage, 2011), 58.
[7]Steven M. Wise, An American Trilogy: Death, Slavery, and Dominion on the Banks of the Cape Fear River (Philadelphia, PA: Da Capo Press, 2009), 33.
[8]English Language Unity Act, H.R. 997, 117th Congress (2021). https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/997.
[9]Ellen D. Wu, The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 1.
[10]Wu, The Color of Success, 1.
[11]Kat Chow, "Grace Lee Boggs, Activist and American Revolutionary, Turns 100," Code Switch (blog), National Public Radio, June 27, 2015, https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2015/06/27/417175523/grace-lee-boggs-activist-and-american-revolutionary-turns-100.
[12]Syngman Rhee, "Reconciliation: A Vision of Christian Mission," in Teaching Mission in a Global Context, eds. Patricia Lloyd-Sidle and Bonnie Sue Lewis (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 2001), 73.
[13]Angie Thomas, The Hate U Give (New York, NY: Balzer + Bray, 2017).
[14]Thomas, The Hate U Give, 295.



About the Author

William Yoo is Associate Professor of American Religious and Cultural History and Director of the Master of Divinity Program at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia. He is the author of American Missionaries, Korean Protestants, and the Changing Shape of World Christianity, 1884–1965 and What Kind of Christianity: A History of Slavery and Anti-Black Racism in the Presbyterian Church and editor of The Presbyterian Experience in the United States: A Sourcebook. He has also contributed articles and essays to various books and journals, such as the Encyclopedia of Christianity in the United States, Connections: A Lectionary Commentary for Preaching and Worship, and The Wabash Center Journal on Teaching.

Journals and Journeys Through the Bible: Using Learning Journals in Teaching Biblical Studies

Steed Vernyl Davidson

My earliest childhood play acting revolved around Church and school. Naturally, these were the major highlights of my week. The intersection of religion and education as a professional career only became clear in my adulthood. The first time I saw a title that went something like, Professor of Hebrew Bible was when I enrolled for a postgraduate degree in Hebrew Bible in Boston. Each time I stand before a classroom or contribute to this academic field, I am aware of the strangeness of the role. I am no stranger to things of the Church – faith, religion, belief, belonging, rules, and morals. Classrooms are one of few social gatherings where I don't blend into the background. Yet the Biblical Studies classroom challenges me as a teacher. As a student, I flourished in these classrooms. To avoid the mistake of teaching the way I learned, I revisited key moments in my learning and the geographical places where I learned to chart my journey as a learner-teacher. The learning journal gives me a visual of myself as an adult learner easily hidden from my teaching self.

A bit past the mid-point of my teaching career, the bravado of my early years has cooled into a moodiness that questions the point of it all. The first semester of Biblical Studies at Seminary takes a toll on everyone. Well, to be honest, the first weeks of that semester. In those days, I am a puzzle to students. They reach out to my colleagues quietly asking, "is he really Christian"? And I, by the middle of the semester confess to my friends that if alcohol lifted my mood, then I would be having at least two rounds of drinks after each class.

In a cold war, the zones of conflict are everywhere. In the Biblical Studies classroom, tensions lie beneath the surface. Conflicts rage in the stubborn refusal to accept new knowledge. And red markups trigger traumas of academic inadequacy. Years later students will testify to their breakthroughs and transformation about how they approach the Bible. As they recall these new practices, they also recall the pain that came along with their learning. Thrilled by the slow growth, I am wounded by the scars they now feel free to reveal.

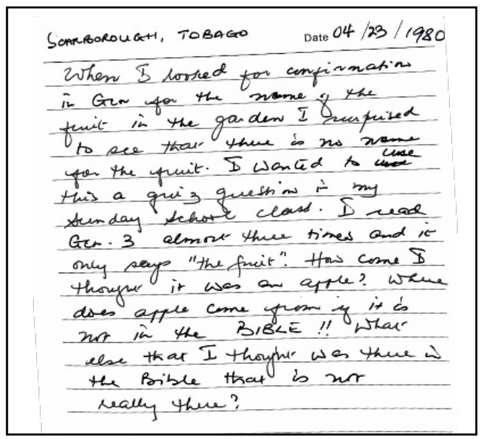
In the moodiness of mid-life, journals form part of my therapeutic process. Teachers in several disciplines, particularly professional disciplines, use learning journals (Stevens and Cooper, 2009). This surprises me but my surprise gives way to a knowing affirmation about the reasons for the scarcity of learning journals in a Biblical Studies class. The volume of information that I would like to impart in a semester leaves little room for processing through a journal. Only the minimum of time set aside for reflection will do. On the first day of class, I ask students to write short notes to themselves: "What does the word Bible mean to you?" and "How do you understand biblical authority?" On the last day of class, we come back to these questions to see how they have grown. Less the process of a learning journal and more the indicator of how well I did in changing their minds. I am only interested in one form of growth that of informational learning (Stevens and Cooper 2009, 37). Little did I know that by privileging informational learning I was also fostering surface approach to learning. (Kember, Wong, Yeung 2001, 14).

I have always thought of my teaching as making a difference. Bringing the light of knowledge to those who are in darkness, as my colonized education disposed me to think about learning. Or I felt accomplished if I do various forms of banking education whether directly or indirectly (Freire 2005, 109). At least I guided them to new information. The development that matters occurs in the weeks of the semester a student takes a class with me. For as long as I ignore the testimony of trauma (yes, deliberately overused here) from my former students, I could continue to believe this dictum. Even more, as long as I continue to ignore my own experiences, I couldn't see myself as a life-long learner in a way that was not the trite, "we learn new things everyday" sort of way (Drago-Severson 2004, 18).

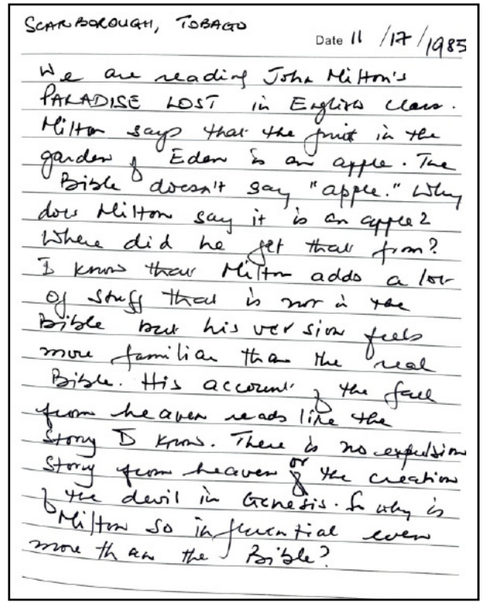
> *How was your mind changed? the older Hebrew Bible professor asked me around the first time he met me.*
> *What are you talking about? I answered curiously.*
> *About homosexuality and the Bible. How was your mind changed? he continued, sensing either vulnerability or a*

How did I change my mind? That question marked a pivotal point in my growth as a Biblical Scholar. Growth… we change, we develop, we think differently, we believe differently. "When I was a child, a thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. But when I became an adult" (1Cor. 13:11). I stumbled an answer to that question. Almost fifteen years after that exchange, the best answer I could come up with is, I don't know, my mind changed, I developed, and I keep changing. My non-reflection upon my learning convinced me that what I learned was more important than how I learn. Never before was I either asked how I learned or to reflect on how I learn (Drago-Severson 2004, 19).

Thinking about journals in Biblical Studies forced me to retrace my learning development I have kept a mental journal of my development as a learner and teacher of the Bible. For this entry, I make several visits to my past and through them I reconstruct an actual journal of my learning related to mostly to Genesis 3 and some other biblical texts. The practice is illustrative of the learning journal that I could have been keeping from those early days. Here these journeys to the past, serve as an example of the learning journal that can accompany courses in Biblical Studies.

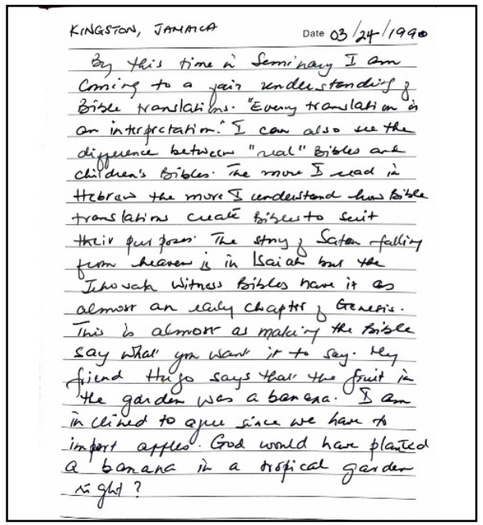

Scarborough, Tobago Date 04/23/1980
When I looked for confirmation in Gen 3 for the name of the fruit in the garden I surprised to see that there is no name for the fruit. I wanted to use this a quiz question in my Sunday school class. I read Gen. 3 almost three times and it only says "the fruit". How come I thought it was an apple? Where does apple come from if it is not in the BIBLE !! What else that I thought was there in the Bible that is not really there?

I started teaching Sunday School in the Methodist Church at thirteen years old. At that time, I am halfway through High School in the educational system that the British imposed upon its colonies. Although, we were several years into the post-colonial period, Church and education still carried all the marks of the colonial era. Bishop's High School in Tobago still has the reputation of the elite grammar school where high performing students attend based upon merit in rigors exams done at eleven years old. Thirteen marks the age of my first critical encounter with the Bible. Reading the texts for myself showed me the difference between what was actually written and what I was told was there. By the time I was seventeen, I was exploring issues common to first year Seminary courses in preparation to enter Seminary in Jamaica a few years later. The normal disruptions of Seminary came to me before my first Bible class in Seminary. They were not really disruptions to me since I had little investment in ideas of inerrancy as part of my faith formation. In fact, my emerging adult faith was based upon a critical and somewhat rigorous view of the Bible. That is not to say, I didn't experience angst or have my foundations shaken with more learning. I happily surrendered some ideas. During an oral examination as part of my candidacy process when the examiner suggested that my orthodox recitation of the "Second Coming" was not the only reading of the New Testament texts, I was happy to let that go. I was twenty-one years old when I entered Seminary, the new ideas and learning were fascinating to me. I clung more tenaciously, though, to "moral" teachings of the Bible. I built a foundation of biblical knowledge that could accommodate questions even if what I was doing was acquiring knowledge as an instrument (Drago-Severson 2004, 23). I wanted to know in order to teach, to tell, to admonish. As much as I understood the Bible as a diminutive sacred cow, for me it remained sacred with moral forms of authority over all human beings.


Scarborough, Tobago Date 11/17/1985
We are reading John Milton's PARADISE LOST in English class. Milton says that the fruit in the garden of Eden is an apple. The Bible doesn't say "apple." Why does Milton say it is an apple? Where did he get that from? I know that Milton adds a lot of stuff that is not in the Bible but his version feels more familiar than the real Bible. His account of the fall from heaven reads like the story I know. There is no expulsion story from heaven or the creation of the devil in Genesis. So why is Milton so influential even more than the Bible?

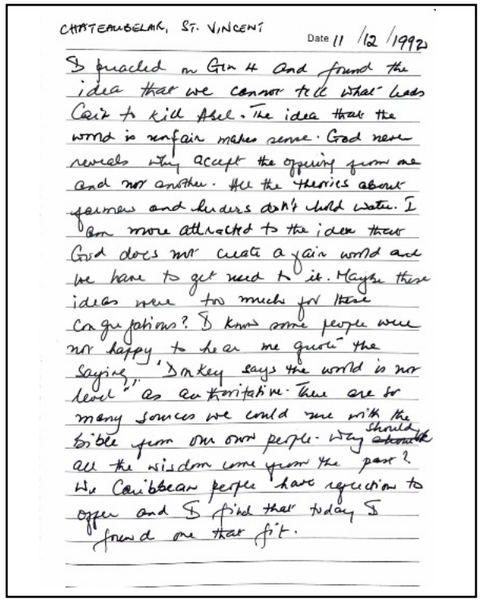
The extracts from my journal reveal someone who asks ques-

tions. Dick Rogers' Johnny Wonder's Question Corner Comic Strip fueled my daily curiosity. That they did not have questions related to the Bible made my search for answers even more urgent. In time I came to see questions as a less assertive way to demonstrate my knowledge (Huber 2011, 86). Alfie's question, "what's it all about?" more than anything else sums up my teenage angst. I don't know that I love this question, at least, in the way that Rainer Maria Rilke suggests. I live this question to the point where my middle-age self meets my teenage self. The journal gives us a chance to meet. In meeting, I see how I use questions to notice and explore (Huber 2011, 34; Perry 2011, 151)). Keeping a journal might have made me a better writer (Stevens and Cooper 2009,18). Since I have the chance to correct for that gap and hone my writing skills through a journal, I regret more missing out on taking note of my explorations. I am curious about what people do with the Bible outside of church. My love for reading and critical analysis of literature emerged around the same time I started reading the Bible critically. High School classes in "critical appreciation and comment" as well Elizabethan literature gave me skills to explore how meaning is made through texts. I am fascinated by the worlds that open up before me because they generate more questions. Over the years, the worlds that come together in biblical interpretation have increased as the walls of separation of sacred/profane, relevant/irrelevant, or appropriately cultural break down.

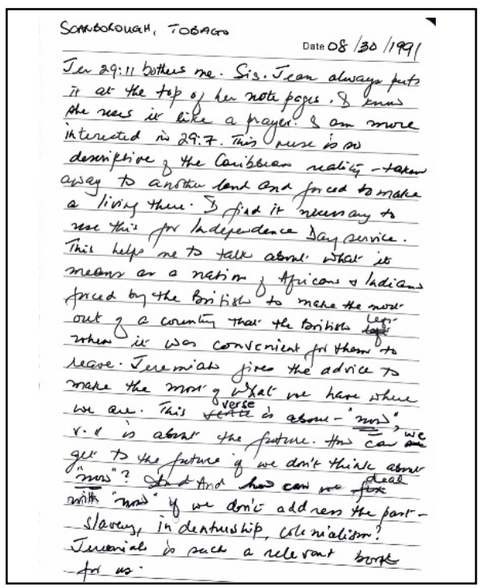

KINGSTON, JAMAICA Date 03/24/1990

By this time in Seminary I am coming to a fair understanding of Bible translations. "Every translation is an interpretation." I can also see the difference between "real" Bibles and children's Bibles. The more I read in Hebrew the more I understand how Bible translations create Bibles to suit their purposes. The story of Satan falling from heaven is in Isaiah but the Jehovah Witness Bibles have it as almost an early chapter of Genesis. This is almost as making the Bible say what you want it to say. My friend Hugo says that the fruit in the garden was a banana. I am inclined to agree since we have to import apples. God would have planted a banana in a tropical garden right?

By not keeping a learning journal I regret the times I might not have always learned from my experiences. Experiences do not always need to be negative to teach us something. Experiences, the memorable ones, for whatever reason they are memorable, provide opportunities for learning. Some of my more memorable experiences of biblical interpretation occurred during the years of active pastoral ministry. I served as a Methodist Pastor in St. Vincent and Tobago with a brief internship experience in Barbados. Interpreting the Bible in a relevant way for the Caribbean and meeting the pastoral needs that come with death and dying gave me invaluable learning experiences that would otherwise go unnoticed if not for a journal. Years later, I can see links between my pastoral experiences and formation as a scholar. My inability to become a flag-waving patriot in the days after the September 11 events in New York City forged my sense of the ambiguity of the book of Jeremiah. At that time, in the early stages of the PhD program at Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York I lived in Harlem and pastored a United

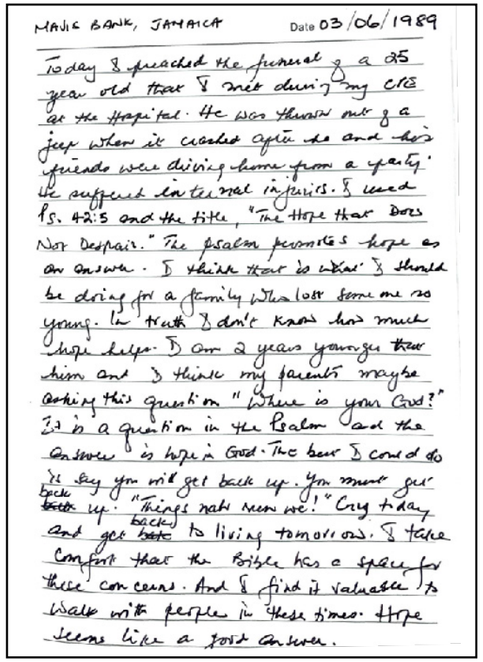

CHATTEMBELAIR, ST. VINCENT Date 11/12/1992

I preached on Gen 4 and found the idea that we cannot tell what leads Cain to kill Abel. The idea that the world is unfair makes sense. God never reveals why accept the offering from one and not another. All the theories about fairness and leaders don't hold water. I am more attracted to the idea that God does not create a fair world and we have to get used to it. Maybe these ideas were too much for these Congregations? I know some people were not happy to hear me quote the saying, "Monkey says the world is not level" as an antithetic. There are so many sources we could use with the bible from our own people. Why should we always look to all the wisdom come from the past? We Caribbean people have reflection to offer and I find that today I found one that fit.


SCARBOROUGH, TOBAGO Date 08/30/1991

Jer 29:11 bothers me. Sis. Jean always puts it at the top of her note pages. I know the verse is like a prayer. I am more interested in 29:7. This verse is so descriptive of the Caribbean reality - taken away to another land and forced to make a living there. I find it necessary to use this for Independence Day service. This helps me to talk about what it means as a nation of Africans & Indians forced by the British to make the most out of a country that the British kept when it was convenient for them to leave. Jeremiah gives the advice to make the most of what we have where we are. This verse is about - "now" v. 6 is about the future. How can we get to the future if we don't think about "now"? So the real how can we deal with "now" if we don't address the past - Slavery, Indentureship, Colonialism? Jeremiah is such a relevant book for us.

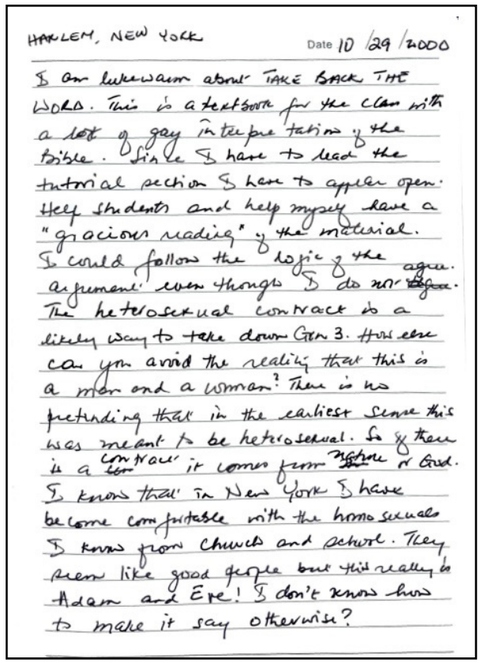
Methodist Church in Harlem. I stood in the midst of several complexities, not least of which were the complexities of speech and silence that faced Jeremiah. As war raged in Iraq and the counterinsurgency gained steam, passages from Jeremiah appeared in the lectionary each September to taunt me to break into a jeremiad. Over the years of my critical study of Jeremiah, my admiration of the fearless prophet that had turned to scorn for a prophet that seemed aligned with the Babylonian Empire only to then evolve into sympathy for such conflicted personalities.


MANJE BANK, JAMAICA Date 03/06/1989

Today I preached the funeral of a 25 year old that I met during my CPE at the Hospital. He was thrown out of a jeep when it crashed after he and his friends were driving home from a party. He suffered internal injuries. I used Ps. 42:5 and the title, "The Hope that Does Not Despair." The psalm promotes hope as an answer. I think that is what I should be doing for a family who lost someone so young. In truth I don't know how much hope helps. I am 2 years younger than him and I think my parents maybe asking this question "Where is your God?" It is a question in the Psalm and the answer is hope in God. The best I could do is say you will get back up. You must get back up. "Things will turn out!" Cry today and get back to living tomorrow. I take comfort that the Bible has a space for these concerns. And I find it valuable to walk with people in these times. Hope seems like a good answer.

The course in Christian Ethics I took in Seminary stands out as the most memorable course that I have ever taken. I reveled in examining issues from multiple perspectives. The non-stop demands to come up with airtight arguments were exhilarating. The push to "take a stand" and "defend it" opened up an academic wonderland that I wanted to play in every day. This was critical thinking at its best and I wanted to be a devotee of this form of learning. When I saw "critical thinking" as degree outcomes in the curriculum for both of the seminaries where I have taught, I knew I had found the theme park that would spark joy. In the academic playground I prefer, playing turned into serious mind games. Reflection, introspection, or getting in touch with feelings spoiled the fun. I emphasize observations in my teaching. Helping students pay attention to the world around them, how their learning fits into that world are things I underline. By doing so, I realize that I pack more critical thinking on top of critical thinking to make learning an instrument. An instrument of more and more information. "The place where fun goes to die"?

When I leave out the rides for reflective thinking from my theme park, I deny myself and my students the chance to actually grow and grow through genuine play. In truth, rather than expanding the range of my knowledge, I have been merely adding more examples of ideas I had already gained. Reflection lacks the rigor of true academic learning I would have told myself if I was keeping a teaching journal. Yet reflective thinking feels like a disturbance that forces me to engage my curious SELF with material and ideas that would readily negate my unique existence. I have to make a move that joins my experience or at least experiences that I am aware of together with the ideas in a process that lets me try them out in the real world. Seeing these processes work together and assessing them not simply for their viability but their suitability for me or my community form the heart of reflective thinking that a learning journal facilitates. That process is as rigorous trying to distill complex philosophical ideas. A learning journal opens the space for a curiosity. Curiosity is a fun ride. The ride becomes even more thrilling when there is room for questions that generate the merry-go-round of experience, ideas, testing out, and reflection (Stevens and Cooper 2009, 24).


HARLEM, NEW YORK Date 10/29/2000

I am lukewarm about TAKE BACK THE WORD. This is a textbook for the class with a lot of gay interpretations of the bible. While I have to lead the tutorial section I have to appear open. Help students and help myself have a "gracious reading" of the material. I could follow the logic of the argument even though I do not agree. The heterosexual contract is a likely way to take down Gen 3. However can you avoid the reality that this is a man and a woman? There is no pretending that in the earliest sense this was meant to be heterosexual. So if there is a contrast it comes from nature or God. I know that in New York I have become comfortable with the homosexuals I know from church and school. They seem like good people but this really is Adam and Eve! I don't know how to make it say otherwise?

Surviving the pandemic jump started my journal practice. In addition to the collective traumas of that time, I faced several accumulated personal events that compound my grief for a time might not have actually lived. Grieving for an unknown makes it hard to separate personal and professional journals. The loss all blends together. I am surprised that I like it that way because I don't like my food to touch one another on plate except when they should. This journal mushing allows me to examine myself

in several dimensions. Reflective thinking brings the self into the foreground in learning. Another one of those heading nodding moments. I look down at my shoes, aware that I don't practice what I preach. Well not completely. Reflections on the SELF led to the development of a postcolonial optic in my research and teaching. My dissertation and academic publications speak to my biography in overt ways to those who know me well. The confluence of the pandemic, personal grief, and simply aging opened up gaps in my teaching. At what point did I teach reflective thinking even as I was asking students to produce work focused on sustaining just communities? How did I help students start with the SELF as much as I wanted them to center the SELF in their writing? Where were the places when I attended to examining ways of knowing even as I emphasized that a critical problem with biblical knowledge are our epistemologies?

Dr. Davidson I am having trouble with the assignment because I still do not understand what I should be writing.

I looked at the student in my office knowing that her earnestness should have led her to be more open about her difficulties in the class. I knew that I didn't want to follow where she was leading. Instead I asked, What do you think that the passage is about?

Aaron and Miriam being punished by God. They both did something wrong and God punished them, she answered. From her answer I could tell that she understood at least most of what was happening in the passage but couldn't get at something that was a worthwhile observation for her. People sin in the Bible and God punishes them, seems like a regular feature of the Bible.

Let's look at again, I pressed, knowing that she was not seeing what was clearly there.

I read it several times and I see the same thing, she protested as much as her deference for authority would allow.

Ok, well tell me what happened to Aaron. I waited for her to read the passage. This might well have been the hundredth time she read it. She was a diligent student.

I don't think anything happened to him, she finally offered.

What happened to Miriam?

She got sick, she volunteers beginning to sense that there was a difference.

So, both Miriam and Aaron are accused of the same fault, talking bad about Moses, but God only punishes Miriam? What does this say about God?

That God is not fair? She concluded quite hesitantly and silently as we were transacting a drug deal.

Exactly! I shouted in smug satisfaction over the success of my Socratic practice. But then the student quickly punctured my joy.

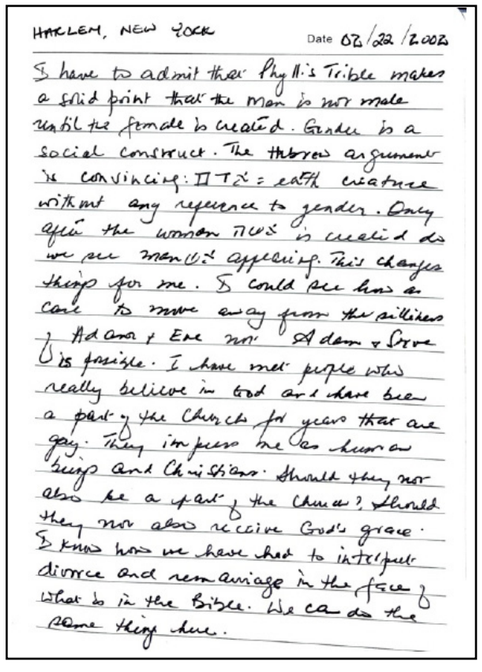
But Dr. Davidson I cannot write that, she bluntly declared now pressing me on the defensive.

What do you mean? I asked quizzically and mildly upset.

Can I write that God is unfair? I would feel uncomfortable saying that, she outlined in the matter-of-fact way that would leave no room for negotiations.

Even if you come to that conclusion from your reading? I pressed hoping that the light of her discovery would confirm her growth. She didn't respond but turned uncomfortably in the chair. At that point I realized that I needed to assure her that her fears of writing blasphemous words would have no impact upon her as God could take the criticism. She listened thoughtfully and respectfully, though reluctantly. Her assignment didn't mention God's unfairness. She found other more theologically palatable observations to include in her work to show an adequate level of developed thinking.

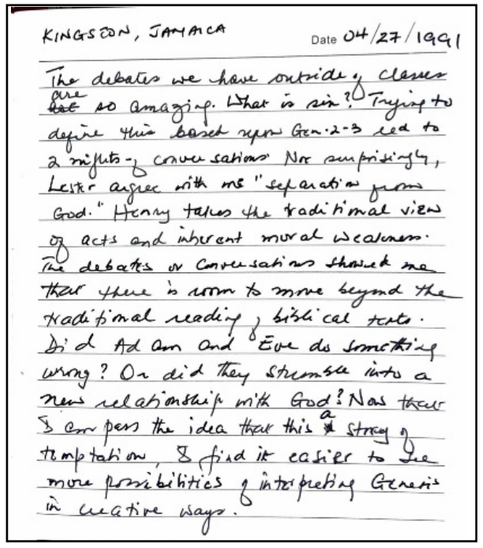
I regret not keeping a journal of learning and teaching in real time. I regret not giving this student the chance to keep a journal. Who knows whether that meeting was as memorable for her as it was for me. Was it even formative for her? I recognize that so much learning takes place outside of the classroom and in a number of instances beyond the life of the course (hooks 1994, 206). The practice of a learning journal has the potential to outline a lifetime of learning that extends beyond the formal limits of a course and with good fortune into meaningful relationships between teachers and students to the point of mutual teaching and learning (hooks 1994, 205).


HARLEM, NEW YORK

Date 02/22/2002

I have to admit that Phyllis Tribble makes a solid point that the man is not male until the female is created. Gender is a social construct. The Hebrew argument is convincing: אדם = earth creature without any reference to gender. Only after the woman אישׁה is created do we see man איש appearing. This changes things for me. I could see how to move away from the silliness of Adam + Eve not Adam + Steve is possible. I have met people who really believe in God and have been a part of the Church for years that are gay. They impress me as human beings and Christians. Should they not also be a part of the Church? Should they not also receive God's grace. I know how we have had to interpret divorce and remarriage in the face of what is in the Bible. We can do the same thing here.

"Trust me, I know what I am doing" seems like a misplaced motto to adopt in teaching Biblical Studies (Skinner 2008, 100). I don't recall ever saying it. In fact, I have little patience for sayings like "Trust the journey" or "Trust the process." Without using those exact words, my teaching aims to guide students to a promised land of liberative biblical reading comes across as me asking them "trust me, learn from me and you can still continue to hold the Bible as a book of faith or even preach from it." I am not sure how much trust I receive when I teach. I know I get respect. They respect that I know what I am talking about, that I am competent in the subject, that am a fair teacher (Skinner 2008, 102). They respect that I teach them new things and push them to perform at a high level. I hear that respect from a group of students who sat in stunned silence on the drive back to their Seminary after a class until one person asked what everyone was thinking, "Did he just say that there might not have been a Moses?" Not only did they share this experience with me several months later, but in subsequent years they seek me out to ask questions or guidance on biblical texts.

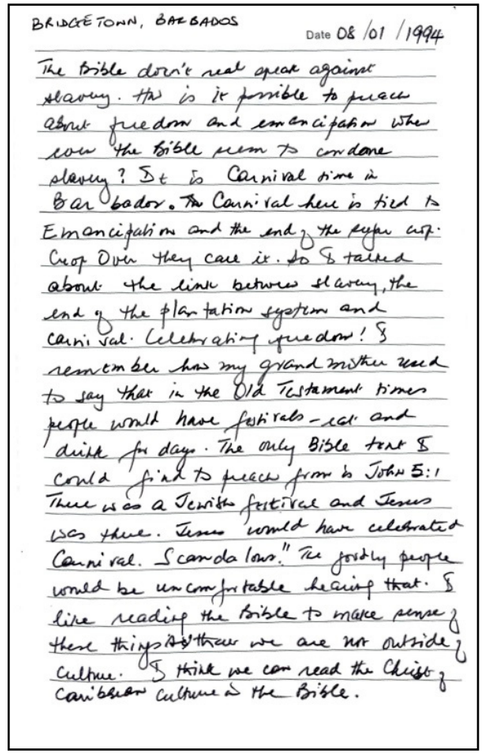

KINGSTON, JAMAICA

Date 04/27/1991

The debates we have outside of classes are so amazing. What is sin? Trying to define this based upon Gen. 2-3 led to a nights-long conversations. Not surprisingly, Luther agrees with me "separation from God." Henry takes the traditional view of acts and inherent moral weakness. The debates in conversations showed me that there is room to move beyond the traditional reading of biblical texts. Did Ad Am and Eve do something wrong? Or did they stumble into a new relationship with God? Was there a sense the idea that this was a Story of temptation, I find it easier to see more possibilities of interpreting Genesis in creative ways.

Students don't really need to trust me to learn. I am happy with respect. And perhaps respect is a form of trust in the teaching learning relationship that's built upon learning in an instrumentalist frame. I aim for transformation that requires the type of intentionality that a learning journal provides. Students can trace their own process and notice how they develop. In this way they can become even more aware of how they construct knowledge (Barbezat and Bush 2014, 129).

Learning journals ask students to pay attention to the SELF (Tombro 2016, 17). I could do more for a student if I teach them to trust the SELF on the journey (Hess 2008, 54). As a learner, I never had the type of cognitive dissonance as expressed in course evaluation comments: "Seems like this is a class where you can't mention the name of Jesus" or "He ruined Christmas for me after the class on Isaiah." My dissonance was of another variety of the same fruit. For me it was more about the thinness of historical data to support the birth narratives of the Gospel that could make Christmas more than a sentimental event. A


BRIDGETOWN, BARBADOS

Date 08/01/1994

The Bible don't real speak against slavery. How is it possible to preach about freedom and emancipation when now the Bible seem to condone slavery? It is Carnival time in Barbados. The Carnival here is tied to Emancipation and the end of the sugar cane crop. Over there is. So I talked about the link between slavery, the end of the plantation system and Carnival. Celebrating freedom! I remember how my grandmother used to say that in the Old Testament times people would have festivals - eat and drink for days. The only Bible text I could find to preach from is John 5:1 There was a Jewish festival and Jesus was there. Jesus would have celebrated Carnival. Scandalous!" The godly people would be uncomfortable hearing that. I like reading the Bible to make sense of these things that we are not outside of culture. I think we can read the Christ of Caribbean culture in the Bible.

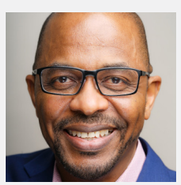
journal would have given me the space to process the vigorous debates around faith that I have had about faith and how much we can develop that based upon the Bible. The complaint of loss that occurs in a Biblical Studies class can be eased with the space to see how spirited engagement with peers but mostly the SELF provides a way to gain, to once again participate in a living faith (Blount 2002, 68).

Looking back, I can see where I lacked and where I need to make more space for students to engage the SELF in their learning. The changes to the SELF that happens with education beckon us to a new and hopefully a better place. The SELF emerges as a new authority figure in that place (Drago-Severson 2004, 21). If students find the surrender of the authority they presumed resided in the Bible to the professor in a class an untenable idea, handing that authority over to the SELF becomes even more threatening. A course evaluation is not a place for journal writing, even when it's the only opportunity in a course to vent about the de/re/formation of the SELF (Brookfield and Hess 2008, 3). On any given day, I will state the lofty goals of wanting to equip students to be independent learners, transformative agents, critical thinkers, and on and on and on. Ideals take a while to become practice. I say this because a critical inventory of my teaching practice reveals that it doesn't always rise to the discernable and rigorous standards of engaged pedagogy to which I aspire (hooks 1994, 15). Learning journals can help me and students interrupt the uncritical transfer of their authority to the

teacher rather than to the SELF. Journals help to track ways of knowing and to reflect upon how these ways are being transformed. At the heart of journal is attention to well-being, a value that I have not always experienced as a learner nor cultivated as a teacher.

At the start of a semester, I say this to students: "I don't expect that at the end of this course that you will agree with everything that I have taught you. In fact, I don't expect that you will see things the way that I do. What I hope for is that by the end of the semester, you will use what you have learned to examine what you have previously known. And in so doing, you will be able to clearly state why you hold to those views knowing that there are alternative views. You might leave the class with the same positions as you started but I want you to hold those in a more informed way." My idealism shows in one way or another! I say this to students with all sincerity. I want them to be knowers in all the ways that are available to them. Of course, I must also expand my range of the myriad ways of knowing and facilitate these ways through teaching. Since I now teach the Bible to students largely students of color who are socialized into thinking that they have no place in the creation of meaning about the texts and they are simply conduits for ancient insights, I want to emphasize the SELF. Now I need to cultivate the environment for the SELF to thrive in my classrooms. Journal writing focused on the SELF needs to be more than a place to practice or a platform towards "real" learning (Tombro 2016, 17). The learning journal when done well integrates life and the classroom (Perry 1987, 157). This integration accomplishes the type of development that we would wish to see in our students where they become self-actualized with the capacity to know the discern the forces that shape the world and how they will live in response to them (Stevens and Cooper 2009, 34).

Journals bring us face to face with a SELF that doesn't always feel so loveable far less knowledgeable. I marvel at my naivety even at the boldness of questions I asked in my teenage years surprise me now. My rigidity – past and present – embarrasses me. The ways I supported oppressive insights. My bumbling articulations of liberation don't sometimes restrict my writing. Mixed in there like soggy bread (yuck!) are the moments of brilliance, dexterity with the discipline, original insights, and unrelenting pursuit of freedom. I can't tell what's original porcelain and what is the golden glue that holds all of this together. The journal keeps reintroducing me to the SELF that has been learning the Bible in a critical way since the age of thirteen. These learning journeys that lie beneath our skin can easily deceive me into thinking that there is one critical moment when the light turns that marks true learning. Instead the journeys are marks on the skin – scars, blemishes, wrinkles, creased foreheads, and if I am lucky no sagging eyes. Learning and coming to terms with the complexities of the Bible is a lifelong project. I see how a journal marks the distance in years but more importantly how it notes for posterity the changes that take place as an adult embraces knowledge as an author rather than only a receiver of wisdom.



About the Author

Steed Vernyl Davidson is Professor of Hebrew Bible, Vice President for Academic Affairs, and Dean of the Faculty at McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago IL and Extraordinary Visiting Professor, Department of Old and New Testament, Faculty of Theology, Stellenbosch University, South Africa

Notes & Bibliography

Barbezat, Daniel P. and Mirabai Bush. Contemplative Practices in Higher Education: Powerful Methods to Transform Teaching and Learning. San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 2014.

Blount, Brian K. "The Last Word on Biblical Authority." Pages 51-69 in Struggling with Scripture. Walter Bruggemann, William C. Placher, Brian K. Blount. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2002.

Drago-Severson, Eleanor. Becoming Adult Learners: Principles and Practices for Effective Development. New York: Teachers College Press, 2004.

Freire, Paolo. Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Translated by Myra Bergman Ramos with Introduction by Donald Macedo. New York: Continuum, 2005.

Hess, Mary E. and Stephen D. Brookfield (eds.) Teaching Reflectively in Theological Contexts: Promises and Contradictions. Malabar, FL: Krieger, 2008.

hooks, bell. Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom. New York: Routledge, 1994.

Huber, Sonya. The "Backwards" Research Guide for Writers: Using Your Life for Reflection, Connections, and Inspiration. Sheffield: Equinox, 2011.

Kember, David; Francis Kam Yuet Wong; and Ella Yeung. "The Nature of Reflection." Pages 3-28 in Reflective Teaching and Learning in the Health Professions: Action Research in Professional Education. David Kember (ed.). Malden, MA: Blackwell Science, 2001.

Perry, Donna M. "Making Journal Writing Matter." Pages 151- in Teaching Writing: Pedagogy, Gender, and Equity. Edited by Cynthia Caywood and Gillian R. Overing. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1987.

Pratt, Mary Louise. "Me Llamo Rigoberta Menchú: Autoethnography and the Recoding of Citizenship." Pages 57-72 in Teaching and Testimony: Rigoberta Menchú and the North American Classroom. Allen Carey-Webb and Stephen Benz (eds.). Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1996.

Skinner, Matthew L. "'How Can Students Learn to Trust Us as We Challenge Who They Are?' Building Trust and Trustworthiness in a Biblical Studies Classroom." Pages 93-117 in Teaching Reflectively in Theological Contexts: Promises and Contradictions edited by Mary E. Hess and Stephen D. Brookfield. Malabar, FL: Krieger, 2008.

Stevens, Dannelle D. and Joanne E. Cooper. Journal Keeping: How to Use Reflective Writing for Learning, Teaching, Professional Insight, and Positive Change. Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2009

Tombro, Melissa. Teaching Autoethnography: Personal Writing in the Classroom. Geneseo, NY: Open SUNY Textbooks, 2016.

The Mother of Teaching, Ms. Earlene Watkins: A Real Mother for Ya

Ralph Basui Watkins
Columbia Theological Seminary

I am a professor because of my mother. Not only am I a professor, but I am a professor who prides himself on being a good teacher. My mother instilled in me that it is the teachers who change the world. She also taught me that at the core of good teaching is love. Love for those you teach, the community in which you teach, and the subject matter you teach. My mother believed that teachers could make this world a more just place by loving their craft, becoming excellent at that craft, and loving those they have the privilege of learning. What I learned from my mother has guided me throughout my career and it has informed my pedagogy. Her story is my story as I continue to do that which she taught me do as a kid growing up in Eatonville, Florida. Eatonville, Florida, the oldest incorporated all Black town in the United States of America, the home of Zora Neale Hurston. The place where Black history was born.

Ms. Earlene Watkins circa 1970

My mother, Ms. Earlene Watkins, was in the words of Johnny Guitar Watson, "a real mother for ya." She was a mother not only to me and my siblings, but she became the mother of the children of Eatonville. My family moved to Eatonville from Jacksonville, Florida in 1969. We moved from Jacksonville, Florida, from a big city to a small town, Eatonville was one square mile. A close-knit community where everybody knew everybody, and we were the new outsiders trying to make this our new home. Ironically enough, making Eatonville feel like home didn't take long. My mother took to this town, got involved from day one, and me and my siblings were involved as well.

This story takes place over a two-year period. Two of the most important and impressionable years of my life. I was between eight and ten years old, third and fourth grade, and it seems like it was yesterday. Yesterday; all of my memories don't seem so far away. The memories rush as I write. I can sense the energy, excitement, and joy of this time. A time when a town came to love its children and instill in them that they could dream, and their dreams could come true.

All of my senses come to life when I think back to 1969 to 1972. As I remember this story, I remember in frames of joy, fragrances, and sounds. I can smell this time as much as I can see it. It was a time that smelt like summer, the wetness of Florida humidity in the air, sweat on my skin, and hope in the air. Sun shining, grass growing, rain falling. I can see it, I can feel it; as I type joy floods my soul. The joy of a time that gave shape to the life I live today. My life as an indigenous teaching scholar was birthed in Eatonville. A scholar who was of the community, serving the community, and teaching in community. The sounds of joy, the joy of the music of the time – rhythm and blues – coming from the radio my mother controlled that sat on the counter in our kitchen.

It was 1969 and I was dancing in the streets to the sounds of Martha and Vandellas, while singing James Brown's, "Say It Loud, I am Black, I am Proud." This was my theme song, the number one song and album of 1969! *Say it loud, I'm Black and I'm proud* by Soul Brother #1, Mr. James Brown. This was a revolutionary statement, "I am Black and I am proud," that James Brown was making, but I didn't know that. It rolled off my lips with ease. I was being raised to be proud of who I was and how I looked. My afro was fresh, as fresh as my mother's afro in the picture that opens this piece. This was radical, revolutionary, to wear your hair "natural" as my mother and her peers did. This is the first thing my mother taught me about teaching. There is a power in being yourself, expressing yourself. Bring your whole self to the classroom.

My mother didn't apologize for who she was or how she was proud to be an African American. She taught me there was a uniqueness in being Black, a royalty in being Black. I was taught not to leave my blackness at home. In 1968 we were negroes, but in 1969 we were Black and Proud. The Black Panthers had already signaled the call to blackness. "Say it Loud, I am Black and I am Proud," was in heavy rotation on the radio and my mother bought the 45 record for me, just for me. Well, she bought it for the entire family, but I owned it, I pretended that it was my record. I took pride in being old enough to be trusted to put a record on the record player and play it. I played that song over and over again. It was more than an anthem for me, it was my devotional.

Ms. Earlene Watkins and Mrs. Stephanie Williams at CPEY House circa 1970

When James Brown came on the radio – "Tiger Radio," 1600 WOKB on our radio dial – Mamma would say, "Turn it up!" I was always happy to turn it up, and sing along. The third verse was my verse. I became James Brown, I got the broom (my microphone) and I sung:

Now we demand a chance to do things for ourselves
We're tired of beating our heads against the wall
And working for someone else
Look here, there's one thing more I got to say right here
Now, we're people, we like the birds and the bees
And we'd rather die on our feet than keep living on our knees

Say it loud (I'm Black and I'm proud)
Say it loud (I'm Black and I'm proud)
Say it loud (I'm Black and I'm proud)
Lordy, Lordy, Lordy, say it loud (I'm Black and I'm proud)

Lordy, Lordy, this was sacred music. Sacred music that critiqued all those folk who spent more time praying and waiting on God to act instead being in the streets fighting and doing the grassroots work. We were fighting the power just like Public Enemy would later proclaim, the enemy of procrastination and waiting on God.

That third verse of this song! We were no longer waiting on our knees. It was time to get up off our knees and get to work. This song was a call to action, it was a call to allow God to use you to make a real difference in the lives of real people by doing some real grassroots organizing. My mother wasn't one for praying in churches, she was one who prayed in the streets, stayed in the streets, connected with the people, and was about doing something that would make a difference. Ms. Earlene wasn't going to die on her knees. She always said, "My prayers got legs." Her prayers walked, talked, and acted in real time. This is the second

thing my mother taught me about teaching. Don't pray for it to happen in the classroom, make it happen.

She taught me that people have a tendency to use prayer as an excuse to do nothing. You have to do something, make something happen, take chances, and be willing to be criticized. Be willing to

be on the outside, on the margins. My mother was on the margins of the church; the church was a stagnant organization in the eyes of my mother. She was about being on the move. Teachers who make a difference realize that an institution of higher learning, and especially of theological education, is about tradition, teaching it, preserving it, and protecting it. My mother taught me to get up off my knees and make change happen.

One of the keys to my mother's praxis was being committed to the community where you teach. If you are not rooted and connected to that community, the distance gets in the way of the relationship needed to make the change that she believed teaching could produce. When we moved to Eatonville, my mother had to find somewhere for us to live. We had to be rooted in the community.

My mother and father divorced a year before we moved to Eatonville. She was left singing that Freda Payne song, "Band of Gold." She rented our former home in Jacksonville and had the vision to come to this new town and purchase a home for her and children. She was putting down roots in the community. As she was surveying the town, she saw a home for her and her three children. Now mind you, this is 1969-70, and single African American women weren't purchasing brand new homes. My mother had vision; she was able to imagine things in her mind and then figure out how to make it happen. Good teachers have to have imagination. What are you walking around the halls of your institute dreaming of? My mother was driving and dreaming. Her dreams were able to silence the doubts, fears, and what others would've told her couldn't be done. How are you going to purchase a home as a single, thirty-two-year-old divorcee with three young children?

When my mother talks about this herculean feat you see how she saw challenges, the power of vision, and her simple tenacity in getting things done. In this short clip she tells the story of how she would purchase our home in Eatonville: 16 Eaton Street, Eatonville, Florida 32751 (**click on the video below to hear her tell her story)!**

From Purchasing a Home to Making a Home for the Children of Eatonville: Birthing CPEY

My mother was all in. She was committed to this town, its people, called by its history, and committed to making a future here. The purchase of the home is one of many examples that speaks to what I learned from my mother. Because someone hasn't done it says nothing about what you can or can't do. She taught me not to look at what hadn't been done or what others weren't doing and to do ME! Be true to yourself.

Too many teachers teach as they were taught or how their peers are teaching and it results in stifling their teaching, killing their desire to innovate and take chances. My mother took chances; she didn't care what hadn't been done or what people told her she shouldn't be doing. She did HER! As a teacher you must be the unique teacher you are called to be. Her example, of basking in your uniqueness in the midst of critique, is the third thing she taught me about teaching.

My mother came to Eatonville committed to being rooted in the community and making a difference in that community. She came searching for that thing she, and only she, could bring to that community, and that thing was an organization, Concerned Parents of Eatonville Youth (CPEY). It was here at CPEY that I saw myself becoming a professor. It was here that I saw the teacher that I wanted to be. It was here that I learned my history, the love of teachers who loved their community, their students, and the subject matter they were teaching.

My mother and her colleague, Mrs. Stephanie Williams, would birth CPEY and CPEY birthed and developed me and so many to get up off our knees and do things for ourselves. It was through the deeds of CPEY that the words of a Nina Simone song of the time came to life. My mother and Mrs. Stephanie Williams saw us as "young, gifted and Black!" They saw us; they saw us wanting and needing a space and place to develop, and they, along with the parents and kids of Eatonville, built CPEY and CPEY created in me a vision for the life I live today.

Seeing the Need: What's Going On?

What do you see? What do you feel? What should you do? Knowing . . . there are many ways of knowing. Ms. Earlene and Mrs. Stephanie Williams saw something. Their eyes were a window as to what needed to be done. They trusted their eyes, their hearts, and their hunch. Trust your eyes; what do you see, and how does what you see in turn direct what you should do? Seeing is a way of knowing. It is an epistemology. This is an important pedagogical foundation. What do or don't you see that your students might need? My mother saw something and she did something. In this short clip she tells the story of what she saw and what she decided to do that resulted in the birthing of CPEY **(click on the video below to hear her tell her story):**

Ms. Earlene Watkins and Mrs. Williams didn't deny what they saw or dismiss the call to do something about what they saw. Failing to see is a failure to respond. What do you see in your students? What are their faces, body posture, and other visual cues telling you? Ms. Earlene saw that the kids needed something – they needed something to stimulate them, focus them, challenge them, and empower them. What she saw made her uncomfortable and this discomfort wouldn't allow her to rest.

There is power in seeing because it is in seeing that we get vision or a vision. Her seeing produced a vision and that vision would materialize in CPEY. The ironic thing is, when you talk to her she never questioned if she could do it. She was so compelled by what she saw, and in her vision, that she found a way to make it happen. What do you see for your students? What do they need? What are they missing? In what ways do the standard ways of teaching leave your students wanting?

It was my mother's love for the children that helped her see, moved her to respond, and empowered her to make a way out of no way. Her love for her children and the children of Eatonville demanded that she act. She loved me and my siblings, she loved the children of our town, and love propelled her to act. Love is a force in teaching; love moves the teacher to respond in ways that meet their needs and the needs of the ones they love. I am convinced that when you love those you serve, serving them, teaching them, and responding to their needs produces joy. Our best work comes out of our love and joy.

The power of love. The power of love moved my mother to ask, in the words of Marvin Gaye, "What's going on?"

> ***Mother, mother***
> ***There's too many of you crying***
> ***Brother, brother, brothzer***
> ***There's far too many of you dying***
> ***You know we've got to find a way***
> ***To bring some lovin' here today, yeah***

Bringing the love is what Ms. Earlene did. She brought the love, and if you don't love your students it is hard to feel them. Her love for the children gave her a connection with their felt needs. Academics are taught to live in their heads, but the power of teaching comes from the heart. Students respond to love. Teachers that love their students and the subject matter they teach are the ones who are transformative. Transformation is an inside job with external manifestations.

What changed Eatonville, Ms. Earlene, and all the children she touched was love. Her love for the children drove her to design something with the children in mind. She wasn't concerned about the adults who had left the kids in the balance, she wasn't afraid of the city fathers who looked at her as a radical Black woman who, in their opinion, should go find a husband and be a submissive wife. She ignored what people thought of her, said about her, and opposed. She was going to do what was right and was in the best interest of her students.

There is power in ignoring what others are doing so that you can do what you want to do. Academics are taught to build on previous knowledge, teach what has been taught the way it has been taught, and as result they are held hostage to the past. Liberation comes when you can respect the past but create the future. A future that is not held hostage to what was, because if you are held to what was you can't become what can be. Ms. Earlene embraced the future by being propelled by the past. She knew the ancestors and what the ancestors said to her: Don't repeat them but build on them.

Imagination: What Do You See in the Future

Not only did Ms. Earlene birth CPEY, there was something in her that wouldn't be denied. At her core she was an audacious visionary. The power of seeing and acting was in who she was, and this would birth the most powerful teaching experience of my life. We know that "Design projects must ultimately pass through three spaces ('Inspiration, ideation, implementation')." Ms. Earlene was doing design thinking in action before they had a name for it. Ms. Earlene was inspired: she dreamt of the type of experience the children could have in a nurturing learning environment, and then she made it happen!

CPEY became much more than an after-school program that provided remedial help for children; it became the center of our lives. Doctors, lawyers, professional athletes, actors, politicians, preachers, civil servants, and college professors came out of that program. The program was the center of the community, built with the community, to empower the community. CPEY saw what we needed and provided what we needed. They built with design in mind. Designed around the needs of the children of the town.

We are children. We are the children this program was designed for, who met at the CPEY House every day after school. The picture above is a bit deceiving. This picture was taken by a newspaper photographer for an article about the success of CPEY. I am the youngest kid in this picture (third from left), looking at my Mamma. What makes this picture deceiving is that we never sat like this. We never sat and listened to adults talk to us or lecture us and point at stuff. CPEY was about community, conversation, dialogue, engagement, pushing us to think, act, dream, and speak up. I hear academics talking about trying to find their voice post PhD; I found my voice at CPEY. CPEY was a place of empowerment. I learned from CPEY that the best of teaching empowers students to think for themselves, speak for themselves, and think in new ways. Does your teaching do what CPEY did? Does your teaching empower students with voice, vision, and courage? I was taught not to be afraid at CPEY. My first book was entitled, I Ain't Afraid to Speak My Mind. It was the first book I published after getting my PhD and was a tribute to my mother and those at CPEY who empowered me to have a voice as a third grader.

At CPEY we were encouraged to talk back, to question, to think, to speak up; they were intentionally preparing us to speak truth to power. The kids in this picture would become a career telephone company employee, pastor, professor, and the first African American woman chief in the Orlando correction system, and all four would graduate from college.

Thank You Falettinme Be Mice Elf Again: Get Up

CPEY was touted as an after-school tutorial program. CPEY helped kids with homework. CPEY also had classes that spoke to kids' interests, from homemaking to Black history. Black history was my favorite class. There was something there for all kids. You could find your place at CPEY and this was important. Helping students find their place, find out who they are, and who they want to be. CPEY helped us navigate those uncomfortable years being a kid, trying to find your table in the lunch room. Does your teaching help your students find themselves, their voice, their sense of identity and vocation?

Sly and the Family Stone broke out with "Thank You Falettinme Be Mice Elf Again" during this time and that is what Ms. Earlene and CPEY were doing for us. My mother and her team not only designed something for us, they designed something for us that would help us know who we were. They designed an experience for us that would let us be ourselves. They didn't try to confine us to classrooms, they let us play, they let us go outside, play ball, and then talk about what we learned on the football field and basketball court. It was a holistic experience. Everything was done in the community – it was a communal experience. It was an experience that we were thankful for because it let us be kids. It let us be ourselves so that we could find ourselves. Do we let our students be themselves? Do we respect the communities they come from? Do we even ask or consider the theology they bring with them? and do we respect it, destroy it, or demean it?

My mother and her colleagues kept us in mind from start to finish. They were helping us be ourselves. They focused on our needs. My mother and her colleagues identified a need and allowed us to articulate our needs and dreams as a part of the plan. They empowered us to do what only James Brown says so succinctly: "Get Up" and get to it.

When designing something it is important to keep in mind, and in conversation with, those for whom you are planning it. Ms. Earlene kept us in the conversation. We would sit around the table with her and she would ask what the kids wanted. What do you all think you need? She worked with us to design an experience for us. It wasn't a class or a set of classes but rather it was an experience she was designing.
My mother made it her business to know the children in the community. She knew them by name. She put up a basketball goal in our backyard, kids would come, play, and be fed some of my Mamma's good cooking. In exchange for the food and games she earned the right to ask questions.

My mother would talk to the children, ask them what they wanted to do, how they wanted to spend their time, and what type of program they should create. She asked what was missing in their lives, what subjects were they struggling with, what they liked to do after school, and her key question was: "What do you want to be when you grow up?"

I felt sorry for my friends when she asked her "key question." My mother would use your answer to motivate you. The conversation would go something like this, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" "I want to be a lawyer like Thurgood Marshall." She would pause, look in your eyes; her eyes would lock eyes with your eyes. Mesmerizing trance-producing eyes. It was as if she was looking deep into your soul. Her response was never a lecture but always a call to have a conversation. The probing questions would start. "Do you know what college he attended? Do you know how hard he studied? Do you know how hard he worked?"

When she found out you had a dream, she used it to push you to act on your dream. She showed you how your today would produce your tomorrow. The consequences of your actions, daily habits, the power of study and school as the ticket to success, was what she was pushing. She wasn't offering a way out of the 'hood but she was calling you to be a part of the 'hood, to grow up here, make your dreams a reality here, serve your community and stay in your community like she did. All you needed to make your dreams a reality was right here in Eatonville.

Her dream was for your dreams to come fruition. When she talked, you felt her love. The conversations were inspiring and those conversations fueled what CPEY did for us and in us. They inspired us

Ms. Earlene at CPEY House with Victor Watkins, Clarence Pittman, Ralph Basui Watkins, and Cornita Scott-Riley circa 1971

to come, stay, grow, and be CPEY! I benefited, not simply by being a part of CPEY – I had her all the time and she pushed me to dream, to study, and to become what I am in the process of becoming. She taught us never to settle but to always push. Push to make your dreams and those in your community's dreams a communal reality that would help all people.

At CPEY we weren't taught to do by yourself and for yourself. We were taught to be ourselves in the context of community and to help others. We did homework together, we studied together, we read together, we talked together, we dreamt together, we fought together, we stuck together, we were there for each other. We are in community.

How do you make your classroom a learning community? How do students see themselves, not in competition, but in companionship, partnership, relationship? CPEY taught us what it was like to be in a relationship. We celebrated together. We celebrated with each other, loved each other, and cared for each other. How do you teach your students to care for each other? How is caring experienced in your classroom?

The CPEY Model: Push and Pull

CPEY was great but it didn't start that way. The leadership made adjustments along the way and weren't afraid to change course. What they were building was new. This was a novel program back in 1969-70. After-school programs are everywhere in 2022 but this was not the case in the early 1970s.

CPEY was trial and error. In the words of Rufus Thomas, "everybody is doing the push and pull." Rufus Thomas' song, "Push and Pull," could've been the theme song of CPEY in those first few months. It was a push and pull.

CPEY met us at our deepest need.

They put the CPEY house in the line of traffic, with rooms for teaching, a yard for outdoor events, and basketball courts across the street, but they were vacant. In the first few months CPEY struggled. My mother and her team had to deal with failure and they used failure to learn. The kids weren't coming. They had built it, designed it, and put it in the right place. What had they missed?

My mother saw what was missing; she needed children to lead children. She had to let a child lead her! She was humble enough to partner with the kid who led the community: Larry Hopkins, a fifteen year old, Malcolm X wannabe. Larry was part athlete, part preacher, part radical, but all leader. My mother saw this, recruited him, made a fifteen-year-old her trusted partner in building CPEY, and it worked.

Larry was like a magnet, he brought kids with him. Not only did Larry come, but Clarice came, and Peanut, and Shirley and Howard, and Vernon and Michael. . . the CPEY house was full every day. At night we could come back for evening talks with the teachers from the high school, and my favorite was the history teacher. We were being taught Black History by a teacher with an afro and he was a Black Panther. It couldn't get any better. I excelled in his class. I read, raised my hand, pushed back, and was affirmed as someone who was "smart." He would call on me, encourage me, and ask questions. He was the first person to tell me that I could be a professor and I believed him.

There was something about this time that doesn't have to be unique to this time. We were community, wed together in a cultural fabric that made us operationally one. It wasn't unusual for Sly and the Family Stone's work to be the foundation for next week's lesson, or Glady's Knight and the Pips's, or Funkadelic's; "I Got a Thing, You Got a Thing, Everybody's Got a Thing."
Everybody had a place at CPEY. CPEY supported the local little league football team, The Eatonville Rockets, basketball teams, scholarship banquets, and pageants. CPEY was a one stop shop. The one stop shop was born out my mother's keen eye. She saw what had to be done and took the steps necessary to create a holistic learning experience. Holistic learning is communal, needs-meeting, love-oriented, innovative, creative, and course changing. That is what CPEY was for us and is for me as I do CPEY-type teaching today.

CPEY provided a nurturing educational environment centered around our hopes and dreams. These weren't empty hopes and dreams, they were dreams we could see through the community at CPEY. We were taught about those who had come before us. We were taught that our history said something about our future. It said something about our people and our resilience. When KRS-One would declare, years later, "that most of my heroes don't appear on no stamp," we had been taught about our heroes and sheroes: we knew them and they were stamped in our hearts and minds.

CPEY met us at our deepest need. It met us, loved us, encouraged us, and it sustains me yet. This model of holistic teaching is a transformative way of teaching that promises to do what my Mamma said it could do: make the world a more just place. There is power in love. Love is liberating, transformative, and to truly love the other is to want what is best and right for them. When we teach from a place of love it leads to a world of love, and love can change the world.

Playlist

"Say It Loud – I'm Black and I'm Proud" by James Brown

"Dancing in the Street" by Martha and the Vandellas

"Fight the Power" by Public Enemy

"A Real Mother for Ya" by Johnny Guitar Watson

"Most of My Heroes Don't Appear on No Stamp" by KRS-One

"What's Going On" by Marvin Gaye

"Band of Gold" by Freda Payne

"Get Up Offa That Thing" by James Brown

"Thank You (Falettinme Be Mice Elf Agin)" by Sly and the Family Stone

"(Do the) Push and Pull" by Rufus Thomas

"I Got a Thing, You Got a Thing, Everybody's Got a Thing" by Funkadelic

"You Need Love Like I Do (Don't You)" by Glady's Knight and the Pips

"The Thrill is Gone" by B.B. King

Notes & Bibliography

[1]James Brown, "Say It Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud (Part 2)," (Vox Studios, 1968, 45 rpm single).

[2]Marvin Gaye, "What's Going On," (Hitsville USA, 1971, 45 rpm single).

[3]Brown, Tim, Clayton M. Christensen, Indra Nooyi, and Vijay Govindarajan, HBR's 10 Must Reads on Design Thinking (Boston MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2020), 16.

About the Author

Ralph Basui Watkins is known as "the scholar with a camera!" He is a professor, photographer, documentarian, faith leader and scholar. He is the author of six books, and over thirty chapters and articles. He is a sought after speaker, workshop leader and panelist. His television show Talk it Out with Dr. Ralph Basui Watkins was one of the top rated show on the Atlanta Interfaith Broadcasting network for over four years (2012-2016). He is also the producer / director, cameraman and editor of three full length made for television feature documentaries: She Is The Pastor (2012) and Our Journey to Palestine: A Story of the 43rd Delegation of Interfaith Peace Builders (2013) and Africana Theology and the Roots of Our Faith: A Journey Through Egypt (2018). Dr. Watkins has had two solo photography shows and his photographs have been published in numerous publications. In recent years, Watkins has been the artist in residence at the Velvet Note and St. James Live, both nationally recognized jazz clubs. He also been awarded a Louisville Institute Sabbatical Grant, Collegeville Institute Sabbatical Residency Grant, Governor's Teaching Fellowship, Lilly Teaching Fellowship, Fulbright Hayes Fellowship for study in Ghana, a Wabash Teaching Fellowship, and various awards and grants to study in Kenya, Tanzania, Egypt, Ethiopia, Senegal, and Ghana.

Centering Black Women: Embodied Ethics and Womanist Ethnographic Pedagogy

Monique Moultrie
Georgia State University

As a newly tenured and promoted professor, I was enjoying the sweet spot where teaching in my areas of interest took precedent over teaching just for the university's core curriculum; this blissful place where teaching evaluations did not have to be scoured for immediate remediation before jumping back on the hamster wheel to do all the things necessary for promotion to Professor. I reveled in the times where I was free to teach what my soul must have. One of the first courses I designed and taught post-tenure was centered around womanism and activism which brought the fullness of my research and my personal commitments to eventually three very different institutional contexts. Here, I will explore some of my gleanings from womanist approaches to the classroom. In particular, I will discuss womanist ethnography as a pedagogical method demonstrating the value that comes from being a living text that brings living texts to our classrooms.

My Womanists As Living Texts (WALT) model of teaching highlights the import of mother wit and embracing our embodiment in our classrooms. This pedagogical model considers womanists (Black women and other women of color) as living texts and encourages instructors and students to trust Black women's voices and stories. As a third-generation womanist scholar my teaching model also reflects my training by womanist theologian and anthropologist Linda Thomas. In her classes, I learned the import of womanist teaching that included not just fiction, poetry, and historical narratives, but also included the living stories of everyday Black women. In this article, I will inform those interested instructors, students, and academic professionals such as advisors, department chairs, and publishers how they can effectively view Black women as living texts through three steps of the WALT model, namely Re-membering Ourselves, Re-collecting Voice, and Re-connecting Reflections. Each step has a specific approach directed towards demonstrating that Black women are vital vessels of knowledge. Some examples will be given for the implementation of these approaches.

Re-membering Ourselves

> ***What does it mean that academia is so structured that Black women are severely ostracized when we re-member and re-present in our authentic interest?***
> *—Katie Cannon, "Structured Academic Amnesia"*

The first step in the WALT model involves an autoethnographic approach to re-membering ourselves. By this, I mean encouraging instructors and students to re-align themselves with their bodies as whole selves and sites that inform their learning. Each first class I inform students that the course will be a space where they are expected to Do Their Own Work meaning they must be willing to self-examine before we tackle living texts in the course. Because I approach womanist pedagogy autoethnographically, I follow Black literary critic Mae Henderson's assertion that Black women pedagogues are called to locate themselves in their bodies and to help students interpret themselves as embodied texts that are "produced by certain personal and historical texts."

I create opportunities for students to explore autoethnographic methods. For example, the students' first assignment in my courses is a low-risk Critical Cultural Autobiography that is worth 5 percent of their total grade. Students submit a four-page autobiography that details how religion, race, gender, and class impact and shape their lives and perception of the social and cultural world. This essay should begin with how students became aware of these concepts and how they have developed values and beliefs in light of these concepts. It is perfectly fine if religion plays no role in their life, in which case the essay reflects their observation of how religion creates values in society. During class we do prompting exercises on privilege and self-identity before they write the assignment, and they also free-write a paragraph in class about their identity in each of the categories before they submit the actual paper.

Students will need prompting exercises and direct discussion because overwhelmingly when students do not heed these instructions, an instructor may end up with a variety of responses that do not quite match expectations. For example, white students generally need more prompting and direct nudging to discuss race since whiteness tends to serve as a general category, not a racialized one. Minority students often require prodding to recognize their class identities or the ways that their race and gender intersect with income to create their realities.

Finally, nonreligious students frequently forget the pervasive religious structuring of blue laws, work schedules, and education. Explicit attention to these areas of oversight is just as useful as the grading rubric, which makes grading equitable as students discuss their own stories. In this way, the grading rubric (which includes prompting questions for each of the categories) draws students back to the areas that they have not fully interrogated, and it is this interrogation that is being assessed.

Over the years, I have modified the assignment to respond to student concerns such as the risk involved with sharing their sexual orientation (which I no longer ask students to reveal); concerns regarding the confidentiality of their stories (student examples or papers are never shared with anyone other than the instructor); and concerns regarding grading (e.g. how can telling my story earn me a B). My commitments to combatting heterosexism and transphobia also mean that I have more nuanced conversations around the body as a text, demonstrating my commitment to making trans students comfortable with the assignments. One distinction made in the perspective of the body as text was my realization that the externality of the body may not reflect the interiority of one's body. In these cases the unwritten text a body represents may require further translation. If an instructor chooses to modify the assignment it should be to make space for more students to find themselves in the paper.

Beyond the modifications and nuances added to the assignment, I realized I needed to modify how I described its purpose to my students. As one of the course objectives, students learn that the autobiography will help them interrogate intersectionally the concepts of gender, race, religion, and class. Pedagogically, before students begin the work of analyzing other texts (written and non-written) it is necessary for them to do the exploratory work of gaining a deeper sense of their own views. This work of re-membering as whole selves prepares students to probe the texts in the class. The assignment also helps the instructor to assess "who is in the room," uncovering an awareness of the lenses with which students will encounter the course.

Helping students to read their complicated bodies as texts that can inform their analysis is the first step in the model because for womanist ethnographic pedagogy to flourish, students and instructors must have done the priming work necessary to gather again their various identities, memories, and experiences. As the first assignment reveals, many of my students are dis-membered in their identity formation and embodied experience. For example, students remember themselves as middle class and yet when we discuss their lived experiences or even a recognition of what the US considers the poverty level, their memories and identity often shifts. Paying attention to this dissonance will help an instructor name these disconnects for students.

As I walked students through the necessity of doing their own work, I realized that I was also re-membering myself for them, situating myself as not just a black, female body, but as a body with a mind. In introducing myself during the first classes, I talked about my elite and Ivy League education, about growing up in rural Virginia as a conservative Christian, and about my role as an ally for the LGBTQIA community. These self-disclosures were necessary as I was sharing with students the lens from which I now teach Black content after being taught a White discipline at predominately White elite R-1 institutions. Other marginalized instructors must gauge which self-disclosures are necessary to bring students back to awareness of their full embodiment. For me, I realized that as I wrestled with how to be a Black woman teaching about Black women to often non-Black students, it was perhaps futile to ameliorate the cognitive dissonance students experienced with my Black female embodiment.

> ***Before my ovaries formed in my mother's womb God said I was a woman warrior…Before oppression and racism were named I was chosen to be a crusader for justice…I can't stop now. I can't stop.***
> —Thema Simone Bryant, The Birthing of a Lioness

In fact, I began to realize that my body was the first text (and

sadly, sometimes the only text) that students read in my course. Yet, what text do I represent for them? They read my body through their assumptions, stereotypes, and even hopes. I realized that their engagement with me is a window into how they will engage the Black women research subjects in the course. As Mae Henderson asserts, failing to acknowledge that students are meeting instructors as their first text does not remove the experiences where one's gender and racial performance is read within the context of their dominant cultural script. Persons interested in pursuing a WALT pedagogical model must begin with the instructor's and students' autobiographies. This means that before I begin the work of helping students translate the other course materials or the Black women's histories that we engage in the class, I often have to begin by helping them translate me. Thus, the instructor mirrors for students the interpretive move they will make first in their autobiography and then in other course assignments.

For some students the translation work of engaging with living texts involves unfolding their peers' racist presuppositions, like I had to, when a white male graduate student sought to terrorize me in class by targeting my identities. He created a website in response to my course where he used caricatures of my body and speech patterns to describe his daily problems with my instruction and course content. While my department and university were supportive in helping me enact our disruptive student policy, I spent every class battling his comments, redirecting the course, and then staying after class with students to process their experiences. This course experience made me weary of being a black woman in the classroom, exhausted from defending my course content, my embodiment, and my scholarly interests. Like in Donna Rushin's The Bridge Poem, in that course I did "more translating than the Gawdamn U.N." I share this painful experience to authentically frame concerns about using autoethnography in the classroom as it could provide bad actors with fodder for disruption, and if not checked could rob instructors of their passion to teach. When instructors invite their stories into their classrooms this can evoke strong feelings and memories, and in doing so the invitation to re-membering could ignite or thwart new pedagogical possibilities.

My self-identification and sharing of my Black female experience demonstrate the womanist ethos to teach and research from the grounded experiences of women of color. Thankfully, that type of disruption has not been normative when I bring myself and other Black women subjects to the forefront of my classes. Typically, I teach in a context with a population starved for pedagogy centered around Black female embodiment. Yet, I still must do the "bridge" work of helping students separate my Black womanhood from the tropes running in their backgrounds. Sometimes they came eager, seeking mentoring as they had been ignored, or because they were a person of color shuttled off to work with the Black woman. Sometimes they came seeking a Mammy or a Mommy, roles I openly contested. I bring my decision to be a childfree Black woman to my courses before drop/add ends. I reiterate that despite my birthing hips I have no mothering gene waiting to be unleashed. That gene, like the lost city of Atlantis, is well hid and their time would be better spent seeking that type of nurturing elsewhere.

I am intentional about sharing what some would consider too much information (TMI) with my classes because this is an important component to how I want to be read as a text. I am not their mother. I will not make southern potlucks for the last class or send them reminder emails about their assignments or help them navigate their economic crises. I am not Mommy or Auntie but I will nurture their dreams and assist them with their applications and give copious feedback to strengthen their writing. I teach sexuality and gender studies; thus, I refuse to spend precious time assuaging their conceptions of black women as asexual or hypersexual. Yet, I talk about my partner and my newest book on black lesbian religious leaders. Autoethnography in the classroom is a selective sharing of one's story in an effort to be appropriately vulnerable with the class. It is done with telos in mind—to help students correctly read the instructor so that they can be taught to read their subjects.

Ultimately, I am persuaded that womanist pedagogy allows students and instructors to be re-membered as whole selves. While the process of autoethnography is internally focused, it is a methodological practice performed for relational purposes. In a course centered on womanist ethnographic pedagogy, autoethnography models interdependence and vulnerability on the part of the student and instructor. Sharing our stories necessitates that we learn as a class to trust each other with our stories, our intentions, and our pursuits to be seen as whole selves. Yet, this first step is not without tensions. As womanist pedagogue and religious educator Nancy Lynne Westfield reminds, there is potential peril in relational pedagogy because the teacher and learner become co-learners struggling to hear and understand each other while honoring and respecting each other as whole persons. When one overcomes these tensions, the ability to recognize the value of embodied knowledge becomes apparent.

Re-Collecting Voice

> ***If we want to dismantle the master's house that has stood for centuries on the backs of Black women, we must read the text that has been written by Black women's bodies.***
> *—Stacey Floyd-Thomas, "From Embodied Theodicy to Embodied Theos"*

The appreciation of embodied knowledge continues the reciprocal relationship created by instructor and student by highlighting the importance of voice and agency in the creation/recognition of new sites of knowledge. When students learn to seek out and accept fully embodied knowledge, this means they have learned to tune out the distortions of women and/or minorities' voices. This makes space for students to participate in the second step of the WALT model, which is reading living texts to re-collect voice. When students engage in the first step of re-membering themselves and their instructor, they are primed for the next step of moving beyond the collected canons they are familiar with by seeking insight from other sites of knowledge.

Re-membering should have taught them compassion and empathy as they recall how difficult it was to think critically about their own stories. When they begin reading Black women as living texts they can acknowledge that these women have feelings and families that exist beyond their purposes in our academic classrooms. To ensure that students learn to collect new stories each of my courses requires oral histories, autobiographies, or biographies representing my deliberate call to bring Black women's voices to the center of our knowledge production. Listening from multiple vantage points about Black women's lived experience allows students to critically engage texts going beyond what they have been trained to recognize as knowledge. Re-collecting means looking for the missing Black women in the dominant canons and searching for un-heralded ones in new and familiar spaces.

Pedagogically, this method involves the instructor demonstrating for students how to interpret the ways Black women tell their stories. When I urge students to collect a Black woman's voice, I am not just asking them to make a recording. I want students to learn how to hear in a woman's intonation, word choice, and syntax the agency being demonstrated. As we investigate Black women's liberation pursuits, I aim for students to be able to recognize how the Black women we are studying choose to share their stories and for what purposes, as we consider the media and other platforms used to advance their platforms.

One of my favorite means of teaching students how to listen and articulate the who/what/why of the story is through oral histories. Oral histories typically produce history that centers the stories and experiences of communities typically excluded from dominant narratives; yet the stories shared are curated and portrayed in a certain way. My courses include students learning to navigate archives that host Black women's oral histories so they can learn the skills involved for conducting their own oral history of a social justice movement leader. We spend time in the course learning oral history techniques, reviewing the student's interview style, and revising their questions to ensure they are able to capture at least an hour-long interview. In a multistep endeavor, students identify someone working within a social justice movement or a religious organization that has taken a social justice stance to explore through narrative means, and this data becomes the foundation for their class presentation and final paper or project.

The project should be scaffolded so students can gain dexterity with the techniques and flow of gathering an oral history. Thus, the oral history typically becomes the data for the final course assignment. Students explore a particular theme and thesis, analyzing the narrative of the Black woman to bolster their argument. This assignment usually brings forward lesser-known Black women which reiterates knowledge coming from a variety of places.

Through coursework and engagement with course materials students learn to read their activists' stories in multifaceted ways so that they understand some of the theological, moral, and political commitments involved when women seek liberation. Perhaps one of the most useful skills students can gain is the ability to appropriately handle living texts, such as women who can talk back to their analysis in real time. The Black female texts that they are being exposed to are constantly making agential choices in what to share, how to share, where to share—tactics that go beyond students merely noticing when Black women speak. The re-collection of voices that they gather may be one woman who has changed her perspective over time or it may be a tapestry of voices all revealing knowledge on a subject. Pedagogically, students are being trained to respect women's agency, expression, and authority.

This range of agency requires students to recognize Black women as mutable living texts—they can change their minds before the end of the course! They can respond in ways that prove our course content or runs counter to it as we wrestle with what it means when the person they interview or read about in today's class turns out to be a more complicated and less justice-oriented person by tomorrow's news. The slogan "Don't meet your heroines" often proves true as students engage women who lead dedicated lives for Black freedom but whose interpersonal dynamics leave much to be desired.

The view of Black women as complicated agents is often not a revelation students recognize on their own. The instructor gives them context to do so but experience is perhaps a better teacher. This experience can come from the interviewed women, but it is just as likely to come from other members of their class or peers with whom they share experience and information. In each class where students conduct an oral history, they also must present this oral history to their peers. During the class presentation students show that they have learned to interrogate a Black woman's activist story, and that they have learned how to provide a nuanced version of the person, reflecting a re-membered whole self. Yet, students are also able to challenge each other to see even more than they originally understood.

By pedagogically centering Black women's voices in the class, students gain experience engaging in cultural analysis of Black women leaders and activists, and this work involves critically approaching their narratives, recognizing that all stories are told with an agenda. A pedagogical pitfall occurs when students are not prepared to be impacted by the women that they encounter. For example, I prepare students by explaining the Institutional Review Board process and how it typically serves to protect the safety of our subjects. Yet, students must be reminded that their interviewees have interests too. When reviewing oral history questions before students conduct interviews, they must be prepared for the shock of conducting hour-long interviews and perhaps still not getting their questions answered. When students bring this disappointment and frustration back to class there is

ripe opportunity to remind students that living texts also choose how they are read and may only reveal what supports the dominant reading they desire.

While class assignments and readings are all tools in helping students collect new canons that include Black women's voices, students are also learning key qualitative research processes like slowing down to listen and learn. Rather than be disappointed that they asked all the right questions and got none of them answered, students who allow themselves to be shaped by their instructor and by the women they are interviewing may find that they receive unexpected knowledge that supersedes what they were seeking. This awareness allows students to collect new knowledge, perhaps the subjugated or forgotten wisdom shared in Black experiences.

Re-Connecting Reflections

Central to the WALT model's final step of re-connecting reflections is an awareness that there is a symbiotic relationship among all the steps. Centering the voice and experiences of Black women via listening to their subjugated knowledge requires reflecting on what gifts their stories bring and learning from them. This recognition is a hallmark of womanist ethnographic pedagogy. As womanist practical theologian Phillis Sheppard describes, womanist ethnography includes listening to Black women's experiences as valued basis of research. Listening to Black women and fully understanding the gift that is being shared is possible when students and instructors engage in the priming work of autoethnography so that they can empathetically receive what is being shared. Listening to Black women also requires the collection of new stories from perhaps unfamiliar knowledge vessels. Listening to Black women's voices takes time. Time for you connect to yourself. Time for you to connect with the Other. Finally, it takes time to reflect on what one has learned. This re-connected reflection as step three of the WALT model helps instructors and students gain capacity to accurately share the knowledge gained from studying Black women.

> ***We want our bodies back. We want our bodies back. We will take them. Protect them. Remember them. Remind you.***
>
> *—Jessica Care Moore, We Want Our Bodies Back*

Trained by womanist ethicist Emilie Townes that womanist reflection is individual and communal, this final step of the model insists on building from the skills learned in prior moves. It authenticates the whole person being studied and appreciates the various knowledge bases as essential to the final step of listening deeply. Again, Emilie Townes is instructive as she posits that womanist ethical reflection is an organic method that involves self-reflection within the context of hearing from a multiplicity of voices, and that the purpose of this endeavor is to interpret from all these vantage points a liberatory reading for the audience and student. Classes striving for the lessons of WALT pedagogy must embody liberatory goals because why else would one strive so hard to hear contextually and accept the authority of Black women's experiences?

Instructors embodying a womanist ethnographic pedagogy will need to build capacity in the students of our TikTok generation to learn these lessons. By instructing my students that we are going to go slowly so we can observe more carefully, I am honing their insights and their ability to read Black women as texts more expansively. Practically, this means assigning less readings and giving time in class to process what was read. It also means that when I teach the mechanics of conducting an oral history or collecting qualitative research, I am also devoting time to helping students gain access to the women whom they would like to interview. They will need to allocate time to conduct their interviews, get them transcribed, and upload their recordings to the course site. Thus, they are engaging with digital skills while also improving their interpersonal skills. Helping them process the time involved also means I am indirectly telling them that Black women are worth their time.

In engaging these assignments and readings before they are released to go interview Black women, I am setting protocols for students to actively listen and explore Black women's agency and voice. Some fields discuss skillsets such as cultural attunement, whole-body listening, or even embodied listening. While most of that research focuses on techniques like leaning forward, affirming the speaker, and being quiet to demonstrate one wants to hear from the other—it is the ethical intention behind embodied listening that is important in womanist ethnographic pedagogy. Yes, it is critical that students learn how to engage their research subjects, but if their purpose for study is not liberatory or ethical they will be ill suited to gain access to the knowledge Black women have to share.

Students must learn to sharpen their active- and deep-listening skills in order to gain the most from a course taught with womanist ethnographic pedagogy. For example, I prepare students by teaching them cultural theory, demonstrating how it supports womanist analysis, so students can learn to listen with cultural awareness, being able to interpret the polysemic readings possible with any story. Other instructors and academic professionals can include relevant literature that assists them and their students in supporting students in gleaning the dominant reading encoded by Black women in their stories. Yet understanding the meaning is only possible when one is ethically committed to carefully listen to the agency, message, and telos of a Black woman's voice.

Often these listening and interpretative skills are gained through relational reflection. Katie Cannon argued that a key feature of a womanist classroom is its reciprocity, where instructors and students are co-learners. I concur with this assertion, but I would also argue that a womanist classroom that has been shaped by ethnographic pedagogy also depends on relational reflections from the Black women being studied. Because there is a smaller number of womanist scholars attending to ethnography in their courses, reciprocity is limited to student and teacher. For those of us whose scholarship and pedagogy depends on living texts, the bounds of reciprocity must be expanded. In this way reflection is not a singular act or an act expressed just in the classroom. Womanist ethnographic pedagogy includes those beyond our classrooms as vital for our reflection.

The ability to re-connect with others and bring those reflections into the classroom is tested in real time. An effective means of demonstrating this skill comes through the class's dialogical reflection and peer translation. Pedagogically, I utilize peer review because allowing students to help each other learn to read Black women as living texts is a low stake means of making sure the class grasps the major concepts of the course. Peer review typically involves students giving feedback on their classmate's presentation on a Black woman social justice activist. The presentation is informed by the student's oral history, and it highlights how the Black woman activist exemplifies womanist spiritual activism; how she told her story; and the student's cultural analysis of their interviewee. This exercise helps students expand their knowledge and remember lesser-known Black women. Through the peer review students also gain capacious ways to interpret the evolutions of their interviewee.

Peer translation is another effective mechanism for teaching students to critically reconnect with their subjects and their classmates. In fact, in each of my courses there has been a robust discussion on who a student considered a womanist activist; how to deal with the diverse components of a persons' identity; how to handle texts that change their minds, and so forth. In other courses employing a womanist ethnographic practice, peer translation can help amplify Black women's voices, increase students' knowledge, and give students an opportunity to learn from each other's cultural analysis without being referred solely to the instructor's interpretation. Students are able to demonstrate with their peers that they have learned to understand their sources more completely.

Peer translation is also a method that improves students' connection to each other and the course content. For example, as instructor I model dialogical reflection for the students in our class discussions on the readings and assignments. Dialogical reflection reveals the capacity to change the questions that students bring to the class and well as the questions they bring to their own assignments. The class thinks collectively on how their questions changed after encountering these living texts and how this often demands a change in their thesis and argument. Yet, the instructor is also changed by their readings and the insights from the various women whom they bring to the course. As the students modify their arguments, I am also modifying my lectures and discussion questions for the other course materials so that we can approach course topics with these stories in mind.

A concrete example of this dialogical reflection made possible via students' re-membering themselves, re-collecting new stories, and re-connecting via peer translation is evident in how the course I taught at Harvard Divinity School was structured. I planned with the Harvard Divinity School Library to archive the oral histories from my Leadership and Womanist Moral Traditions course as a justice issue, thinking that in lieu of payment for their stories the women being interviewed would have the ability to have their narratives chronicled at a prestigious university. Setting up the permissions, indexing, and organizing the sharing of the interviewee data was a sizeable time investment making me wonder whether it was worthwhile. Months after my course ended, I attended a conference held at Harvard Divinity School that happened to have several panelists who were interviewed by the students in my course. I was pleasantly pleased that each interviewee sought me out to share how honored they were to have their stories captured by my students. Not all of them had seen themselves as leaders, but were able to do so through the student's eyes. In this important moment, I realized that the time investment was not only worth it, but it had paid me back with dividends: the students had learned from the women's stories, the women leaders had learned from the students, and I had learned from the entire process. This expansive reflective process is an advantage of the womanist ethnographic pedagogical model.

Teaching students to appreciate Black women as living texts is a reconnecting process that should put them back in touch with themselves, cultivate new canons of knowledge, and expand their capacity to hear and interpret Black women's authentic voices. As an instructive model it offers the promise of reclaiming embodied knowledge and requires that one deeply understand Black women as subjects and sources. In my classroom, I have watched this model help students privilege the voices and experiences of marginalized persons, and Black women specifically, exceeding the goal of teaching students to appreciate diversity. Finally, womanist ethnographic pedagogy allows instructors and students to expand our canons beyond written texts which have often excluded black women. Womanist ethnographic pedagogy speaks our truths despite the "structured academic amnesia" that seeks to limit Black women's impact to our classrooms and historical records. It provides immediate impact to the students we engage and presents future opportunities for the next generation to glean from the data that they gathered.

Notes & Bibliography

[1]My discussion of womanism has been shaped by womanists Alice Walker, Layli Maparyan, and Emilie Townes in particular. From Walker I utilize the framings of her four-part definition; Maparyan's definition of womanism as a "social change perspective rooted in Black women's and other women of color's everyday experiences and everyday method of problem solving in everyday spaces" allows me to discuss women of color as womanists in my classrooms; and finally Townes' contention that although womanism is confessional it can be used to describe a theorist or practitioner. Alice Walker, In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose (New York, NY: Harcourt, 1983), xi–xii; Layli Phillips [Maparyan], The Womanist Reader (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), xx, xxvi; Emilie Townes, "Ethics as an Art of Doing the Work Our Souls Must Have" in *Womanist Theological Ethics: A Reader* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 36.

[2]Mae G. Henderson, "What It Means to Teach the Other When the Other is the Self," *Callaloo* 17, no. 2 (1994): 436.

[3]I use exercises adapted from Dena Samuels' *Teaching Race, Gender, Class, and Sexuality.* Specifically, I have students create a Wheel of Oppression where each spoke represents a social location/identity. Students indicate where their status falls on the wheel and how close/far away from the mythical norm at the center of the wheel. This exercise prepares students for talking about the privilege and oppressions they experience. Students are also assigned Peggy McIntosh's "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" and asked to think critically about the examples she provides and how they relate to their realities. Finally, when physically in the classroom, students engage in a privilege walk to a series of prompts. Virtually, this has been modified to allow students to answer the series of prompts by simply marking on a sheet of paper when a prompt refers to an experience of privilege that they share. All of these exercises help prepare students to write the Critical Cultural Autobiography. "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack." Peace and Freedom Magazine (July/August, 1989): 10-12.

[4]Womanist ethicist Katie Cannon discussed this as embodied theos because she asserted that "remembering is no less than the experiences of our bygone days re-embodying themselves in the present flesh." Pedagogically, embodied theos was central to the justice-making transformation she desired from her classes. Katie Cannon, *The Womanist Theology Primer: Remembering What We Never Knew—The Epistemology of Womanist Theology* (Louisville, KY: Women's Ministries Program Area, National Ministries Division, Presbyterian Church [U.S.A.], 2001), 15.

[5]Mae G. Henderson, "What It Means to Teach the Other When the Other is the Self," 437.

[6]Donna Rushin, "The Bridge Poem," *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color, ed.* Cherrie Moraga, Gloria Anzaldua (Watertown, MA: Persephone Press, 1981), xxi.

[7]Nancy Lynne Westfield, "Called Out My Name, or Had I Known You were Somebody…The Pain of Fending Off Stereotypes," in *Being Black: Teaching Black: Politics and Pedagogy in Religious Studies, ed.* Nancy Lynne Westfield (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2008), 73.

[8]Students engage Black women-produced Ted Talks, TikTok, spoken word/poetry, blogs, popular magazine articles, oral histories, and Black women's YouTube channels or other websites. Students partner this engagement with oral histories, academic articles, books, and book chapters as they are exposed to a variety of examples of how Black women share their stories.

[9]Phillis Sheppard, "Methodologies." *Womanist Ethnography.* www.womanistethnography.org/methodologies.

[10]Emilie Townes, *In a Blaze of Glory: Womanist Spirituality As Social Witness* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 10.

[11]Emilie Townes, "Womanist Ethics," in *Dictionary of Feminist Theology, ed.* Letty M. Russell and J. Shannon Clarkson (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 91.

[12]Katie Cannon, *The Womanist Theology Primer*, 15.

[13]Katie Canon, "Structured Academic Amnesia: As If This True Womanist Story Never Happened," in *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society, ed.* Stacey Floyd-Thomas (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006), 19.

About the Author

Monique Moultrie's scholarly pursuits include projects in sexual ethics, African American religions, and gender/sexuality studies. Her research has been supported by a Ford Foundation Postdoctoral Fellowship, a Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning Grant, a GSU Dean's Early Career Award, the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion Jack Shand Research grant, and an American Academy of Religion Individual Research Grant. She is co-principal investigator on a Henry Luce Foundation Advancing Public Knowledge on Race, Justice, and Religion in America grant which will fund "The Garden Initiative for Black Women's Religious Activism." Her book Passionate and Pious: Religious Media and Black Women's Sexuality was published by Duke University Press and was the 2018 Book of the Year for the Religious Communication Association. Her second manuscript Hidden Histories: Faith and Black Lesbian Leadership will be published in February 2023 by Duke University Press. Additionally, she is a book Series Editor for T&T Clark Enquiries in Embodiment, Sexuality, and Social Ethics and serves on the editorial board for the Journal of Black Women and Religious Cultures and the Bloomsbury Series in Religion, Gender, and Sexuality.

Pornographic Provocations, or Kyles in the Classroom

Courtney Bryant
Religious Studies at Manhattan College

Tears filled his eyes, but never quite made it to his cheeks, now flushed by the labor of proving himself pitiable. Self-deputized, seventeen-year-old Kyle Rittenhouse killed two people and maimed another at a protest, spurred by the killing of Jacob Blake by a white police officer, in Kenosha, Wisconsin. With semi-automatic rifle in tow, Kyle had traveled to the neighboring state of Wisconsin, out of a sense of duty to, in his words, "protect people." As he stated his case on the stand, Kyle became emotional. For many his impassioned outburst was another demonstration of Kyle's extraordinary virtue, inspiring a kind of kinship and pathos not-guilty verdicts are made of.

Kyle was more curious to me. His tears did not connect with me in the ways they landed with Middle America. Like Middle America, I too was struck by Kyle's immaturity and naivete (his media team earned every penny they were paid). Still, I approached this innocence with suspicion. I examined it critically, interrogating my rush to absolve him of the kind of wisdom necessary to deliberate as an adult. Sitting there with the full weight of a criminal trial on his shoulders, surely Kyle was emotional; emotional enough to break down on the stand. However, fear and remorse are not the same thing, and neither mitigated the damage done on that night, nor the consequences that accompany accountability.

"He had the courage to do what needed to be done," they said.
"To keep those niggers and nigger lovers in line!"
"They may put up with that rioting in other places, but not in these parts."
"Kyle was a protector."
"Kyle was extraordinary."
"A patriot who took a stand against lawlessness," they said,
with no mention of the laws he broke himself.

While Fox News pundits praised him, black folks, activists, and our allies feared for our safety. Gathering around water coolers and dinner tables we grappled with the juridical implications of Kyle's actions. Surely the imminent not guilty verdict could be interpreted as an endorsement of vigilantism from the American justice system. Would seventeen-year-olds, shaped by conservative rhetoric, officially be given license to operate as an extension of the law? How would it affect those who were just learning to stand in solidarity with the marginalized? But most of all I wondered about formation, the formation of Kyles across the nation, and even more close to home, the Kyles in my classroom.

Despite our assumptions, all "Kyles" aren't built the same. In my four years as a professor I've encountered many a Kyle…

Kyles that complain to the chair when you let them disrupt your class,
Kyles that relish in course evaluations more detailed and critical than any paper they ever submitted for the actual class.
Kyles that will do the written work, but tune out on their computers each and every class,
Kyles who find any and every reason not to attend classes with racially-charged subject matter,
Kyles who seek to bond with me through hip hop, swapping top fives and concerts stories,
Kyles who come to office hours when something is sparked in them during my lecture,
Kyles just coming out.
Kyles who are quiet as a mouse but shock you with their brilliance in almost every assignment,
Kyles who have declared themselves feminists and can run theory with the best of them.
Kyles who make excuses for the Kyles who do violence.
Kyles who go over and above, above and beyond,
The Kyles who expect A's, despite the fact they have seven missing assignments.
Kyles who enter the room every class period with the celebratory salutation, "Hello Dr.!"
Kyles who are searching for meaning and trying to figure out the cacophony of messages, raised by "very fine people…"
Who watch Fox News religiously
Whose uncles and brothers are police officers and don't understand why black people won't just comply with the law,
Children of second generation immigrants, but the good kind, from Italy, Ireland, and Croatia.
And then there are Kyles who are unwilling to acknowledge my expertise,
Kyles that will challenge every idea that comes out of my mouth, usually with a source to the contrary from Breitbart News.
Kyles that take the day off to travel to Washington DC in celebration of Donald Trump's Inauguration,
Kyles whose written work divulges a disdain for identity politics and who brazenly don bright red "Make America Great Again" hats as a goading tactic.

My teaching career has been littered with Kyles. This is far from surprising. In fact, their existence is part of my impetus for teaching. So much of my understanding of teaching is shaped by my faith in the life and love of Jesus and the wisdom of bell hooks, who sees aspects of the vocation of teaching as sacred. She writes, "To teach in a manner that respects the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin." Inspired by Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh who underscored wholeness—that is unity of the mind, body, and spirit—in the enterprise of

teaching, hooks advocates for pedagogies that welcome all aspects of students' and teachers' personhood to the classroom. On a good day, if I am operating in my purpose, teaching and writing are done in communion and conversation with God as an extension of my ministry. It is a sacred act, a ministry of conscientization in the pursuit of justice and transformation, accomplished by touching more than students' minds, but their being. This union of doing and being is the work of eros in the classroom, evidenced by the buzz of erons that fill the room. These erons, Katie Cannon offers, are the erotic particles emitted anytime an individual is engaging head and heart. Eros, hooks contends, helps us self-actualize and grounds our wisdom, facilitating how we know what we know. It is in these moments that eros does its good work of rearranging, debunking, and pushing students toward change.

I prioritize creating an atmosphere of intimacy, truth telling, and belonging in the classroom as a way of inviting erotic energy and exchange into the space. We do not approach religion as a mere set of principles or a community practice. It is more than the belief in a deity or deities. It does not just lie flat, but is dynamic, impacting the perspectives, ethics, and identities of every student, each of whom come with a nagging desire to find their place, their belonging in a world constantly hurling images and ideas of what it is and who they should be. In the erotic laboratory of my classroom, these perspectives, ethics, and identities, so often accepted without scrutiny, come under the full weight of counter-hegemonic texts, activities, and methodologies and their disruptive effect on the social imagination. My aim is that my classroom functions as a place where students will come to know their own voices more clearly, through the development of critical consciousness. I want this for the liberation of the marginalized in my classroom. I desire this for the Kyles of the world as well; for our liberation, for their wholeness. It is also required for our safety, which in the most horrific of times seems predicated on their sense of reality.

This work holds danger, particularly from those whose power is dependent on the systems this kind of teaching seeks to tear down. For the hoarders of power, it inspires violence of all kinds, especially the pornographic. It is pornographic in the sense of taking pleasure in that which takes rather than gives life— parasitic, exploitative, objectifying and degrading of the humanity of others. The pornographic has its place in the racialized history of America. It has repeatedly been a tactic of white dominance.

In these dynamics of relating, dominion over black people and all products of black life, especially pain, are used for sensation, with no regard for feeling. Engaged pedagogy shuns such dehumanizing behavior, yet it is often lurking in the shadows, waiting for the next chance to antagonize and diminish.

"Did you hear?" His excitement bubbled over in his voice. "The verdict is in."

Which verdict? I wondered.

In addition to a series of clashes at demonstrations against police brutality across the nation, some men in Georgia had run a young black man (see how that works) off the road and killed him while he was out jogging. White vigilantism was trending.

"Not guilty on all counts," he exclaimed, with a smug purse of his lips.

And then something strange but familiar. His attention turned to me as though he was waiting for something; or better yet, he salivated at the opportunity to make a spectacle of black pain, to rip the veil, and expose it to his friends. Existing beyond the constraints of oppression, he, this eighteen, perhaps nineteen-year-old, sought an impassioned response. Void of recognition, empathy, or reciprocity, he imposed his curiosity, gawking into the intimacies of my interiority for sport. These pornographic provocations helped him count the distance between him and me, and its permanence, so long as we both shall live.

Kyle relayed the verdict to me not as a casual exchange of today's news, but as a provocation to inflame. It was an exercise in provocation for entertainment, reminiscent of Sarah Baartman and the pseudoscientific gaze of her sophisticated spectators. I had readied myself for the unwanted sexual gaze. The professorial cape, accomplished through a tunic, large blazer, or long flowing dress was foundational to my professorial wardrobe, effectively obscuring any intimate engagement with my body. Yet, while this was lacking in physical violation, a libidinous lust was nonetheless present, and its stultifying racial dynamics very much felt.

This recognition, as well as the anger that sat at the pit of my belly, set my body ablaze. White hot and prickly, I could feel the heat in my neck and in my face. Boxed in like a caged animal, between the lectern and his desk, I stood as he gawked. Others, sensing the tension that had now filled the classroom, began to watch as well, as the room devolved from a space of inquiry and wonder to a site of pornography as students consumed me for their voyeuristic delight. Their stares, it seemed, aimed to snuff me out as another casualty of the ubiquitous power of whiteness, to eat upon my flesh in a ritual of victory over the black professor who really thought the world could be different. Poking and prodding at the wounds of justice and accountability deferred yet again, Kyle was titillated by the idea of exposing my pain and parading it for the class—not for the sake of solidarity with my sentiments, but to use them in the manifestation of his own power.

And I resented him for it. I resented the lot of them—

> The Kyles who exacted the violence,
> The Kyles who sat on the jury,
> The Kyle of a judge and his flagrant manipulation of the law, to the benefit of the Kyles who believe it is their job to protect America from my freedom.
> The Kyles whose power was so deeply entrenched in this institution that it was clear there would be no one coming to my rescue.

What do we as educators do with these provocations, in light of our own humanity? How do we, those who prioritize coming to the classroom whole, invite others to do the same? How do we, in the fullness of ourselves, navigate the very human response of anguish? Auntie bell and Katie Cannon offer much wisdom regarding generating eros in the classroom, but left no instructions for those moments when the classroom becomes a site of the pornographic. They did not equip us for the moments when we would stand naked and raw before our classes unseemly and psychically disrobed. Yes, we can bring our passion to the teaching moment, but what of our pain? Our pain we must stuff down, tuck in, airbrush away… far away, lest hopelessness have its way. The work of resilience seems to require dissociation or compartmentalization if these moments are to be survived, lest the rage spill over onto the very minds we are so committed to exposing to alternative possibilities or power.

I lose sight of these things in moments of despair. The weight of it often seems too heavy to bear. How does one remain just and responsible, human and whole, when students make the sites of our pain the breadcrumbs that lead them back to their power? Satiated by our suffering, the provocateur pokes and prods, peering into the contours of these sentiments too weighty for them to comprehend. Yet they hunger for the way it stimulates their own sense of sovereignty and supremacy. For surely, they would never find themselves in this kind of predicament. Their whiteness, like Kyle's, renders them immune from the turmoil of suppressing true feeling, while always being expected to ascend to one's higher self.

> With no place to stuff my anger, frustration, and disillusionment, I said a simple prayer, "God be with me."
> Those four words stood in for a more elaborate petition: Use the anger they so desperately want to witness.
> Wrestling with the competing postures of rage and responsibility, I scanned the room watching the faces.

The Kyles I enjoy in the classroom,
The Kyles who have shared their passions, questions, and fears,

The Kyles who were still trying to figure out inhabiting their bodies,
The Kyles who followed more confident Kyles because it was easier.
The other students were watching too, unable to look away from the spectacle.
It was their faces that helped me find my center and return to the mission and the method.

> My teaching is done in conversation with God—"God, be with me." I prayed.
> With no place to stuff my anger, frustration, and disillusionment, I decided to use the anger they so desperately wanted to witness, to connect with it and be led by my indignation as well as care for my students.

Words began to form in my mouth, almost without my consent, but I welcomed them. Riding them for dear life, I leaned into these words, uncomfortable to hear, but seasoned with the care Kyle denied me. These words laid us all bare, tapping into the grave reality of the situation:

> Me: a black educator grieving for the countless times a connection and sense of responsibility this country might never have for me or those who mean my good,
> and The Provocateurs: "Those who need, but also hate. Those who hope for life, but those who are susceptible to the wooing of death, to become its agents," to use the words of theologian and professor Willie Jennings.

Likening those gathered together in the enterprise of theological learning to the crowd that wants Jesus crucified, Jennings calls to our attention to the longing present when crowds gather. The crucifying crowd sought connection to the divine, and the students, if bell hooks was right, sought "to be touched by knowledge." Reflecting on this longing humanizes these young men and helps me to recognize that people mimic what has been taught until other options prove more beneficial. Professors are not the only ones who enact rituals of control in the classroom; students for whom the classroom is a site of contestation often seek to assert the same kind of control in the name of patriarchy, white supremacy, heterosexism, and so on. But so too do these students hope for life. What does it mean to teach toward the humanity of these students too?

Such a tall order required a reframing. It required me to remember that the classroom was a place of experimentation, and that students in their various stages of development would not always choose the strategies I desired for them. The care needed was beyond my capacity alone.

The care was so beyond my capacity, in fact, that to expect it of anyone else would be exploitative. Beyond the fact that for the unwilling party these actions would be ineffective, to demand such a response could be considered yet another way in which black educators are diminished, pushed aside, and made to suffer. And yet through this care, nothing was taken from me at all. Instead, as I leaned into the truth of my emotions and willingly shared them, the atmosphere shifted. I could not with any certainty relay the exact words I offered. But I do remember taking disclosure into my own hands. In taking this power, the provocateur got what he wanted, but not in the way he wanted it. His power to expose was thwarted by my willingness. It was in the authority of this vulnerability that I became more able to speak to the hearts of the many, rather than to the provocation of the one.

All the more surprising, leaning into the intimacy and vulnerability of that moment, I could hear the sounds of my words taking root. They reverberated within the walls, penetrated and expanded until their echoes gently clung to the spaces between their imagination and emotion. And wouldn't you know it, not only did the words swirl about in the room, but erons too—erons that destabilized the pornographic ethos in the room. I write this as a means of finding my way back to eros, when the pornographic seeks to disrupt the work of critical awareness. I add it to my arsenal in the fight not only to call the world to be better, but to participate in adding to the horizon of opportunities.

Reflecting on this pornographic provocation, I am reminded that in a world that screams otherwise, when I lean into the wholeness of my personhood, and aspire to reach toward the humanity of my students—the whole of them—the agenda of the pornographic is bested by a force that reconnects, a love that enables us to find our way back home to ourselves, and oftentimes to each other.

Notes & Bibliography

[1]bell hooks. Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom (New York, NY: Routledge, 1994), 13.

[2]hooks, Teaching to Transgress, 14.

[3]Katie Cannon, The Womanist Theology Primer: Remembering What We Never Knew (Louisville, KY: Women's Ministries Program Area, National Ministries Division, Presbyterian Church [U.S.A.], 2001)

[4]hooks, Teaching to Transgress, 195.

[5]Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," in Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches (Berkeley, CA: Crossing, 1984), 53-59. Lorde connects the erotic to the work of creating a more just world. Lorde writes, "the erotic within our lives can give us the energy to pursue genuine change within our world" (59). Lorde contends the erotic exists on a spiritual plane, experienced by our innermost being and our bodies through the union of intuition, emotion, and the senses. It connects us to the fullness of our personhood through revelatory knowledge about ourselves and the world that spurs personal and communal accountability. Hence, the erotic is a consciencentizing and guiding agent of truth, or as Lorde writes, "It is an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire. For having experienced the fullness of this depth of feeling and recognizing its power, in honor and self-respect we can require no less of ourselves" (54). The erotic moves us from mediocrity to excellence. It heightens our awareness of our desire for connection with one another. It reinvigorates our lives with passion, waking us from strategy of numbness for the sake of survival, and instigates our proactivity in challenging injustice and oppression.

[6]Engaged pedagogy is a method of teaching that emphasizes the wellbeing of both the students and the teacher. Through active participation both engage in learning with an aim of developing critical awareness and self-actualization through mutual labor. Cultural critic bell hooks suggests that this manner of teaching is particularly well suited for people who consider aspects of the vocation of teaching sacred, "who believe that our work is not merely to share information, but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of students" (13). For more, see hooks, Teaching to Transgress,13-22.

[7]Willie Jennings, After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2020), 1

[8]Jennings, After Whiteness, 143; hooks, Teaching to Transgress, 199.

About the Author

Courtney Bryant is a Womanist scholar, preacher and practitioner. She received her Doctorate of Religion, with an emphasis in Womanist Ethics and Christian Social Ethics, from Vanderbilt University. on the role of the erotic as a divine resource for black women's moral agency, Bryant's scholarship explores how erotic practices—which she defines as sexual and non-sexual bodily manifestations of love— can facilitate individual and social transformation. Bryant currently teaches Womanist Ethics at Manhattan College and serves as the Pastor of Righteous Relations at All Angels Church in New York City. Her first book, Erotic Defiance: A Womanist Ethic of Freedom and Resistance, is currently slated for publication with Fortress Press

On Entanglement, Eradication, Obstruction, Discomfort, and Vigilance

Richard W. Voelz
Union Presbyterian Seminary

Entanglement

Several years ago, before I came into my position as a professor of preaching and worship, I served as the pastor of a congregation in the northeast suburbs of Atlanta. On one side of the house where my family and I lived, there was a patch of English ivy that grew…and grew…and grew. It would not be stopped. The ivy spanned the entire side yard from the front of the house to the back. Only slightly more tame than the kudzu that runs amok all over the southeastern United States, this patch of English ivy was expansive, invasive, stubborn, and parasitic. Rooted deep. If you tried to walk through it, inevitably your feet would get tripped up. It found its way into the neighbor's yard and its greedy dark green leaves often began to climb up the side of my house. Ever-spreading. I had no idea how long ago it had been planted, or if it had been planted at all, only that it held what it must have thought was its rightful place. If it had been planted, I suspect that one little sprig did the trick. In any case, the house was then about twenty-five years old and now the ivy was everywhere, set in motion on a determined course to swallow everything in its path.

***

In a one-on-one sermon feedback session, one of my students painfully relayed the hesitancy apparent in her sermon and why she seemed to have wilted in delivery. "What held you back?" I asked. She responded: "I have a hard time being me. I feel like I have to preach like the white students." Despite my well-meaning white professorial intentions to offer a syllabus representative of authors from many social and theological locations, despite the presence of diverse example sermons throughout the semester, despite my efforts to provide a wide lane for many expressions of preaching style, and despite the special section of the syllabus that articulated anti-racist aspirations, she voiced a critical truth: her emerging preaching identity was caught in the snares of a deep, wide, and deathly system. I was and am still complicit in harm: the classroom was a space in which my own identity and those of her classmates made her work more complex, and our school's two hundred-plus year history and culture tripped her up on the way to and in the pulpit.

Outside the Early Center, formerly the Spence Library, on the campus of Union Presbyterian Seminary, Richmond, VA. Photo by the author.

All these entanglements of white supremacist pedagogy.
Rooted deep.
Ever-spreading.
Wrapped tightly around us.

***

Because the system encourages white people to deny the material, psychic, social, and political benefits of whiteness and works only when oppressive patterns are made difficult to name, even the practices of well-intended white people can result in making whites feel comfortable and "good" while simultaneously harming people of color.

Eradication

I wanted the ivy gone. Surely, something else would be better there. But I was a busy pastor and a parent of a young child, with attention spread wide and time for the labor of eradicating a pesky plant thin. So, the best I could do was to occasionally go outside, put on work gloves, and dig up some of the thick, tangled networks of cables that rooted the ivy to the ground. I would pull them up until I could pull no further, unable to discern their source and where they terminated. I would cut off the pieces I could, as far back as I could cut them, as well as the tiny tips that were starting to make their way up the foundation of the house. Being averse to pesticides and recognizing the sheer volume of poison it would take to eliminate this ivy, I once tried mixing up a bio-safe, home-brewed concoction a YouTube video told me would kill weeds: dish soap and vinegar and salt, or something to that effect. I sprayed it on the leaves and waited. A few days later, I returned. I am certain I heard the leaves laugh at me. All of this was to no avail (perhaps I should have heeded Jesus's advice in Mark 9:29). I am told that one of the most effective ways to get rid of ivy is to hire a landscaping crew to come and carefully dig out every single root, as far down as it goes. Bring in the brown bodies; pay them to root out what they did not plant. That option didn't sound much better. So, I was limited to occasionally and hopelessly trimming it back with a weed eater. Keep it contained as best I could, lest it become too unsightly for my own tastes or those of my neighbors. Disheartened by the imperfect solutions in front of me, overwhelmed by the enormity of it all, the least I could do was to feebly keep it at bay for a season, to beat it back every now and then when it got too far out of line.

Outside Westminster Hall, on the campus of Union Presbyterian Seminary, Richmond, VA. Photo by the author.

***

After my first few years of teaching, I finally had the confidence to proclaim to my Introduction to Preaching class, "There is no textbook for this course. That might drive some of you mad. But we're going to gather around as many voices as we possibly can this semester." Surely, I thought, there was a different, more comprehensive way to combat my complicity. So, true to my word, the course texts came from every perspective I could manage to squeeze in. My job, as I saw it, was to convene and sustain a conversation around these many voices. And yet, given my previous experiences, I was keenly aware that even this progress was a simultaneous failure. While there might be a few successes, some students still would inevitably see themselves at the margins, even when I had tried to eradicate the very notion of a center. Some would not be able to imagine themselves as preachers in what they read or watched, or to see the richness of their tradition or culture or identity represented as worthy of study. The attempt to eliminate a center by one who comes with power and privilege is fraught with all kinds of unavoidable complexities.

***

> I have been thinking recently about how my whiteness is a site of power and privilege. I have been thinking about how, despite the fact that I define myself as a white anti-racist, I continue to incur white privilege, I continue to carry the weight of white racist training in my body. I notice how when I fight against white racism, it remains in place. I want you to pray for me so that I can become more aware of the complex and subtle ways that I am unfairly privileged because I am white in a society that privileges whiteness.

Obstructions

While the ivy made for excellent ground cover – and perhaps that was its original purpose there, because this section of the yard was under a dense canopy of trees that made it difficult for other plant life to thrive – my desire for it to be gone was not just because it was unsightly. It began when I discovered that some of the drainage from the house's gutters ran just slightly underground away from the house and into the patch of ivy. But the ivy had become a menace. Oftentimes new ivy growth would snake into the drain pipe that carried water away from the house. If the ivy got too much in the way, crawling up into the drainpipe and obstructing it, there were bigger problems. Heavy rain meant that water would back up into the gutters and overflow, spilling out along the foundation of the house. If I let it go untended, eventually the water would seep into the crawlspace underneath the house. Whoever planted it thought they were doing something good; perhaps they thought it not only pragmatic but beautiful. But it was insidious all along, right from its very beginning. The will to take over lies in the plant's DNA. And it lived into its purpose, threatening everything in its path, right down to the foundation of the house.

Not only that, but the ivy's expansive cover meant that little, if anything else, could grow in the same territory. Monoculture, they call it. If, say, I had wanted to plant roses or tulips or daffodils or azaleas or wildflowers or to let it meadow or reintroduce native plants, even if those things had a chance to grow and bloom, the pervasive ivy would have quickly climbed, overtaken, and choked them.

***

Every year, early in the semester, I ask my class, "How many of you have heard of Jarena Lee?" Every year, silence follows. I know this is going to happen. She wasn't part of the canon in the predominantly white seminary from which I received my MDiv, nor the Christian tradition in which I was brought up, educated, and that I eventually left behind. There were other heroes that populated that monocultural canon, winding their way toward the theological house we occupied. I wonder what difference knowing about her would have made for the few women and few people of color who were my peers as a seminary student, many of whom were struggling to find their place in that school and fighting to find ways to live out their various calls. Lee's words were a revelation white surprise to me when I first read them as a doctoral student, exposing my ignorance and privilege, opening my vision in new ways to what she and others experience in the work of claiming their voice. I hope they are a revelation for my students, or even more, an opportunity to stand arm-in-arm with a foremother and ally in their own struggles. "We're talking about our sense of authority and voice for preaching today. Listen for how she justifies her call to preach," I say. "Think about how she talks back to those who would silence her."

I wonder what she might say to my student who faded….

I wonder what she might say to me.

Always lurking is the possibility that the constructions of my own teaching and scholarship become (or remain) obstructions to the flourishing of others' voices, threatening to envelop the house I am charged to help keep.

Outside Watts Hall, on the campus of Union Presbyterian Seminary, Richmond, VA. Photo by the author.

***

Whiteness is the object of the white critic's inquiry but also the subject and the obstacle to his or her project, especially when it obstructs the difficult task of being skeptical of the need to have "arrived somewhere."

Discomforts

I suppose that many homeowners have an experience at some point in which they ask themselves: "What was the previous owner thinking when they…?" I was no different. I did not plant this ivy. I would have never chosen for this to be here.

Or would I?

I comfort myself by telling myself I wouldn't have.

And yet it was still my responsibility.

I bought the house; I put in my investment. The people I love needed to be safe inside it. And not just my family, but whoever might live in the house after me. Upon reflection, I realize that I must have been satisfied with my maintenance approach; otherwise I would have done more. I wonder if I would do something different, if I had to do it all over again. If there is such a thing as "seller's remorse," this is the discomfort that follows me. I did not opt for a different approach. I did not seek wisdom elsewhere. I settled for the appearance of having the ivy carefully managed. I did not do enough to get rid of the ivy, to make way for something different, and to ensure the house was not threatened for whoever would own the house next.

***

This year, I assigned a new essay for the first time, for the very first day of class. In it, Donyelle McCray describes her course "Is It a Sermon?" In doing so, McCray highlights historical voices who have engaged in types of proclamation that wouldn't fit traditional categories of what constitutes a sermon in Black (or white) churches. When students preach, she says, "[They] preach genre-bending sermons…Wonder and a sense of

possibility result from hearing a sermon in which the preacher speaks through her own voice and through the cello or dances part of his message or invites us to gaze at a painting that illumines some aspect of the sermon's argument." My students are already anxious about preaching, especially on day one. As we began our first day's work of attempting to define "preaching" and "sermons," surfacing the values we bring to this work and interrogating our assumptions, one student raised her hand and asked of McCray's essay, "How do we bend a genre when we haven't learned the genre yet?" It's one of those questions that, in the moment, fires off every protective (mal)formation I have had as a teacher-scholar. I was tempted to retreat with a simple response: "You're right! Learn the [white] rules first! Then break them!" And I confess that some version of this was what I said in years past to students yearning for something new to emerge, wrapped up in meeting my own responsibility to prepare students for certain formations of church, confident that those parameters were well within my grasp as the expert. Instead, this time I opted for a different and uncertain path. I told the student, "I don't know. Let's figure it out together." Even if it's uncomfortable, I hope this gives students the space to risk something new and transformative for all of us, in more ways than one.

***

The [pedagogical] focus is not on white moral innocence or on allaying white guilt. Instead, critical hope offers a sort of assurance that discomfort will be an opportunity for profound learning about not only the other but also about oneself. Moreover, in emphasizing uncertainty and ambiguity, critical hope advances support in the embrace of vulnerability, which may lead to a willingness to stay in discomfort because discomfort can broaden the limits of one's frame of intelligibility… [C]ritical hope entails an ethical and political responsibility requiring constant vigilance in the process of change and becoming resulting in the potential for relations in solidarity with others.

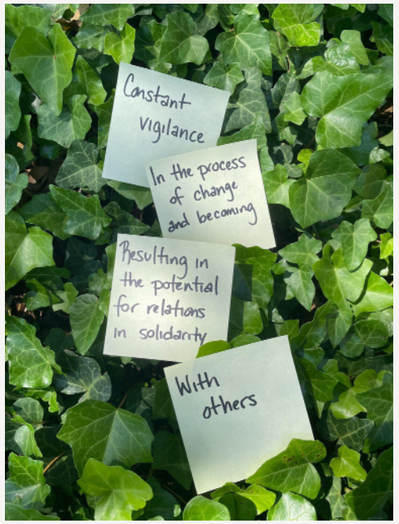


Photo by the author.

Vigilance

My homeowning experience and my early years in theological education have taught me the wisdom Applebaum shares. I will never "arrive" and it would be disingenuous to think that is possible. So amidst the enormity of the obstructions, amidst the imperfect and fleetingly successful attempts to stop the spread, and amidst the perpetually unfinished work to disentangle my teaching and scholarship from white supremacy, this is the commitment to which I aspire:

> Constant vigilance
> In the process of change and becoming
> Resulting in the potential for relations in solidarity
> With others

Notes & Bibliography

[1]Barbara Applebaum, *"Comforting Discomfort as Complicity: White Fragility and the Pursuit of Invulnerability," Hypatia 32*, no. 4 (Fall 2017): 873.

[2]George Yancy, *Christology and Whiteness: What Would Jesus Do?* (London, UK: Taylor & Francis Group, 2012), 3–4.

[3]Wabash Teaches, "Wabash Webinar: White Surprise – White People Don't Know About Racism?" October 15, 2020, YouTube video, 59:50, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QEhsF2PKP4Q.

[4]Barbara Applebaum, "White Privilege/White Complicity: Connecting 'Benefiting From' to 'Contributing To,'" *Philosophy of Education Archive* (2008), 295.

[5]Donyelle McCray, "Playing in Church: Insights from the Boundaries of the Sermon Genre," Liturgy 36, no. 2 (April 2021): 11–17.

[6]Applebaum, "Comforting Discomfort as Complicity: White Fragility and the Pursuit of Invulnerability," 872. Applebaum describes "critical hope" this way, quoting Megan Boler (Feeling Power: Emotions and Education [New York: Routledge, 1999]):

> Critical hope is distinguished from naïve hope, which is defined as "those platitudes that directly serve the hegemonic interest of maintaining the status quo" (128). Critical hope, first and foremost, acknowledges that systemic oppression exists, and such hope entails a responsibility to challenge what Boler refers to as "inscribed habits of emotional inattention" and involves "a willingness to exist within ambiguity and uncertainty" (129). Critical hope does not obstruct purposive and critical reflection around one's complicity in systems of oppression but instead encourages a "willingness to be fully alive in the process of constant change and becoming" (126). Critical hope aims to encourage openness toward continued struggle and forefronts discomfort as a signal to be alert for what one does not know about others but also about oneself. Critical hope is an illustration of support that can avoid comforting white discomfort. Like strategic empathy, critical hope encourages and does not terminate uncomfortable critical discussion around complicity. But unlike strategic empathy, critical hope does not risk offering absolution or redemption. "Comforting Discomfort as Complicity: White Fragility and the Pursuit of Invulnerability," 872.

About the Author

Richard W. Voelz is an Associate Professor of Preaching and Worship and Director of the Doctor of Ministry program at Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond, VA. Voelz is a graduate of Vanderbilt University's Graduate Department of Religion with a doctorate in homiletics and liturgics. His interests are in contemporary homiletic theory, particularly how preaching relates to the areas of critical pedagogy, adolescent youth, reproductive loss and adoption, and public proclamation. He has authored four books, including Youthful Sermons (Working Preacher, 2022). He also serves as Associate Editor for the "Between Text and Sermon" section of Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology.

#ISKOLARStoo

Rolf Nolasco
Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary

Dead. White. Men.
Dead White Men as Scholars
appear everywhere
like ghosts that haunt and hunt
the minds of
Living. Brown. Queer.
Living. Brown. Queer Sages
Responding to the same great Call

These ghosts
have a particular aura of inerrancy
that command submission, mimesis, currency
Their eerie power and presence unmistakable
Untouchable they may seem
Yet they mutate everything they touch

Like the living especially those with similar pigmentation and accent
Think and contort their mind like the mastermind
Parroting and quoting their words and their world making
As if under a spell, chanting divinations
Ready to dispense approval and belonginess
And to exact punishment and exclusion to those who don't belong

These ghosts, these hungry ghosts
Consume the living
Collapsing the past into the present
Making them seem eternal and transcendent
Still haunting, still hunting
Even what is yet to be

Some of these ghosts become nightmares
They conjure memories
Haunting memories of subjugation and debasement
Of thievery and rape
Of violence, of sacred violence
All meant to continue the legacy of empire and coloniality

In a twisted and hair (hell) raising way
These ghosts and those who are possessed by them
Get the accolades in perpetuity
That legitimize and sanction their ghostly presence
Here, there, and everywhere
With the air of superiority and exclusivity

ISKOLARS of a different kind
Roamed the earth as well
Born
From unlikely places and circumstances
Sages and scholars in their own right
They left a different legacy
Not to be mimicked or regurgitated
But to nudge us along to chart a different path
To think differently without apology

They were iskolars/scholars, artists, and sages at the same time
Who curated and created lifeworlds, different word and worlds
Not from the tower of the privilege
But from the sweats of their brows
From the hands that toiled and tilled the land
From the heart that bled blood of courage
And from the mind that refused to be "whitened" and "straightened"

They, too, have an ethereal aura in them
But not as ghosts that haunt and hunt
But as guides, as spiritual guides
Who continue to inspire, uplift, and rejoice
Especially when we find our own voice

The voice of the
Living. Brown. Queer Sages
Whose work of he(ART)
Are installed not in museums
But carved in the hearts and consciousness
Of other queer folk that
Query and queer
The assumptive binary cis/het white world

We bend that which is straight
And bring discomfort and affliction
To the comfortable and supposedly well
Not so much through abstraction
Though we can certainly play that game well too
But through the quirkiness
Of our queer bodies
That are vessels of wisdom felt and experienced
and not simply drummed up by our creative minds

Yes, these queer bodies
Though distorted and discarded
Rise from the ashes like phoenix
With vigor and vitality

So that our writings, living, and loving
Become portals to the infinite possibilities
of a world that embraces all
Because that is our sacred iskolar/scholar's call.

About the Author

Dr. Rolf Nolasco is the Rueben P. Job Professor of spiritual formation and pastoral theology at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary and director of the Rueben P. Job Institute for Spiritual Formation. He is an experienced professor, trained in pastoral and counseling psychology, mindfulness and contemplative spirituality, and affective neuroscience. Nolasco is also a psychotherapist, published author, and has vast experience in cross cultural communications from living and working across the world within varying social and cultural backgrounds. In addition to Hearts Ablaze: Parables for the Queer Soul, he is the author of God's Beloved Queer (Wipf & Stock,2019), The Contemplative Counselor: A Way of Being (Fortress Press, 2011) and Compassionate Presence: A Radical Response to Human Suffering (Cascade Books, 2016).

Teaching Can Be Dangerous: Embodied Learning in Carceral Spaces

Sarah F. Farmer
Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion

Once you're in, you're in.
A loud clang signals
That the doors behind you are locked.

This was not my first time at a prison.
But, this was my first time teaching in the prison.

And, I did not come alone.
I brought students with me.
Undergraduate students who were
eager and anxious,
Curious and cautious
Pensive and hopeful.

Several weeks before,
I came to the prison with my colleague.
I came in
eager and anxious,
Curious and cautious
Pensive and hopeful.

These emotions mirror the emotions I feel
On the first day of class.

Section I: Dislocation

When I enter the prison,
I enter the prison full-bodied.
Never disembodied.
But my body transverses the unfamiliar.

Routines to enter the space.
Rituals of dislocation.

Walking through metal detector.
Handing over the little I can take in with me,
My keys.
Keys that are sometimes confiscated
until I depart.

Officers sometimes give a quick pat down.
Bodies searched.
Emotions heightened.
Anxious…Cautious…and pensive.
I will never get used to someone searching me.

Unnerving
Another's hand on my body
Prompts awareness.
Did I take that out of my pocket?
Are my clothes too tight?
Am I going to draw unnecessary attention
by what I'm wearing?

And yet,
As a black woman, I recognize
That the same surveillance I feel
In the prison can sometimes be felt
behind university lecterns.

No pat downs in the classroom.
Body not physically touched.
But clothes evaluated.
Hair questioned.
Are my clothes too tight?
Am I going to draw unnecessary attention
by what I'm wearing?
By how my hair looks?

I ask those same questions
When I stand before any group of students
Knowing that the curves of my Black female body
Doesn't conform to the typical white male
professor that stands before them.

Routines to enter the space.
Rituals of dislocation.

Yet, at the prison, what I wear
And how I look
Can have real consequences
For those I seek to teach.

My body…dislocated and yet transgressive.
Transversing the unfamiliar space…prison.

Embodiment becomes a central way
to know and learn in prison.
Embodied emotions
Embodied presence
Embodied oppression.
Embodied resilience.

I entered the prison with great excitement.
I entered as a Black woman
Who understood what it felt like to live
in a racist, classist, sexist system.

What does it mean to enter a space where you are confined?
That's what I do every day as women of color.

What does it mean for you to enter a space where you are under surveillance?
That's what I do every day as women of color.

What did I already know about what it means to live in Systems of oppression?

Our ways of seeing…dismissed.
Our ways of feeling…mocked.
Our ways of knowing…devalued.
Our ways of being…despised.
Our ways of doing co-opted, exploited,
And used for the "good" of others.
Emotions embodied.
Presence embodied.
Oppression embodied.
Resilience embodied.

Disparities abound.
A pure paradox
The way bodies like mine
are overrepresented in some spaces
And underrepresented in others.
Misogynoir.

Black Americans.
Incarcerated in state prisons
at nearly 5 times the rate of white Americans.
Black women.
2.1 percent of bodies like mine
tenured associate and full professors
at US universities and colleges.

Structural disadvantage,
Racial subordination,
Over policing
of bodies like mine
Is present in places where
We are both overrepresented
And underrepresented.

Their policies sought us out
And Stabilized instability.
Already unarmed,
But disarming us further.
Perhaps they think we learn better caged!

A history that has persisted.
A people that has resisted.

Whether in the prison or in the academy,
Our ways of knowing dismissed.
Our ways of being despised.
Our ways of doing co-opted, exploited,
And used for the "good" of others.

Whether in the prison or in the academy,
Similarities abound.
Making me wonder
If the places I teach and learn
Are bred from the same stock.

Me in this carceral space
Is a humble attempt to
write the wrong
so others can read
the inequity that manifests
wherever bodies like me are recruited
for the "good" of others.

I thought this embodied knowledge would give me a leg up
In my attempt to relate with the incarcerated women I would meet.

In many ways,
I thought I would relate more to the incarcerated women
Than my colleagues in the academy.

When several incarcerated students
Decided they no longer wanted to be in
Me and my colleague's class,
I needed to know why.
"Why did you drop our course?" we asked them.
"You talk too much about race in your course,"
one of the women responded.
"But, you and your university students can leave.
We can't leave.
If what I say in the class
gets misconstrued,
and that misunderstanding
gets back on the block,
it's life or death for me."

I left stunned.
For the first time ever
I realized that
Teaching can be dangerous.

Teaching in carceral contexts helps
us come to know differently.
Embodied knowing.
Emotions embodied.
Presence embodied.
Oppression embodied.
Resilience embodied. And once you come to know in your body,
It's really difficult to forget it.

Teaching theology in the prison offers embodied knowing.

Times of racial reckoning
jolt us all into a place of learning and unlearning.
The "righting" on the wall
signals perhaps more than ever,
our need to "know" differently
Not a knowing that can be placed
on the shelf
When the riots stop.
Not a knowing that
Points away from our own
Complicity
Not a knowing
too easily forgotten.
too easily justified away.
But an embodied knowing.

We teach what we know.
Teaching can be dangerous.

Not knowing, is dangerous.
Not knowing perpetuates the death-dealing
that takes place on sidewalks, churches, the academy,
neighborhoods, universities, and prison.

Carceral spaces,
like church pews and university lecterns
are plagued with unknowing,
Full of teachers who don't understand
Nor does their faith seek understanding.
Bodies disconnected.
Minds forgetful.

Teaching bodies can do harm.

The "righting" on the wall
signals perhaps more than ever,
Our need to know.

Some of us already know differently.
We know what we lived.
What our nanas and great grandmommas lived.
Knowing that remains in bodies like mine.
Bodies that remember.
Bodies that speak
even when our voices are silenced.
Ways of knowing that can't be dismissed.
Can't be easily forgotten
Or justified away.

We teach what we know.
Teaching can be dangerous.
Upsetting the status quo.
Upsetting the boundary lines set by others.
Often, as theological educators
We approach teaching with the presumption of knowing.
We possess all the knowledge,
And our students are so lucky
to have someone like us
to help them to understand,
help them come to know.

And the urgency of what we know
Has taken on new demands.
We possess a need to be,
as popular society has called it,
"woke."

And yet, teaching theology in the prison reveals to us
That we are asleep,
And have been sleeping for a looong time.
We are unable to know some things
Because our own comfort and convenience
have become idols that we refuse to surrender.

What can we know by teaching in the prison
That is difficult to know in other teaching and learning contexts?

Section II: Dis-Orientation

The week before the "outside" students entered,
I had an orientation with the incarcerated men
I would be teaching for this particular class.

"I'm nervous," Sigmund whispered in my ear.
I had only met Sigmund a couple weeks earlier
when I was doing interviews to see who would be part of this class.
"Why?" I asked.
"I haven't been around females in over ten years," he responded.
I smiled warmly at him, as he had a slight shiver in his body.
"You will be fine," I whispered back to him. "You will be just fine."

Disorientation.
Young college women in a men's prison.
Disorientation is not lop-sided
but experienced by both—those who enter the prison
and those on the inside.
Dis-ease felt.

Those who have taught in the prison
know how disorienting it can be.

The things that we take for granted like:
Students being able to type up papers, staple items, or use paper clips.
Professors lecturing with PowerPoint, showing videos.
The approval process to bring books and supplies into the prison.
Walking through metal detectors daily.
Paying attention to the clothes we wear.

These are just a few,
but all of these things force intentionality.
To prepare for the unexpected.
To embody flexibility the best way we know how.

Disorienting.
To have officers disrupt your class to do "count."
Thirty minutes that can never be recovered.
A reminder that safety doesn't exist
Even when there is every intent to create safe spaces.
Safety is always just an illusion.

Student bodies tense,
As we move between classroom
And prison
And back to the classroom again.

Disorienting.
Movement abrupt.
Ajarring.
Disruptive.
Unavoidable.

Disorientation is a first step
To learning.
Assumptions questioned.
Mind expanded.
World exposed for what it is.

What is disorienting for some
Has become the norm for others.

"Now, what were we talking about?"
Students grasp for coherence,
To reorient their attention.
To integrate what they now know
As real.

Learning can be
disorienting.
Movement abrupt.
Ajarring.
Disruptive.
Unavoidable
if change will ever take place.

Reorientation is a process.
A learning process
Of finding our footing
Amidst chaos.
To reorient to time,
Space, situation, and role takes time.

Disorienting circumstances force us to pay attention.
Reorientation comes most profoundly
When it is embodied in the process toward equilibrium
Rather than the arrival of equilibrium,
The arrival of neatly formed ideas about life…about lives
Is an illusion.

Prison…it is in this unique, unconventional context
that teachers are formed in very specific ways.
Because, some knowing
is provoked by unconventional methods.

As we are reoriented,
we start to notice things they never noticed before,
care about things that previously did not matter.

As a professor, this space proved formative
beyond teaching in the prison.
Rather than the arrival of equilibrium,
The arrival of neatly formed ideas about life…about lives
I realized that teaching can be dangerous.

Section III: Deconstruction

You come to know each other as peers.
Students in a class.
Not as felons.

You come to know
Each other as
Thinking beings
And feeling beings,
But not on a first name basis.

They must call you "Mrs. Farmer."
Not just you,
But also the "outside" students
That you bring with you.

Inside students can be addressed
By their first name,
The prison officers tell us.

Formal titles
were more than a formality.
In the prison,
It was a requirement.
A barrier erected
By prison officers
For the sake of safety.

Deconstruction
In real time.

Naming is a political act.
An identity-marking,
Reality-shaping invitation
For us to belong.
For us to make sense
of the world we inhabit.

Names are given to us.
Imposed upon us.
Often by communities we did not pick
But bear some responsibility for
Who we are.
Bear responsibility for
Who we become.
We don't pick our name
When we come into the world

A barrier to inhibit knowing
Each other as
Thinking beings
And feeling beings,
But not on a first name basis.

Distance protects.
Allows for justification, misunderstanding, and ignorance.
Invites misnomers.

A barrier erected
For the sake of safety.
Deconstruction
In real time.

We all made up stage names.
An invitation for students to decide
Who they wanted to be
And how they wanted to show up
In the classroom.

To teach is to name.
Naming is a political act,
Possessing the authority to define and redefine,
to classify and de-classify,
To exclude and invite.
Reconstruction in real time.

To name is to counter imposition.
To name is to deconstruct and reconstruct
Identities and placements in the worlds.

To name is a theological act
An opportunity to reimagine
Life together despite
The barriers erected that divide.

Teaching in prison
Invites students to name.
To counter imposition.
To deconstruct and reconstruct
Identities and placements in the worlds.

Students engage in the "beautiful messiness"
Of community(prison)-engaged learning,
Turning the tables
Of who teaches
And who learns.
Of who knows
And who needs to know
Of who names
And who re-names.

Creating new rituals
Of learning and unlearning
Of knowing and unknowing
Of being and becoming
That bodies may inhabit.
Embodied activism.

We teach what we know.
Teaching can be dangerous.
Upsetting the status quo.
Upsetting the boundary lines set by others.

Section IV: Dis-Missal

The last day of the semester.
Class dismissed.

Before today,
I never experienced students
Embrace each other as they did,
Cry as they did.
The class created a sacred space.

Our privileged bodies
Had to acknowledge something we
Knew every week we entered…
That when the class was over,
We could leave.

Leave the confinement.
Leave the surveillance behind.
Bypass the metal detectors
And the locked doors.

Strict boundaries erected
to separate those inside
From those outside.
A barrier erected
By society
For the sake of safety.

Once you're out, you're out.
A loud clang signals
That the Doors behind you
are locked.

Beyond the bars
Our bodies re-enter the world
the same way we came in
eager and anxious,
Curious and cautious
Pensive yet hopeful.

Charged with a new task.
To shed disembodied knowing
To embrace imaginations
Bathed in the beautiful messiness
Of lives in mutual dialogue.
To create new rituals
Of learning and unlearning
Of knowing and unknowing
Of being and becoming
That bodies may inhabit.
Embodied activism.

We teach what we know.
Teaching can be dangerous.

Notes & Bibliography

[1] Ashley Nellis, "The Color of Justice: Racial and Ethnic Disparity in State Prisons" (Washington, D.C.: The Sentencing Project, 2021), 5.

[2]Audrey Williams June and Brian O'Leary, "How Many Black Women Have Tenure on Your Campus? Search Here," Chronicle of Higher Education (May 27, 2021). https://www.chronicle.com/article/how-many-black-women-have-tenure-on-your-campus-search-here.

[3]That prison itself is a disorienting dilemma. See Jack Mezirow, Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2000), 103-123.

[4]Willie James Jennings, The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 293-294.

[5]Libby Porter discusses the messiness of community-engaged learning in "Partnerships of Learning for Planning Education," Planning Theory & Practice 16 no. 3 (2015): 409–34.

About the Author

Sarah Farmer is Associate Director at Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning. Prior to going to Wabash, Sarah served as Associate Professor of Practical Theology and Community Development in the School of Theology and Ministry at Indiana Wesleyan University. As a practical theologian, she has taught in the areas of community development, faith formation, youth ministry, and transformative pedagogy. Farmer also served as an associate research scholar and lecturer at Yale Divinity School and helped direct the Adolescent Faith and Flourishing Program at Yale Center for Faith and Culture. Sarah received her M.Div and PhD from Emory University, where she taught as an adjunct faculty and co-directed a Certificate in Theological Studies Program at a Women's Prison. Farmer co-founded the Youth Arts and Peace Camp in Chester, PA and worked with the Youth Hope-Builders Academy at Interdenominational Theological Center. She is co-author with Anne E. Streaty Wimberly of Raising Hope: 4 Paths to Courageous Living for Black Youth. She enjoys action-packed movies, art, finding adventures to do with her children, and listening to her audiobooks.

Broken: A Story of Black Transformation in Search of Thick Love *OR* Loving Black Men in the Religious Studies Classroom

Joseph L. Tucker Edmonds
Religious Studies & Africana Studies, Indiana University—Purdue University Indianapolis

"Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They don't love your eyes; they'd just as soon pick em out. No more do they love the skin on your back. Yonder they flay it. And O my people they do not love your hands."

—Baby Suggs Holy in Toni Morrison's Beloved

I think of love as being at the edges of consciousness, a kind of unsourced resonance that, once there, ends up being gathered, as a rainstorm, in mind as dream, as pleasure, as delightful. But like a dream, it can be fuzzy and easily forgotten once one awakens from sleep.

—Ashon Crawley, The Lonely Letters

This is not a story of Black failure.

I thought I was I going to do better this time.

Rich was full of light and enthusiasm the first day that he walked into my classroom. I immediately spotted the fresh Jordans, the tight line, the sly smile, and the way he leaned in when I began my first lecture. He asked me how I was doing as he left the classroom. We acknowledged each other at the beginning of the next class session, but there was little recognition. He a 19-year-old working class brother from Central Indiana, the first to attend college; holding down two-jobs and living just far enough off-campus to never feel a part of the community. He didn't complete the first assignment.

I lectured on Black religion and revolution. I quoted David Walker, Toussaint Louverture, James Baldwin, and Fannie Lou Hamer. I played music, laughed at my own jokes, and invited my students to share their stories. A radical classroom was predicated on my full participation and embodied and full-throttled commitment to being vulnerable and accessible. I shared pieces of my life not realizing that my rehearsed and respectable stories of Black persistence and mobility sounded just like that, rehearsed, and a collection of finely scrubbed anecdotes that could be shared in any and every space. I refused to step off the pedestal that I had worked so hard to get on. I told another story that highlighted my difference without regard to his well-being and safety. I laughed out loud, literally closing my eyes, knowing that he was not laughing with me. I didn't dare to confirm my suspicions.

I called him to the front of the classroom. Talk to me after the end of lecture, I said. Unaware that I was reinscribing the type of surveillance and violence that had pervaded many of his educational encounters. This was not going to be a talk affirming him or his future. Without missing a beat, I noticed that you haven't turned in the first couple of assignments. What's going on? I asked, trying to deploy a more informal tone to disarm this student. Do you want to set up a time to meet with me? We can do this.

Why did I shift to we? When did I become a co-laborer or partner in his struggle? When had I in any significant way altered the power difference or attended to his vulnerability? When did we create a relationship or have any intimacy that existed outside of this classroom or my office hours? I needed a "we" in order to prevent a repetition of what had happened before in my classrooms, in the university, and in the other moments he didn't feel comfortable sharing with me. I could be a part of creating structures and spaces that would save him, right?

Black men fail or are pushed out of college classrooms at alarming rates. At public institutions across the country, the dropout, fail, and withdrawal rates for Black men outpace any other group by multiples. They are sidelined for a variety of reasons, personal and structural, but I would like to make a case that the lack of intimacy and interest in most classrooms on college campuses deny entry and opportunity for most Black men, especially first-generation Black men at public and state universities. Even the spaces that have recruited faculty of color and created retention programs have yet to think critically about the classroom or the modern university as a space for their true liberation and freedom. Curricula and syllabi, even within the newest disciplines or those designed to address the historical erasures of people of color, often duplicate methods and framings that are not helpful, if not harmful, to Black men. The university, in this regard, looks no different from the other spaces that have failed to address or attend to the unique needs of Black students, especially Black men like Rich. The university, like public schools, the public square, and the economic market, has accepted the premise of Black male exclusion, failure, or mediocrity. Is there a space or a moment or inchoate model where my relationships, my classroom design, or the modern university can attest and begin to attend to this system of exclusion?

Fred Moten suggests the "undercommons" and the quest for fugitivity as the foundation of these spaces. The classroom must function as an undercommons, or it must at least make space for the student to challenge its very existence and the primary disciplining function of the classroom. The undercommons are maroon communities of people who are looking for community and connection in spaces that often deny or criminalize those acts. These communities tend to operate under and outside traditional systems and regimes. Therefore, the marginalized and the not fully seen, these Black men and boys, need an undercommons. As Moten and Stefano argue, the goal is not the abolition of universities, classrooms, or other carceral spaces, but the interrogation and "the abolition of a society that could have prisons, that could have slavery, that could have the wage, and therefore not abolition as the elimination of anything but abolition as the founding of a new society." The undercommons or the fugitive learners must live "with brokenness, to neglect our debts, and to refuse to repair (or reform) ourselves." Am I ready to live with brokenness, indebtedness, and disrepair? Can I exist within a marooned community or create one within my classrooms?

I want a classroom and a relationship with Black men that begins with and acknowledges absence. I imagine a space that is organized to erase the failure, mediocrity, and exclusion of Black men and boys. I imagine a space that pushes back against what Lewis Gordon calls the "disciplinary decadence" that pervades every nook and cranny of the modern university and in many ways forms and informs the modern Black intellectual. I've been formed to discipline and to deny access and now how could I be expected to create classrooms modeled on what has been called "democratically-engaged pedagogy" and "full participation." I hoped and prayed that my mere presence was enough or that my pedagogical practices of critical reading and radical welcome would inherently make space for Black men. I was wrong. Recent studies suggest that after the pandemic, counting for the impact of Black professors and support systems, "Men of color enrolled at particularly low rates amid a pandemic in which Black students and their families disproportionately suffered from infections, job loss, and financial strains. Enrollment for Black men dropped 14.3 percent in spring 2021 compared to the previous spring, while enrollment for Black women fell 6.9 percent over the same time period." My presence alone was and is not enough, but I still need and want to do more in my classrooms and learning spaces.

I had assumed that freedom or justice would come easy to me, but my commitment to disciplining my students oozes from my pores. Why would I want to create a fugitive space or alternative practice in settings where I have always felt free or almost free? How does this text make you feel? What other texts or experience can you connect to today's lecture? How can we place this idea or thought into a genealogy of Black freedom? My Black male teaching persona, while explicitly repulsed by the logics of competition and comparison, engaged in activities, produced assignments, and constructed encounters that did just that. My classes, rather than re-imagining freedom and liberation, were saturated in the practices of hazing, carcerality, and containment. Maybe it was a space where I could be seen; maybe the classroom was a space that I could apply order and certainty to in a world that felt so chaotic; maybe I didn't need the approval or love of other Black men to succeed and feel whole here.

Close the door before you sit down. Sean always entered the class after I had started lecturing. He had yet to turn in any assignments, and this was the fourth week of classes. I mentioned the upcoming writing assignment

while looking in his direction. I noted that there were multiple options for completing this assignment and that the due date was flexible. He complimented my shoes as he asked me about the due date. I suggested that we meet after class. He never showed up.

This is not a story of Black pathology.

Terrell was tired. He worked the third shift, helped his grandmother, and was carrying a full academic load. Putting his head down constantly and disconnected from the course material, it was clear that he didn't want to be in class that morning. His shirt looked unkempt, his skullcap was haphazardly pulled down over his forehead, and he avoided my gaze every time I made my way by his desk.

During the fifth week of class, thirty or so days into the semester, professors at my urban research university in the Midwest are tasked with administratively withdrawing students. This process was designed as a mechanism to remove students who had mistakenly registered for a class and never attended or students that were unable to attend due to financial, health, or some other exigent circumstance. It is a tool of the modern university to ensure that all students holding seats have adhered to the structural and logistical constraints and needs of the university. While it had historically been facilitated by the registrar's office or the emerging class of student support staff or academic advisors who populate many offices across the academic complex, this responsibility has been primarily placed in the hands of the hurried, often under-compensated, multi-tasking professor. If a student has not attended your class or has not completed a sufficient amount of work, the professor is supposed to initiate an administrative withdrawal. Without being required to talk to the student and based on the sample size of eight, maybe ten classes, I am told to foreclose a possibility that feels insurmountable. I am not asked to make any interventions, nor am I asked to consider my culpability, failure of the curriculum design, or the outright disregard of the university. With a single keystroke, I am tasked with either letting Jermaine go or failing him for another ten to twelve weeks. I let him go.

Dubois may have said it best. "Well sped, my boy, before the world had dubbed your ambition insolence, had held your ideals unattainable, and taught you to cringe and bow. Better far this nameless void that stops my life than a sea of sorrow for you."

This story is not Broken.

Jason didn't return after fall break. I saw him once in the student center during the last week of classes. He nodded, and I did the same. I was on my way to the class where we first met on an unseasonably cool day in August. My lecture that day was on Black religion and Christian fatigue. I was visibly tired as I stood behind the lectern. For the first time that semester, I veered off script and sat down while I talked to my students. For the next forty-five minutes, we talked about failure and fatigue, the undemocratic and capitalist impulses of the modern university, their competitive drive for grades and their hopes for eventual job security, and the students who didn't make it to the end of the semester. I shared my story. I said for the first time that while harmed and saddened by a system that doesn't see or acknowledge all people, I was in the process of unlearning a system that by chance or a result of my myriad contortions had made space for me. I acknowledged that space for me wasn't enough. I wanted the love that lingered in the dark spaces of my consciousness and opened unexpected and never seen vistas.

I loved Sylvester. He stopped by my office. He interrupted me during my lectures. He actually called me and asked me to lunch. I decided to create a class and imagine a university that loved Sylvester as much as I did. This is a story about loving Black men in the classroom and the university.

This is a love story.

I have always been free and seen in the classroom. I have been affirmed, and I have had the right and privilege to interrogate my questions, concerns, and ideas. I have had teachers who have held my hands and my heart as they moved me through the learning process. They implicitly and explicitly taught me that the classroom could and should not only be a joy-filled exploration of content, but that my story, my experiences, and my ways of learning can and should be centered in the classroom. I no longer saw me or my East Coast, middle-class Black story; I saw Sylvester. All of him.

We began by exploring what love might look like in the classroom. What has love looked like in your home? What has loved look like in your most fulfilling relationships? Have you ever experienced love in the classroom? I couldn't promise him, or any of them, that this term would be different or, that by engaging in this process, intimacy would be the likely result. I suggested that this type of love required a different type of commitment and that it would subvert the notion of the late capitalist, transactional model of the university. Love in this case would be costly, thick, and come at the expense of the comfort and relative consistency that many of my white, cis-gender, or high performing and frequently affirmed students had come to expect. I looked down for a moment, as I unassuredly made the next statement. I am committed to loving you and this classroom over the next sixteen weeks. Love language and intimacy didn't roll off my tongue as easily as abstract and well-placed quotes of Black liberation and the histories surrounding the genius of Black religion. I stuttered a little, and I thought about retracting the statement. Maybe I should have replaced "love" with joy or fugitive or safe, but I knew that it was love and care that I was grasping for. I quoted bell hooks, the doyenne and guide of my love pedagogy: "When teachers teach with love, combining care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect, and trust, we are often able to enter the classroom and go straight to the heart of the matter, which is knowing what to do on any given day to create the best climate." I then played Stevie Wonder, "Love's in need of love today; don't delay, send yours in right away." A little too on the nose, but I needed the gentle prose of rhythm and blues as a safe bulwark in the midst of my uncertain plea. If this is too much for you or if you feel like you can't consent to this type of experimentation, I will not be offended if you decide to look for another section.

As Sylvester left class that day, our eyes quickly locked. I thought I saw fear and resignation. I muttered to myself, This can't be happening again. Had I missed the mark. Was I too eager? Had the departure from the traditional surveillance, control, and decided indifference of the mainstream classroom been too much for

this class and Sylvester? Did they not believe me? Did he not trust me? Was it too vague or too invasive? I thought about calling them back to their seats to better contextualize this assignment, or even jettisoning it in that very moment. As I was gathering my papers and considering the implications of this classroom session for my career and my reputation, Sylvester stopped at the door of the classroom. I went to meet him as he quietly waited, and I thought that I would sweeten the deal or soften the blow by either lowering the expectations of this love language or offering him some insider knowledge. I didn't know what to expect. I couldn't read his body language, and my anxiety and uncertainty made me uneasy. Uncharacteristic of me and my usual teaching persona, I did not try to fill the silence. He had unassuming confidence that matched his all-black outfit, his neatly tied shoes, and the pad and pencil that seemed to be a throwback from an earlier time.

He simply said, I like this. No flourish, no elaboration. He shook my hand and disappeared into the sea of students seemingly within reach but clearly unaware of a burgeoning love and a hope that I couldn't explain.

I started the next class by reading a love letter—one that I had written. I told them that this was what love looked and sounded like for me as an eighteen-year-old freshman at an elite private university in the Northeast. They could hear my longing for home and my unpolished pleas for empathy and attention from my high school love. A few of the students stared at me uncomfortably; others looked away. Sylvester was quietly taking notes in his pad. I told them that we would encounter the interior lives of Black folks and Black religious communities this semester. We would use their letters, their frailties and fragilities, and the sounds of their voices to understand their histories, their significance, and ultimately their methods of resistance, resilience, and rest. I quoted Saidiya Hartman, James Baldwin, Tupac, and Sade. This is no ordinary love. A couple of the students recognize the song lyrics; most do not. I then ask them if and how they are willing to share of their lives and would they be willing to hold the stories of their classmates and their teacher as we journey this semester. I suggest that this type of radical presence is the only way to be fully free.

As I look into two young brothers' eyes, one who was clearly falling asleep and the other who was trying to locate an exit, I stop reading the syllabus and stop trying to make the theoretical argument for radical love and intimacy in the university classroom. I don't talk about the ways in which we will attend to Black joy as well as Black melancholia. I stop emphasizing the ways we will encounter the lives of every day working-class Black men and women to go along with the stories of the exalted and celebrated heroes and sheroes of Africana history. I don't even describe the ways in which I will use the options of ethnography and autoethnography as methods to recover their and their families' stories. I stop for a moment, and I take a deep breath. I am scared, and I hate how I am feeling right now. My palms are sweating, but I need you and you need me. We can run from this and return to a classroom and practices that feel safe, but I want better for you and for me. I love you before you turn in your first paper, pass or fail your first quiz, and whether or not you share any details about your life. I love you, I love this work, and I love the possibilities this space and this time afford us to leave differently than how we entered. One of the young brothers along with four other students don't return the next class session. There was no email or excuse. Just an empty seat and a named removed from the roster.

Morrison in Beloved powerfully articulates the tension that arises as a result of a pedagogy organized around a thick and abiding love. "Love is or it ain't. Thin love ain't love at all."

The last week of class, Sylvester and I are feverishly emailing and texting as he completes his final assignments. We laugh when he walks into our penultimate class twenty-five minutes late. He alerts the entire group that he overslept, and he brushes the hand of his newly minted romantic partner, who has been his friend and conversation partner the entire semester, as he slides into a seat right beside her. There is an ease to our relationship that mirrors my relationship with others in the class. He interrupts me as I begin my comments for the next segment of class, and one of his classmates/co-conspirators in the learning space reminds him that he might know the answer if he had arrived on time. I urge her to update him when we take our mid-class break. Show your brother some love, sis. As we end the class that day, I remind them that our love story does not have to end here. I provide them with possible trajectories for our continued intimacy. We talk about the family reunion model where our love is organized around ritualized gatherings that happen periodically. The level and nature of intimacy may decrease, but we will see each other at some point soon and we will feel free to call on each other when in need. I talk about the referral model of love that includes providing my loved-ones referrals to networks, providers, teachers, and companions that can love and support them in ways that I can't or couldn't. As I watch Sylvester talk, I refer to the last model. This is the trajectory where our relationship is shaped by resonance and reciprocity. This is the model where our relationship deepens with suggestions, recommendations, and late-night conversations. This is the future where I listen as he describes his relational and professional failures as well as dreams of new possibilities. This is when he, as a PhD-candidate completing his dissertation, hears and feels the fullness of my grievances and fatigue. This is a thick love that is not constrained by classrooms or college-wide objectives or the constraints of tenure and promotion. This is a love that sees Sylvester.

This was not my last or only love.

About the Author

Joseph L. Tucker Edmonds is Associate Professor of Religious Studies and Africana Studies at the Indiana University School of Liberal Arts at IUPUI (Indianapolis). His research interests include alternative Christianities in the Black diaspora, Black embodiment, and the role of sacred texts in Black religious traditions. Tucker Edmonds' research is shaped by his critical and reflective pedagogical practice and his commitment to producing community-engaged scholarship with students and community members. His first book,The Other Black Church: Alternative Christian Movements and the Struggle for Black Freedom was released in 2020, and it explores the role of the Black body in twentieth century Christian movements. He currently serves as the associate director of the Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture and as an editor of Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation.

Notes & Bibliography

[1] Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study (New York, NY: Minor Compositions, 2013), 42.

[2] Lewis R. Gordon, Disciplinary Decadence: Living Thought in Trying Times, The Radical Imagination Series (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2006).

[3] Sturm, Susan, Tim Eatman, John Saltmarsh, and Adam Bush, "Full Participation: Building the Architecture for Diversity and Community Engagement in Higher Education," SURFACE: Syracuse University, September 2011, https://surface.syr.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=ia

[4] Sara Weissman, "A 'Loud and Clear' Call to Invest in Black Men," Inside Higher Ed, September 27, 2021, https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2021/09/27/college-leaders-seek-boost-enrollment-black-men.

[5] W.E.B. Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folks, Fifth Edition (Chicago, IL: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1904), 213

[6] I think that Black joy is important, and there has been important work on the recovery of Black joy, the role of fugitive imaginations, and play. See Lindsey Stewart, The Politics of Black Joy: Zora Neale Hurston and Neo-Abolitionism (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2021); Jarvis R. Givens, Fugitive Pedagogy: Carter G. Woodson and the Art of Black Teaching (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021).

A Lesson in Magic

Brian Bantum
Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminar

Teaching is a strange alchemy. The gathering of disparate objects—a spoon, pressed leaves, a drop of blood, and words of incantation. They all conjure powers of sight or channel lives long dead. Maybe there is no science to it at all.

Maybe witchcraft is the better analogy. When I say, "I teach," the images that float in our minds are spell books and star charts and the properties of the elements and the water and bone that sit suspended and infused in flesh and skin.

What is teaching if not playing in the gaps between spirits and trees and bird nests and breath and tendrils of hair, and the love and pain and grief and safety that wafts from them? What is teaching but looking for portals in ink on a page to discover the people we come from— memories and histories that cling to us, invisible and quiet, like static charged particles that fill me when I rub my socked feet along the carpet and snap into being when I touch my little brother.

I walk into a classroom and we are all just elements—water, electricity, carbon, energy pulsing in blood—until we combine just so, with just the right words, with the sun in just the right spot then—a spark, a bit of charcoal, light smoke—something to write with and light to see what we've written. We see each other's faces different in flicker of flame. Something comes into being that was not there before. I become something I was not before.

But before I was a teacher, before I could speak of the spells that were woven over me, the miracles where mud was smeared over my eyes and then water washed over me and I opened again to see color and shapes that were once only sounds, I was a learner.

I could talk about learning and the time I sat in a college classroom full of white students with the white professor standing at the front (such a pleasant man). We were reading W.E.B. DuBois and we got to the line "To the real question, 'How does it feel to be a problem…" and knowing exactly what DuBois meant. The words were not mine—but the feeling, the experience, the reality was thread on a needle that poked through that used copy of Souls of Black Folk and pricked me, wound its way through me and tied me up and loosed me at the same time. I walked out of that class trailing threads of time and text and brown bodies, stitched in little hatched patterns and tucked back in so you can't see the seams.

I could talk about learning as flipping through hundreds of mini cards cut from 3x5 cards with words like "masticate" on one side and "to chew" on the other, stuffing myself on word after word, the pile of what I didn't know getting smaller and smaller as I walked to and from the car in the shadow of the university chapel. Two more correct words than last time could mean 10 points more on my GRE. Ten points closer to the letters Ph.D, the symbols of transformation into one who can teach, cast, perform.

Growing up I loved playing soccer. It was my whole life. But I wasn't great. Or even good. My footwork was clumsy and my kicks didn't snap. After a few sprints my lungs would seize up and I'd have to sit by the coach with an inhaler cradled in my palms. Puff. Inhale. Hold. When my lungs didn't sting anymore I would go back in. I'd sprint. My lungs would seize. Sideline. Puff. Inhale. Repeat. To this day I still don't know what it was about that game that lured me into such constant embarrassments and such dangerous reminders of what my body seemed incapable of doing.

Finally my mother, tired of too many (expensive) trips to the ER, insisted I play goalie. "Mom, only the really bad kids play goalie." I said.

"It's that or baseball. They don't run in baseball." She said.

So at the next week's practice I went with the goalkeepers. Mr. Reyes gave me a crash course on the basics. Knees slightly bent. Feet shoulder length apart. Arms hanging slightly bent. Shuffle across, don't cross your feet. With each instruction he'd pose then have me mirror him.

To dive you step out, and drop that knee deep, then drive your other knee where you want to be, then explode from the bent leg… The first shot flew by me. Where were my knees supposed to go? My feet tangled on the second.

oh. So that's why you're supposed to shuffle.

On the third shot I didn't quite realize what was happening. I didn't think to shuffle or bend my knee or explode. There wasn't an order or a neat progression. I saw the ball leave that kid's foot and I was flying, like all the seizing of my lungs had been gathered up like a river behind a dam and then the little door cracked open spewing water into a dry river bed.

Shuffle, shuffle, explode.

Got the fourth with a finger tip. Swallowed up the fifth like it was in slow motion. The sixth was going upper 90, but I was a tree frog, I was a cat defying all the laws of gravity to slip the ball wide.

I thought I was a broken jar who loved to carry water.

Mr. Reyes showed me I could fly.

If learning is transfiguration, teaching feels like magic spilling out of my fingers.

My oldest son had been living on his own for a few months and decided to visit us on a Friday. We were sitting around the table in the kitchen, just listening to what his new life looked like and I asked what he had been eating.

“Rice with butter and soy sauce and tuna,” he said.

“What about vegetables?” I asked.

“Oh, don’t worry. I throw some of that bagged spinach on top and mix it all up.”

“Wait, plain? What do you do to it?” He looked at me, not quite sure what I was asking.

“Do you sauté it in butter? Steam it?” He stared at me.

“Okay, let’s try a little something,” I said pulling the cast iron pan from the drawer under the stove.

“Turn on the burner. Get the pan hot. Throw on some butter. See it sizzle? Now, throw on the spinach. Stir it until it shrinks. Taste it. When it’s tender, add the tuna and some soy sauce, maybe a little more butter. Then put it all on some rice.”

The plate sat on the table and we each took a forkful. I tried it. He tried it.

“What do you think?” I asked.

“Honestly, I don’t taste much of a difference,” he said.

I hope he will.

Before I knew I should teach I had always wanted to be a soccer coach. Maybe it was because of the freedom I discovered that one day on the practice field. But instead of coaching soccer or cooking or drawing, I found myself a Christian and a person who had a knack of explaining things to people. To teach words, to teach the shuffle-shuffle-crouch-explode, that was another thing. To teach how a word changed over time or a history that hadn’t been told, to help students make their pile of what they did not know a little smaller. That seems like lesser magic. Like rituals that if done with enough repetition slowly form branches into wands.

But I found myself teaching the ephemeral, the unseen, a thing characterized more by what we do not know than what we do know. What is it to teach THEOLOGY? What is it to teach the Study of God? To teach something so ephemeral as alpha and omega, and the improbabilities of an incarnation, of one who creates all that is, much less the Trinity?

It’s like trying to teach my kids about their grandmother who’s long since passed away. My oldest has faint memories of her, of what it felt like for her to envelop him. He remembers the yard and the house on Canterfield Way. But not much beyond that. My second son has no such echoes. We found out we were pregnant with him a few months after we heard she got the diagnosis of stage four colon cancer. She said she was going to hang on to see him born. And she did. She held him and cried and cried and laughed and laughed. And three months later she passed.

“Grandmother” is just a concept for my third son, like “God” or “Hope” or “Mars.” A word that points to something but exists in the world only in the forms of squiggly lines that become letters that become words. The words speak because we filled them with meaning, but he’s been asking why they are and whether they are and what about those other letters and gods and signs in the world.

How do I teach them about their grandmother? I tell them all stories, sure.

Maybe I need to tell them the history of grandmothers?
Or give them the etymology of the word?

Or describe to them the deformations of familial structures that marginalized extended family kinship networks?

Or do I show them the genealogy?

The name “Webster” on the Mayflower’s registry?
A picture of the house on Long Island?

Or do I begin with the back surgeries or the men she loved and only seemed to hurt her.

Or do I try to describe her laughing, and the crying, and the laughing?

Or try to scrape together the tastes and sounds and feel of just how hard she loved, even in a world that barely loved her?

But to them they’re all just words, aren’t they? A person who’s become an idea. A body that’s become a memory. How do you show them that the idea, the memory, the love, the freedom is still alive? Maybe there isn’t a science for those kinds of miracles. Maybe it really is all magic and conjuring and scraping brown bits from the bottom of pans and crouching deep to find we are flying. And maybe, along the way, we find we are all the bits and pieces, conjuring and being conjured into some mysterious new—learning and teaching and learning again.

About the Author

Brian Bantum is the Neil F. and Ila A. Professor of Theology at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary. He is a contributing editor to The Christian Century and has published three books: Redeeming Mulatto: A Theology of Race and Christian Hybridity, and The Death of Race: Building a New Christianity in a Racial World and most recently, Choosing Us: Marriage and Mutual Flourishing in a World of Difference co-authored with his spouse, Rev. Gail Song Bantum.

bell hooks, Black Feminist Thought, and Black Buddhism: A Tribute

Carolyn M. Jones Medine
University of Georgia, USA

This tribute to the late bell hooks examines her work as a Black feminist and Black Buddhist. After a brief introduction to her life, I examine her contributions to feminist thought, particularly her understanding of the need to dismantle "imperial white supremacist capitalist patriarchy." As a Black feminist and woman, hooks comes to this work, first, with rage, but in her turn to Buddhist thought, she develops a love ethic, one that she wrote extensively about until her death in 2021 of renal failure.

Key words:
bell hooks/Gloria Jean Watkins; imperial white supremacist capitalist patriarchy;
Black Buddhism; Buddhist-Christian; Jack Kerouac; Thich Nhat Hanh; rage; love ethic

bell hooks, Gloria Jean Watkins, was born in Hopkinsville, Kentucky in 1952 and died on December 15, 2021, of end-stage renal failure (Yancy 2022).1 Her pen name, bell hooks, was a tribute to her great-grandmother, Bell Blair Hooks. She did not capitalize her name, so as to put her person in the shadow of her writing, of her ideas on race, class, and gender, on teaching, on love (Quintana 2010).2 Indeed, her intellectual production remained front and center, as she also refused to use conventional citation practices. She was a prolific writer, publishing forty books and many articles. hooks is a foundational voice in Black feminism and in literary and cultural criticism. She was one of the first generation of Black Buddhists, along with Jan Willis, Ralph Steele, Charles Johnson, and others.3

hooks studied literature at Stanford University and completed her doctorate at the University of California, Santa Cruz in 1983. She taught in many distinguished institutions, finishing her career at Berea College in Kentucky, home of the hooks Institute and the bell hooks Center, which the college webpage describes as a place where "historically underrepresented students can come to be as they are, outside of the social scripts that circumscribe their living."4 "Underrepresented" included, for hooks, Appalachian students. She was the original Affrilachian, black Appalachian, thinker—and poet, as I will discuss at the end of this tribute—whose work changed the practices of the academy in crucial ways. Here, I would like to honor hooks, thinking about her Black feminist struggle against imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy and its impact on our lives, particularly Black lives, her Buddhist-Christian identity, her movement through rage to love, her transformative insights on teaching, and, finally, her work as a poet.

hooks embraced feminism and Buddhism as a young student at Stanford University. As a Black feminist, hooks' framework addresses the struggle against "imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" and its impact on society, particularly for Black people, for whose wounding it refuses to account; imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy will do anything to anyone to maintain itself (hooks 1995).5 White supremacy, she argues, is pathological, "a serious and profound mental illness [that] leads people to do completely and utterly insane things," leading to a spiritual as well as political crisis (Yancy and hooks 2015).6 For hooks, as a Buddhist, this normalizes mental illness and violence, and imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy has wounded Black people in particular ways, hooks asserts, engendering rage.

hooks remained a Black feminist because, for her, feminism was the first discipline in which race and self had to be interrogated. She told George Yancy that when Black women began to address feminism, white feminists had to "open their minds and change the whole direction of feminist thought, writing, and action" to address race (Yancy and hooks 2015). But, she tells Yancy, feminism does not ground her; her spiritual practice, grounded in Christianity and influenced by the emphasis on practice in Buddhism, does. john a. powell says that she called herself a "Buddhist Christian" (powell 2022).7 Both feminism and Buddhism "empowered" hooks "to work with alternative frameworks" that resist surrender or cooperation with, and that generate innovative responses to, the violent workings of normative patriarchal structures. One path, she writes, "was leading me in the direction of self-actualization, the other journey was leading me away from all notions of self" (hooks 2008),8 each reinforcing the other.

Like many Black Buddhists of her generation, hooks has described herself as not being seen as a "real" Buddhist: "no long time with a teacher, no journey to India or Tibet, never present at important retreats" (powell 2022). She writes that suffering led her to Buddhism (hooks 2008: 34). She became interested in Buddhism when, at eighteen, she met Gary Snyder—indeed, he, Jack Kerouac, and the Beats were her introduction to Buddhism, and because of Snyder, poetry, which combined creative process and spiritual practice, became an important form for hooks. Snyder became a mentor for the young poet, inviting her to his home. There, she met Buddhist women walking the bodhisattva path. Feminism and Buddhism together, she suggests, with Rita Gross, help us to imagine a Buddhism beyond patriarchy (hooks 2008: 36–7). Buddhism changes women, she suggests, bringing "a centeredness, strength, and power of being" (Gregory and Mrozik 2008: 71).9 Then, women change Buddhism and society.

Kerouac, particularly, influenced the shape of her Buddhist-Christian identity. His thought allowed her to combine a "transgressive spirit" with "the traditional church" where "Beat" meant "'beatific.'"10 hooks writes:

> I follow the path Kerouac helped forge as I work to mesh intense Christian upbringing with Buddhist thought. In the

> late sixties he continued to work through the convergences between these two spiritual paths, juxtaposing Christian with Buddhist writing. Starting with the assumption that "words come from the holy ghost" Kerouac reminds readers that "Mozart and Blake often felt they weren't pushing their own pens, 'twas the 'Muse' singing and pushing." (hooks 2020)

hooks also says that the conversations between Thich Nhat Hanh and Daniel Berrigan in The Raft is Not the Shore gave her a way to talk within Christianity about Buddhism (hooks, Gregory, and Mrozik 2008: 83).11 Meeting Thich Nhat Hanh influenced her thought deeply, because his "Buddhism isn't framed from a location of privilege, but from a location of deep anguish—the anguish of a people being destroyed in a genocidal war" (hooks 2022).12 Yet she argues that love was not emphasized in Buddhism when she encountered it. She credits Thich Nhat Hanh, Sharon Salzburg, and the Dalai Lama with addressing love in Buddhism. Thich Nhat Hanh also personally told her that she could hold onto her anger "and use it as compost for [her] garden" and to cultivate the seeds planted in a tumultuous relationship as a practice "to find in the mind of love a way to understanding, forgiveness, and peace" (hooks 2014).13 The metaphor of gardening, for hooks, indicates the hard work in coming
to love, in taking action to move through rage, "just as cultivating a garden requires turning over the ground, pulling weeds, planting and watering" (hooks 2014).

hooks moves through rage to love. Here, I want to discuss her work in Killing Rage: Ending Racism as a representative work, because it shows her movement from a rage that makes her want to kill to the capacity to "kill" rage and use anger as a skillful means (bell hooks 1995). Here, hooks analyzes the white gaze and its terroristic impact on Black people and how the imagination of whiteness, for Black people, engenders a terror that leads to shame, which limits agency and leads to mental illness and addiction (hooks 1995: 61, 135). hooks, who grew up in a segregated Black community, asserts that, since integration, Black people moved from loving blackness to responding to whiteness, thereby rooting Blackness in participation in white supremacy (hooks 1995: 243). In her Buddhist analysis, she argues that "one of the things that white people gave us when they gave us integration was full access to the tormenting reality of desire, and the expectation of constant consumption" (Yancy and hooks 2015).. Buying into this way of living separates us, blocking, she argues, the capacity to build coalitions and form "black cultural democracy," which involves not one essential and monolithic Black identity, but the engagement of multiple Black subjectivities (hooks 1995: 247–8), which are needed to address multiple challenges. hooks, through Buddhist thought, warns us about clinging to the idea of any unitary identity. Such clinging creates a stasis that, in Black life and, I would argue, in any life, can be coopted by nationalism, leading to separatism and violence. Breaking the attachment to a unitary, fixed self opens us to process and to fluidity, opening Black people again, for hooks, to Black self-love, which should undergird any radical political agenda.

hooks, in Killing Rage, recognizes that rage can be, as the Buddha knew, a sign that something needs to be addressed: we all feel anger, but we must be conscious, mindful, to avoid moving to hatred. The Dalai Lama, for example, tells us that "hatred and attachment, desire, are the two 'cronies' of ignorance" (Dalai Lama 1997: 26).14 Anger may be a skillful means, but we must be careful that we are clear about how we use it, not deploying a false clarity that may allow us to make an enemy of the "other" and to reject the teaching power of the present moment.15 We may believe we are awake but, actually, we may be bringing more suffering to ourselves and others. We must be careful of anger, because "anger has a hook": "it feels good" (Dalai Lama 1997: 23). And it can lead us from community into exile.

Love leads back to community. One issue hooks addressed many times is Black male identity and its cooperation with patriarchy. Policing Black womanhood is central to imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, which sees Black women's struggles for self-determination as a threat (hooks 1995: 88). hooks said that she knew as a young woman that Black men participate in patriarchy. In Killing Rage, she critiques black male culture for buying into its pieces of patriarchy—for example, in asserting that the suffering of Black males is greater than that of Black women. Black men use their marginal participation in patriarchy to "deflect attention away from the power and privileges accorded them by maleness"; the problem, hooks writes, is not always only racism (hooks 1995: 86–7). In this vein, she also critiques the patriarchal family structure, arguing that the reliance on a single, male authority figure—in the home and in politics as well—is dangerous because it creates a climate of autocracy where the politics of coercion, including violence, are used to maintain that authority (hooks 1995: 68). The equation that Black liberation is only black manhood condones sexism, she writes, and, quoting Paul Gilroy, also condones an exaggerated masculinity that operates as Black men subordinate Black women. Yet, at the same time, this participation in patriarchy is immensely damaging to Black men, who endure the "worst impositions of gendered masculine patriarchal identity," being seen "in the image of the brute—untamed, uncivilized, unthinking, and unfeeling" (hooks 2004a: xii).16 The image of "family" that emerges from this is damaging. Since patriarchy is about domination, not love, families in patriarchy are not safe places (hooks 1995: 73).

For hooks, transformation of the family is one place that we, as Pema Chodron writes, can start where we are. Quoting Mary McLeod Bethune (1875–1955), who was a Black educator and the founder of the National Council of Negro Women, hooks says:

> Let's just start the college in your living room. Self-determination really does begin at home. We're finding out that one of the reasons for why so much black rebel anti-racist movements failed is because they didn't take care of the home as a site of resistance. (Yancy and hooks 2015)

Home, she says is a "place of spiritual possibility […] a holy place," because, I think, it is in the homeplace that Black people can risk intimacy and create modes of healing that, hooks argues, are not readily available to Black people in public spaces because, hooks asserts, very few people feel Black people deserve healing (Yancy and hooks 2015). At home, in the homeplace, a foundational space of communion (powell 2022) and love, resistance, and healing can begin (hooks 2015).17
When hooks turned to love as an antidote to rage and reshaped anger as a skillful means that recognizes inequality and resists domination, the primary work of imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, her Buddhist practice is the source. She writes many volumes on this work. She examines Black men and patriarchy in The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love (hooks 2004b),18 but her "Love Song to the Nation" series addresses all of us in All About Love: New Visions, in which she examines multiple forms of love, Salvation: Black People and Love,19 and Communion: The Female Search for Love.20
Love, for her, is not only a feeling. It is, primarily, an art and a practice, particularly of freedom, with self-love as a basis (hooks 2000: 88).21 It is a voluntary practice that involves accountability and responsibility, as well as "all the dimensions of love—'care, commitment, trust, responsibility, respect, and knowledge'" (hooks 2000: 94). Anger in her practice is righteous anger against injustice, used as a skillful means. As an African American facing micro- and macro-aggressions, anger is part of life, and like Pema Chodron, she argues we must start where we are, beginning with acceptance—even of our anger—and become mindful.

> Fundamentally, to begin the practice of love, we must slow down and be still enough to bear witness in the present moment. If we accept that love is a combination of care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect, and trust, we can then be guided by this understanding. We can use these skillful means as a map in our daily life to determine right action. When we cultivate the mind of love, we are, as Sharon Salzberg says, "cultivating the good," and that means "recovering the incandescent power of love that is present as a potential in all of us" and using "the tools of spiritual practice to sustain our real, moment-to-moment experience of that vision." (hooks 2000: 94)

Love is important for effective political action because it is the foundation of a Beloved Community. Like many Black Buddhists, hooks connects Buddhism's non-violence, using the work of thinkers like Chögyam Trumgpa Rimpoche and Thich Nhat Hanh in his Engaged Buddhism, to Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement. Though she recognizes that the Movement did not always meet the needs of black women and tried to keep women in a subservient role (see: hooks 1981: 5– 6),22 she counts King among her visionary teachers who see love as a "transformative power" (hooks 2021). She told George Yancy that, living in a small white town in the Bible Belt, she thinks, "'What does Martin Luther King want me to do today?' Then I decide what Martin Luther King wants me to do today is to go out into the world and in every way that I can, large and small, build a beloved community" (Yancy and hooks 2015). Sharon Salzberg's book Lovingkindness informs hooks' understanding of metta: "In cultivating love, we remember one

of the most powerful truths the Buddha taught […] that the forces in the mind that bring suffering are able to temporarily hold down the positive forces such as love or wisdom, but they can never destroy them." Love is the greater power and nothing "can obstruct it" (hooks 2021). Love, therefore, is the soul force, as Gandhi understood it, that can work against oppression, domination, and exploitation; "'war, poverty, economic injustice, [and] ecological degradation.'" In starting where we are, our wounds are, our suffering is, where we begin this work (hooks 2021).23

hooks' love ethic has been more influential, I think, than has been acknowledged. For example, Jennifer Nash, in Black Feminism Reimagined: After Intersectionality, albeit from a different origin point— for her, law—calls for a love ethic (Nash 2019).24 Naomi Joy Godden, in "The Love Ethic: A Radical Theory for Social Work Practice," directly cites hooks' work (Godden 2017).25 I also see hooks' work on love influencing the emerging conversations on care, since hooks argues, in All About Love, that care is not necessarily loving. Other feminist thought is often used in discussions on a love ethic and on care,26 yet I would argue that hooks' thought has travelled without being named, which is part of her commitment to an intellectual life in which the ideas are more important than the scholar—to her sense, as we will see, of kenosis and no-self. This ethic, even before the books on love, was the foundation of hooks' teaching, which is a practice in which hooks' love ethic always was enacted.

Teaching to Transgress

Her friends tell us that bell hooks loved and respected children (Karlyn Crowley in Yancy 2022). She wrote numerous children's books, including Nappy to Be Happy and Homemade Love (hooks 2002, 1999).27 I see these books as part of her commitment to education—to what it means to teach as a loving and transformative practice. She believed, as she told George Yancy, that "Most children are amazing critical thinkers before we silence them" (Yancy and hooks 2015). Breaking that silence, reversing that damage, is what, for hooks, teaching is. It is a practice in which a "democratic educator" embodies and combines an ethic of love, care, commitment to service, and accountability; knowledge, responsibility, and respect—all of which make the classroom a civil space in which we may trust in order to create hope in the capacity for human beings to change (hooks 2003: 73).28

Her Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom (1994) has influenced many generations of teachers, and it transformed my generation of teachers, changing how we define our purposes and work in the classroom. hooks emphasizes critical thinking as a path to community, through the guiding presence of the teacher who is both catalyst and companion. She argued that critical thinking is not just criticism; it is a form of care: if our thinking does not care about the human person, society, and social ills, it is dangerous. The teacher's work, therefore, is to guide students through the tensions that may emerge in the classroom towards commitment (hooks 1994: 40).29 This is consistent with her admiration of the work of Martin Luther King, Jr., who believed that revealing cleavages in society was necessary work for making social change.30 She argued that her work, including her theory of education, emerged organically as she sought "an oppositional standpoint that would help me survive a painful childhood" (hooks and West 1991: 148).31 At the same time, her segregated education assumed that Black children would become agents of change, nurturing the life of the mind as a "counter-hegemonic act, a fundamental way to resist every strategy of white racist colonization" (hooks 1994: 2). Theory, the experience of critical thinking, of reflections and analysis, is instantiated in practice that imagines and acts to make real "possible futures […] where life could be lived differently" (hooks 1994: 61).32 She argues, in "Moving Beyond Gender," that this is what the Buddhist concept of the Middle Way or Path offers:

> Seeing reality in this way we are able to hold one another accountable for the positions we occupy in dominator culture without evoking a politics of blame or victimhood. An authentic middle way allows us to recognize multiple intentionalities. We can easily move past either/or notions to both/and. To me, the middle way is the space of radical openness, the space that invites true communication. (hooks 2008: 38–9).

This commitment to radical openness emerges from hooks' sense of identity and reflects her Buddhist-Christian practice. Leah Kalmanson argues that hooks refuses to cast identity, particularly besieged Black identity, in dialectical terms: "She envisions black identity occupying a stance of critical resistance that is oppositional without being merely reactionary, and she describes this creative sense of oppositionality in aesthetic terms" (Kalmanson 2012: 812).33 Kalmanson sees hooks' walking the middle way as a skillful deployment of the Buddhist doctrine of no-self (hooks 1994: 8). Artistry in everyday life provides a foundation for a vision of radical subjectivity; for hooks, it is a foundation for deploying a subjective multiplicity and engendering a capacity for change (Kalmanson 2012: 818). In addition, it resists, in a feminist-Buddhist way, Kalmanson argues, dividing the political, the personal, and the interpersonal, and the strength of this identity is that it can face change, endure loss, and mourn (Kalmanson 2012: 825). In the classroom, this means being interested in one another, hearing each other's voices, and recognizing one another's presences (hooks 1994: 8), even as our dearly held epistemes, our sense of why we think the world has to be as it is, may be questioned and undone.

I saw a striking resemblance between Kalmanson's argument on hooks' deployment of no-self and George Yancy's recognition that hooks, from not capitalizing her name to her understanding of the work of love, cultivated no-self in her life. Yancy writes, "embedded within her writings, with her discussions, within the arc of her existence" is kenosis, self-emptying. In Buddhist-Christian terms, kenosis is no-self. Yancy writes:

> The term clearly resonates with bell's Buddhist Christian sensibilities as it speaks to a form of dying to aspects of the self that sustain violence and forms of toxic divisiveness. Dying, within this context, though, speaks to radical transformation, generative opening, self-forgiveness, and the forgiveness of others, a powerful sense of letting go. (Yancy 2022)

This leads, Yancy argues, to the "liberated voice" and connects it to hooks' transgressive teaching, her use of Paulo Freire's criticism of the banking method of education (Yancy 2022), which is an anti- assembly line. Instead, hooks encourages an approach that includes the sharing of stories (hooks 1994: 13), thereby integrating reflection, (inter-) disciplinary knowledge, and praxis towards transformation. Reading and thinking together under the care of a loving teacher are transformational and liberating acts that make futures possible. Joyce Yukawa suggests that the banking method cannot address "wicked questions" (Yukawa 2015).34 I suggest that hooks asked "wicked questions, and her critical pedagogy/thinking/practice travelled out of the classroom to address wicked problems" (Medine 2019: 329).

hooks' love ethic brings together the moving pieces of her intellectual life: her struggle against imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchal culture, her love of her people, her devotion to teaching, and her love of the beautiful. All this comes together in her writing as a spiritual practice, which she prefaces with prayer and meditation. Her writing, she says in "Voices and Visions," when infused with spirit, is "a moment of pure mystery" that, when complete, leads to "intense jubilation and ecstasy": "Writing becomes then a way to embrace the mysterious, to walk with spirits, and an entry into the realm of the sacred" (hooks 2020). This creates a context of healing, filled with love. Love, as she told George Yancy, is "the only way out of domination" and the only way to connect with others, and to know how to be as a human being is to participate in "every aspect of your life as a sacrament of love" (Yancy and hooks 2015).

Her writing was a loving practice of opening spaces for hope. She hoped, in her college education, to become a "thinking artist," and art was, for her, throughout her life, related to the experience of the power of the imagination. It was, she says, "the imagination that fueled my hope as a young girl in a working-class Southern black home so that I would be able to create an artistic life for myself. The power of the imagination felt prophetic" (hooks 2003: 185). The artist lives out and embodies the dream of freedom and demonstrates, like the Buddha, how to do it.

I wanted to close this tribute to bell hooks with her poetry because that is where her contact with Buddhism began. Her Buddhist Christian/Buddhist feminist practice through poetry is, as she writes in "Poem 34," "where we imagine/we hear clearly/destiny calling" (hooks 2012).35 In her volume, Appalachian Elegy: Poetry and Place, hooks writes that growing up in the Kentucky backwoods made her aware of the importance of being wild, which means freedom and self-determination (hooks 2012: 1–2). In these poems, hooks engages in lamentation, for a landscape affected by war and for all human conditions that keep us at war (hooks 2012: 7) with self and other. These poems also remember those who have been silenced and who might be forgotten (hooks 2012: 8). The Kentucky hills are a homeplace of memory, full of "organic monuments" on which one can stand to call the sacred: "rock on which to stand/and know divine presence/witness and testify" (hooks 2012: 49, poem #39). This wilderness—which is in the free self—is an "intense field of possibility" that is and embraces change. It offers "a constant passing/of life into death/and back again" (hooks 2012: 41; poem #31), an engagement in a dialectical movement avoiding extremes that is the Middle Way, "reaching past death" (hooks 2012: 49, #39).

In “Poem 23,” my favorite of her poems, she brings Buddha “to rest home in Kentucky hills” (hooks 2012: 33, poem #23). When Buddha (not THE Buddha, but one with Buddha nature) rests at home, light shines, opening a way. Buddha calls:

> be balanced
> know lovingkindness
> end suffering. (hooks 2012: 33, poem #23)

How? The practice is to “rejoice in the oneness of life” and “then let go.” This is the Middle Way which avoids extremes: it is, I think, Buddhist renunciation and detachment, which in the Catholic Christian baptismal vow is also confirmation of taking up the way. The pilgrim travels light: “carry nothing on your back/travel empty.” This is to trust and to be unburdened, let go of dualism, of attachment, of self. Then, in place, the Kentucky hills, one journeys on, out of place: “as you climb steep mountain paths” (hooks 2012: 33, poem #23). There is no destination. Only movement—inner and outer. Only traveling into the wounded landscape of Kentucky, awake. Only travel, awake, into the heart.

I grieve the passing of bell hooks and celebrate her life, the seeds of which are planted in my life and the lives and works of so many others.

Eternal rest grant unto Sister bell, O Lord.
And let perpetual light shine upon her.
May she rest in peace.[36]

I am life without boundaries.
I have never been born,
And I have never died…
Since before time, I have been free. Birth and death are only doors through which we pass,
sacred thresholds on our journey…
We will meet again tomorrow.
We will meet at the source every moment.
We will meet each other in all forms of life.[37]

About the Author

Carolyn M. Jones Medine is is the All Shall Be Well Professor in the Department of Religion at the University of Georgia, where she is also a Professor in and Director of the Institute for African American Studies. She is the current Vice-President of the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies.

Notes & Bibliography

[1]George Yancy, “Introduction,” “A Tribute to bell hooks,” Los Angeles Review of Books (15 January 2022), https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/a-tribute-to-bell-hooks/
[2]Maria Quintana, “Bell Hooks/Gloria Jean Watkins (1952–2021),” Black Past (10 January 2010), https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/hooks-bell-gloria-jean-watkins-1952/
[3]For a list, see “Dedication,” in Pamela Ayo Yetunde and Cheryl A. Giles, Black and Buddhist: What Buddhism Can Teach Us About Race, Resilience, Transformation, and Freedom (Boulder: Shambhala Publications, 2020), v–vi.
[4]Honoring bell hooks,” The bell hooks Center, Berea College, https://www.berea.edu/bhc/
[5]bell hooks, Killing Rage: Ending Racism (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995), 16.
[6]George Yancy and bell hooks, “Buddhism, the Beats, and Loving Blackness,” Vox Populi (15 December 2015), https://voxpopulisphere.com/2015/12/15/george-yancy-and-bell-hooks/. Also available at The New York Times, Opinionator, https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/12/10/bell-hooks- buddhism-the-beats-and-loving-blackness/
[7]john a. powell, A Tribute to bell hooks,” Los Angeles Review of Books (15 January 2022), https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/a-tribute-to-bell-hooks/
[8]bell hooks, “Moving Beyond Gender,” in Women Practicing Buddhism: American Experiences, ed. Peter N. Gregory and Susanne Mrozik (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2008), 35.
[9]ed. Peter N. Gregory and Susanne Mrozik, Women Practicing Buddhism: American Experiences (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2008), 71.
[10]bell hooks, “Voices and Visions,” Lion’s Roar, https://www.lionsroar.com/voices-and-visions/
[11]hooks also says that using commonalities is helpful in the classroom in overcoming student resistance.
[12]bell hooks interviewed by Helen Tworkov, “Past Lives, Present Issues,” Tricycle (Summer 2022), https://tricycle.org/maga ine/bell-hooks-buddhism-love/
[13]More on Cultivating a Love Ethic: “bell hooks and Buddhism,” The Gender Press (27 October, 2014), https://genderpressing.wordpress.com/2014/10/27/cultivating-a-love-ethic-bell-hooks-and- buddhism/
[14]Dalai Lama, Healing Anger: The Power of Patience from a Buddhist Perspective, trans. Geshe Thumpten Jimpa (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1997).
[15]Melissa Myozen Blacker, “Everything is Buddhanature,” Lion’s Roar (28 November 2018), https://www.lionsroar.com/everything-is-buddhanature/
[16]bell hooks, We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity (New York: Routledge, 2004a), xii.
[17]bell hooks, “Homeplace: A Site of Resistance,” in Yearning: Race, Gender, and Politics (New York: Routledge, 2015), 41–50.
[18]bell hooks, The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love (New York: Washington Square Press, 2004).
[19]bell hooks, Salvation: Black People and Love (New York: Harper Perennial, 2001).
[20]bell hooks, Communion: The Female Search for Love (New York: HarperCollins, 2002).
[21]bell hooks, All About Love: New Visions (New York: Harper Perennial, 2000).
[22]bell hooks, Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism (Winchester, MA: Pluto Press, 1981).
[23]hooks explores environmental justice in her work Belonging (2009).
[24]Jennifer Nash, Black Feminism Reimagined: After Intersectionality (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).
[25]Naomi Joy Godden, “The Love Ethic: A Radical Theory for Social Work Practice,” Australian Social Work 70, no. 4 (2017): 405–16.
[26]See, for example, Yayo Okano, “Why Has the Ethics of Care Become an Issue of Global Concern?” Japanese Journal of Sociology (2016): 85–99; Olena Hankivsky, “Rethinking Care Ethics: On the Promise and Potential of an Intersectional Analysis,” American Political Science Review 108, no. 2 (May 2014): 252–64. Hankivsky does use hooks’ From Margin to Center (1984).
[27]bell hooks, Homemade Love, illustrated Shane W. Evans (New York: Jump at the Sun, 2002). Nappy to Be Happy (New York: Jump at the Sun, 1999).
[28]hooks, Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope (New York and London: Routledge, 2003).v
[29]bell hooks, Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom (New York: Routledge, 1994), 40.
[30]See Martin Luther King, Jr. “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/sites/mlk/files/letterfrombirmingham_wwcw_0.pdf. King writes: “Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored. My citing the creation of tension as a part of the work of the nonviolent register may sound rather shocking. But I must confess that I am not afraid of the word ‘tension.’ I have earnestly opposed violent tension, but there is a type of constructive, nonviolent tension, which is necessary for growth.”
[31]bell hooks and Cornel West, Breaking Bread: Insurgent Black Intellectual Life (Boston: South End Press, 1991).
[32]Carolyn M. Jones Medine, “Transformation, Fear, and Freedom in Teaching to Transgress,” Teaching Theology and Religion (2019): 326–30. https://doi.org/10.1111/teth.12515.
[33]Leah Kalmanson, “Buddhism and bell hooks: Liberatory Aesthetics and the Radical Subjectivity of No-Self,” Hypatia 27, no. 4 (2012): 810–27.
[34]Joyce Yukawa, “Preparing for Complexity and Wicked Problems through Transformational Learning Approaches,” Journal for Library and Information Science 56, no. 2 (2015): 158–68.
[35]bell hooks, Appalachian Elegy: Poetry and Place (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2012), “Poem [34],” 44.
[36]USCCB, “Prayers for Death and Dying,” https://www.usccb.org/prayers/prayers-death-and-dying
[37]“Thich Nhat Hanh on Dying… and Living,” Shambhala Publications, https://www.shambhala.com/thich-nhat-hanh-on-dying/. Sister Chan Khong sings this verse from a sutta by the Buddha to a dying person who opens his eyes.

Thriving (Not Just Surviving) for All: Re-envisioning Theological Education

Debra Mumford
Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary

When many of us think about theological education, we think about what happens in our classrooms. We think about the programs and curriculum we develop to equip our students who are preparing for various forms of ministry, religious leadership, and so forth. We think about field education, internships, international immersion experiences, and lectureships. We think about papers, assessment, exams, and submission deadlines.

However,
If we are preparing our students to lead and serve communities of faith
we must strive to be – for them –
the types of communities we want
them to lead, positively shape, and
serve.
We must strive, every day, to be communities in which all of God's
people – staff, faculty, and students – thrive.

We teach our students that God created all of humankind in God's image and all should be treated as the children of God they are. Yet, we treat some children of God better or differently than others. Students see this. We preach and sing about justice and mercy in worship, yet we do not always live into our justice commitments in our day-to-day communal lives. Students see this. Faculty are often accorded more privileges and respect because of their education and position. Students see this. Staff are often made to feel like cogs in the wheels of our institution who exist solely to make the institutions run effectively and efficiently. They may not get the recognition, pay, and benefits they deserve. Students see this. Students, staff, and faculty who do not fit the white, cisgender male mold that many theological institutions were originally developed to educate and support still face discrimination and roadblocks that prevent them from living into their full potential. Students see and experience this.

I have had the privilege of being part of the daily lives of four different theological institutions. I was a student at three and staff member at two on the West Coast. I began my work at Louisville Seminary fifteen years ago and currently serve as academic dean. Each institution has mission statements that guide their educational commitments. Each one has tremendous strengths – written commitments, policies, and practices that attract faculty, staff, and students to study and work with them. Each one has its shortcomings – lived commitments, policies, practices, and aspects of their cultures that fall short of their written ones. Some of the shortcomings I have observed over the years include:

- Failure to attract, retain, promote, empower, and/or tenure faculty of color
- Failure to honor the diverse voices, worldviews, and experiences of students, staff, and faculty of color and LGBTQIA+ folks
- Failure to attract, retain, promote, and empower staff and faculty of color into every level of the administration
- Failure to discipline staff, faculty, and students who verbally harass, belittle, or demean others (i.e., women, people of color, and LGBTQIA+ people)
- Failure of faculty and administrators to adequately facilitate difficult conversations about race and LGBTQIA+ related concerns inside and outside of the classroom
- Failure to incorporate cultural traditions and academic scholarship of people of color and LGBTQIA+ folks into dominant culture of the institution and curriculum
- Failure to meet the academic/programming needs of students who work full-time
- Failure to expand and diversify the donor base to include people of color and LGBTQIA+ folk and their allies

Each of the institutions in which I have worked have admirable mission statements and policies. However, living into their mission statements and policies has been challenging. Each of them has failed to live fully into their own ambitious goals. At the core of each of these failures are people – administrators, staff, and faculty who come to their work with education, life experiences, world views, ideologies, and biases that shape their abilities and willingness to make meaningful change, while simultaneously preventing them from making the physical space and mental space for those who are different. Each of these institutions was originally founded to educate white, cisgender males for ministry. Though they have all welcomed women, people of color, and LGBTQIA+ folk to some extent, none of them have been able to fully overcome the oppressive structures of their original, dominant culture (with its many presumptions of white supremacy and patriarchy). For example, one institution schedules its courses for evenings and weekends to accommodate the work schedules of its predominantly African American student body. This is excellent. At the same time, they have failed to recruit, hire, retain, and tenure African American faculty in numbers representative of (or even close to) the numbers of African Americans in its student body. Yet another institution only regularly incorporates the worship traditions of African Americans during the month of February – Black History month. During the rest of the year, the worship ethos and tradition of the founding white denomination serves as the default worship tradition.

At another of the aforementioned institutions, when one white, tenured faculty member was charged with regularly verbally demeaning African American students in her classroom, the institution chose to give her an unscheduled paid sabbatical rather than confronting her misbehavior, demanding that she cease and desist belittling students, and holding her accountable thereafter. These and many other incidents reveal a disconnect between the written commitments and lived realities of these institutions.

All seminaries and divinity schools are theological communities which claim to have God at their center. As such, we need to live out the commitments we teach, sing, preach, and pray about. This is why being against racism is not enough. Being against gender discrimination is not enough. Being against sexism and ageism is not enough. Even being against all discrimination and injustice of any kind is not enough. We must be clear about what we are for. We must have an ultimate goal or vision that serves as guide for our educational efforts. What if our ultimate goal is thriving for all?

What is the difference between focusing on thriving – what we are for – rather than what we are against? Motivation. Focusing on what we are for motivates us to see the potential and possibilities of and for every person, group, and situation. When we focus on what we are against, we are constantly looking for what is wrong by using a hermeneutic of suspicion. We see the faults and shortcomings of people, cultures, and institutions rather than what is good, helpful, and positive.

Educator and activist Bettina L. Love offers us a way forward as we strive to actually live into our stated commitments by creating communities in which all people thrive. Love is an African American, openly lesbian woman who serves as the William F. Russell Professor at Teachers College, Columbia University in New York City. She was born and raised in Rochester, New York to parents who believed that education was the key to a bright and successful future. Her experiences in several school systems in New York and one in Atlanta, Georgia – as a student, educator, school board member, parent, and chair of a charter school – informs her writings. Though her critique of education is focused on public primary and secondary schools, many of her observations and recommendations are relevant to theological education. In her book, We Want to Do More Than Just Survive, Love contends that the goal of public school education should be the ultimate thriving of all who pass through its doors. Though she wills the thriving of all, she centers her definition of thriving in the well-being of black and brown people, which can be helpful for our work:

For dark folks, thriving cannot happen without a community that is deeply invested in racial uplift, human and worker's rights, affordable housing, and food and environmental justice, land rights, free or affordable healthcare, healing, joy, and cooperative economic strategies, and high political participation that is free of hetero-patriarchy, homophobia, Islamophobia, transphobia, sexism, ageism, the politics, of respectability. These structural ideologies police who is worthy of dignity in our communities.

Note that Love's definition of thriving incorporates both what people committed to the thriving should be for, and against. People should be for movements, policies, and benefits that provide opportunities for good and fulfilling lives. They should be against ideologies that impede movements, policies, and benefits that provide opportunities for good and fulfilling lives.

Love believes that when educational entities strive to be places where dark people can thrive, all can thrive. Every human who lives and moves and exists in the world does so within socially constructed intersections. People of African descent have been and continue to be victims of oppressions that converge at the intersections of race, gender, gender identity, class, ethnicity, age, religion, and so forth. It therefore follows that when attention is paid to the growth and development of people of color (whose identities converge upon all of these and other intersections), the well-being of all can be addressed.

In order for African Americans and other people of color to thrive, Love contends that they need a village who sees and protects their many unique gifts and potentialities. Her observation of the need for a village is informed by her personal experience of having her own village of support throughout her life, who identified and nurtured her intellectual potential, and valued and protected, encouraged, and supported her athleticism and development as a basketball player. For Love, every child needs to be surrounded by people who see their gifts and potentialities and do what they can to make sure they have opportunities to gain the knowledge and skills they need to reach their personal goals. Every staff and faculty member, student and administrator needs a village. The village must be composed of people at every level of the institution. Each person must be equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to move the institutions forward. Love offers several concepts to help us reach our goal: closing the teacher education gap, identifying and addressing dangers of the educational survival complex, ending the tendency toward spirit murdering, and centering the need for mattering.

The Danger of Being an Educational Survival Complex

When I started this program,
I was told by other black students
to put my head down.
Do the work.
Don't make trouble.
Do what you need to do to earn the degree.
– Anonymous Master of Marriage and Family Therapy Student, Louisville Seminary

The words above were shared with me when I was serving as Associate Dean at Louisville Seminary several years ago. Reflecting on them now, while engaging the work of Bettina Love, I wonder for whom our institution has been or has become an educational survival complex? Love defines educational survival complexes as entities which uphold Whiteness while simultaneously offering one educational reform model after another that, in praxis, uphold the very discrimination they propose to address. Until and unless reforms actually dismantle, displace, and replace Whiteness with practices and policies that support the dignity and worth of all, people of color in particular are forced to find ways to survive their educational experiences rather than thrive within them.

We should ask ourselves questions such as, "Are new faculty and staff of my institution told or do they quickly perceive that the best strategy to adopt for their own well-being is 'survival mode?' Will they suffer repercussions and backlash if they dare to question current policies and practices? Should they just concentrate on doing the work they need to do and focus on building up their vitae or resumes until they can find a job in an environment where they can thrive? Are there students who enrolled because of our published commitments also doing what they need to do to survive? If they become disillusioned after experiencing differences between our written commitments and our lived reality, is survival mode the best coping strategy?"

By focusing on thriving, Love aspires to reimagine and revision educational systems as places in which people of color no longer have to focus on survival. She contends that survival skills are needed for children of color to endure the many iterations of character education that have been purchased by and integrated into public schools to address the belief that students of color and poor students "lack good character." While most people agree that children need good character, "character education" is actually anti-Black ideology that overlooks or undermines the actual history, culture, and values of African Americans and their communities. Love asserts that character education has replaced civics education in many public school systems. As a result, students no longer learn how democracy works and the ways in which citizens can engage with local, state, and federal government officials and processes to bring about change. Instead, students learn how to be compliant and to attest to their commitment to have "grit" or determination to overcome obstacles to succeed in life in spite of the obstacles that are put in their way.

What if …
theological Institutions focus on thriving –
thriving for all of God's people,
  thriving for students,
    thriving for staff,
  thriving for faculty,
thriving for administrators.
What if …
we actually live into our widely publicized theological commitments –
        not just inside of our curriculum,

not just in the scholarship of our faculty,
but
in our community worship,
in our hiring practices,
in our Board compositions
and decisions,
in our staff meetings,
in our classrooms,
in our pay and benefit packages,
in everything we do.

What if…?

Closing the Teacher Education Gap

When working to ensure the thriving of people of color, our seminaries and divinity schools will work diligently to identify and dismantle structural ideologies such as patriarchy, racism, white supremacy, and homophobia that impede and obstruct the development, application of gifts, and potentialities. Thriving communities not only dismantle and eradicate impediments, they also create opportunities for development of gifts and potentialities by providing the resources members of their communities need to learn, work, and grow. Love highlights the limitations of existing teacher education programs that do not equip teachers with the tools they need to work with diverse student populations. For example, she writes that the programs do not force teachers to be open and honest about race, racism, Whiteness, and their personal locations within the systems of privilege and oppression. Though many scholars preparing to teach in theological institutions receive some academic instruction on various ideologies, seminaries and divinity schools cannot take for granted that new hires have the tools, skills, and experiences they need facilitate difficult conversations about race and how to shape and change institutional culture to be more welcoming and inclusive of all.

Spirit Murdering

Love believes that institutions that force students to adopt a "survival" strategy are "spirit-murdering" institutions. By spirit murdering, Love is referring to institutional practices and policies that maintain white supremacy as the dominant ethos, even as they may publicly embrace inclusive policies and practices. For example, during a worship service at Louisville Seminary several years ago, a guest preacher, who happened to be African American, repeatedly referred to God using exclusively masculine language. We teach our students to use expansive language about God. Our belief is that the language we use for God can also influence human relationships in substantive and impactful ways. By referring to God with exclusively male language, we reinforce patriarchy and its many manifestations. During the sermon, a white, female faculty member was so upset by the preacher's use of masculine language that she got up from her seat and stormed out of the sanctuary. Her actions were highly offensive to other worshippers. They were especially offensive to African Americans in general and to students who were members of the guest preacher's congregation in particular. No apology was ever issued by the offending faculty member or by the institution. The incident itself and the lack of response by the institution was spirit-murdering for students who had been assured that our community affirms and embraces their worship traditions. Our commitment to inclusive language about God was, in actuality, exclusive. Our policy was intolerant of everyone who did not adhere to our practice. Our faculty member embodied our policy in a hateful and insulting way. But she did embody our policy. Since this incident, we teach our students to use "expansive" language for God that can include masculine language.

Mattering

Mattering to Love means being valued and supported in word and deed. Mattering is essential to human existence. Everyone needs to know that their lives matter to someone. We all need to know that our thoughts, experiences, and worldviews are important to someone. To illustrate her point, she highlights the ways she mattered to people and communities throughout her life by their supporting her development, hopes, and dreams. Love mattered, first and foremost, to her parents who did not have college degrees but did everything they could, throughout her life, to make sure she received the education and opportunities she needed to get into the college of her choice. Her mother's mantra was "give em hell," which meant "never compromising my voice and my connection to how I mattered in the world." Love and her parents never discussed the reality that she is a lesbian. Since her parents taught her to always be herself, her sexuality was accepted without the necessity of debate.

Love was taught by her first Black teacher in the fourth grade. Mrs. Johnson made Love and the other black students believe that their fates were tied into her own. Mrs. Johnson dared to be vulnerable with the children by sharing stories of her own life experiences when she was growing up in New Orleans that related to the life experiences of her students. Through her stories, Mrs. Johnson was able to foster a sense of solidarity with her students. Love emphasizes the importance and significance of having students by teachers who look like them and who can relate to their life experiences.

Love shared with her readers the knowledge and sense of community she experienced in FIST (Fighting Ignorance and Spending Truth). This local program was founded in Rochester by an African American single father who was a hip hop fan and a great basketball player, named Thabiti. Thabiti gathered kids in Love's community together on Saturday mornings and some weekdays to teach them African American history. Through FIST, Love learned about Nelson Mandela, Angela Davis, the Black Panthers, and Black Liberation efforts in general. FIST taught her to be proud of being black and the importance of embracing a history of resistance. FIST politicized her at a young age by teaching her that social activism matters.

In addition to FIST, she found community and affirmation at the Boys and Girls Club and the Flint Street Recreation Center. In these centers, people nurtured the gifts and spirits of African American kids who each had unlimited potential to be the people God was calling each of them to be.

Love believes that when educational institutions work together to close the teacher education gap; identify and address the dangers of the educational survival complex; continually examine, critique, and modify practices and policies that lead to spirit murdering; and treats everyone as if they really matter, then and only then will there be widespread human thriving. If we spend our efforts, resources, and time facilitating the thriving of all, we may spend less time playing social justice whack-a-mole.

Social Justice Whack-A-Mole

Social justice whack-a-mole is an inefficient and ineffective way of handling issues and concerns as they arise rather than aspiring to realize an ultimate vision that can and must encompass all of God's people.

The Black students are upset because
they discovered that some white students received benefits they were denied.
Faculty who identify as women are upset because
they discovered they earn less than faculty who identify as men.
Staff are upset because
they have not received cost of living raises in more than eight years.
The lone Mexican-American faculty-administrator is upset because
she was denied tenure
though other faculty-administrators who occupied her position in the past, and had her stellar qualifications, received it.

We force ourselves to employ social justice whack-a mole when we do not live into our publicly stated commitments. When our praxis differs from our written policies, members of our communities become disillusioned with our hypocrisy and failure. We know that none of us is perfect. As communities of fallible human beings, we often fall short of our aspirations. However, some of us fall short because we do not consciously recognize or acknowledge the ways our praxis is inconsistent with our policies or how our outdated policies fail to incorporate changes demanded by new cultural realities and lived experiences. At the same time, many of us fall short because though we have written down our policies and aspirations, we have not taken the time to envision what our communities should ultimately look and feel like when all of our policies are realized. What is our ultimate vision? By focusing on thriving for all, we create an image for which we can collectively strive.

The Cost of Being and Education Survival Complex

The cost of being an educational survival complex is high. Administrators, staff, and faculty who go into survival mode do not give us their best efforts. Many are just biding their time. Doing what they must to remain employed. We should want more for and from our employees. The strongest institutions are those that attract good people; give them the resources, authority, and space to do their jobs; listen to and value their voices, thoughts, and experiences; and hold them accountable for their work. Since humans are relational, we each function most effectively when we feel like we matter at work.

The institutional cost for students who go into survival mode is also high. Classroom interactions and every aspect of the learning process is strengthened by interactions between and among people with different worldviews and perspectives. We grow when we can hear and engage perspectives that are different than our own. When we fail to foster environments in which people can be who they are and feel free to do so, we short-change the learning experience for everyone.

In addition, students who adopt a survival mode do not recommend the institutions to their friends or ministry colleagues. In fact, they may do just the opposite. They are much more likely to advise people they know and respect against attending our institutions. And, as it relates to donations, forget about it. Students who go into survival mode will be the least likely of all of our students to donate in the future.

We should do our best to create an environment in which everyone in our communities can thrive because it is the right thing to do. But just in case that is not enough, remember that we pay a steep price when people choose to adopt a "survival mode."

A Way Forward

In this essay, I have challenged seminaries and divinity schools to truly live into the policies and practices they already have in place with the goal of "thriving for all." As a result, it is important to share a vision of what "thriving for all" actually looks and feels like:

- The board of trustees, administration, faculty, staff, and students reflect the diversity of God's creation as it relates to gender, ethnicity, race, class, gender identity, and age. Proportions of representation of each group correspond with representations of the student populations of the institution, or wider society (whichever is more diverse).
- All personnel are paid a living wage. All employees are paid competitive wages and given cost of living increases as the resources of the institutions allow. Salary and wage of the lowest wage earners are increased when salaries and wages cannot be increased for all.
- Staff, faculty, and students uphold all of the policies and procedures of the institution that support equity and inclusion. They work to change inequitable and unjust ones.
- Faculty are provided with tools and strategies to facilitate difficult conversations and conflict in the classroom (such as race, sexual orientation, etc.)
- The curriculum incorporates the work of scholars of many different races, ethnicities, genders, gender identities, denominations, and geographical locations.
- Staff and faculty are given the resources they need to develop, grow, and reach their professional goals as the resources of the institution allow.
- The culture of the institution incorporates diverse cultures and traditions to represent values of minoritized populations within the institution, denomination, or larger society through occasions such as worship, lectures, continuing education courses, and so forth.
- Everyone matters. All people are treated with dignity and respect. All voices and worldviews are valued.
- Faculty, staff, and students are held accountable for their actions. Grace extended to one is extended to all.

Re-envisioning our theological institutions as communities with "thriving for all" will be a major shift for many of us. However, as institutions founded to equip people for many different types of ministry, we need to be reminded that we ultimately answer to God for the work we do and the work environments we create. Our work environments should bear witness to the will of the God we serve. In our institutions, everyone should be treated with dignity and respect. Our teachers, as well as staff and administrators, should be educated and equipped with the knowledge, skills, and approaches they need to work effectively in and prepare people for ministry in a diverse world. In these institutions, everyone matters. No one should have to go into survival mode. No one's spirit should ever be murdered. Let us work to ensure that all of God's people thrive!

Notes & Bibliography

[1]Bettina L. Love, We Want to Do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2019), 65.
[2]Bettina L. Love, We Want to Do More Than Survive, 70.
[3]Love, 69-70.
[4]Love, 69-70.
[5]Love, 44.
[6]Love, 42-68.

About the Author

Debra J. Mumford serves as Academic Dean at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary and Frank H. Caldwell Professor of Homiletics.

THE WABASH CENTER

JOURNAL ON TEACHING

www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu

The Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion invites readers to share their responses to the pieces and themes of this volume. We would like to continue these discussions on changing scholarship on our blog. Consider sharing your experience in the theological and religious studies classroom. We'd love to read thoughtful and artful pieces of 500-750 words. If interested in participating, please query our Editor, Dr. Donald E. Quist, at quistd@wabash.edu with ideas you might have for potential blog entries.