

# ***Africana Studies Faculty on Addressing Race and Racism in the Classroom***

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## General Advice and Tips

- **Know your stuff/ Do your homework:** When you address issues of race in your field, make sure you are aware of important information/facts and recent scholarship so that you are not caught unprepared, unaware, or sharing misinformation. We all need to take responsibility to adequately educate and prepare ourselves. Having the data and solid, good information is essential in combating stereotypes and misconceptions.
- **Hold students to the standards of the discipline** when assertions are made based on anecdotal, emotional, ideological, or erroneous rhetorical bases; direct students to what the conventions of the discipline tell us about how to evaluate or understand these assertions and **Establish distinctions between:**
  - **Neutral vs. objective** - We can employ the best objective methods of our discipline but we can never be neutral on the matter of racism because of gospel doctrine and the Church statement as well:  
<https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/church-statement-charlottesville-virginia> (SOC 323: Sociology of Race & Ethnicity professors use the examples of John Hope Franklin and Bryan Stevenson as well as the case of Confederate symbols as exemplified by ordinary Black Americans here:  
<https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2015/12/17/john-hope-franklin-race-meaning-america/?printpage=true>  
<https://www.nytimes.com/video/us/100000005491387/confederate-monument-national-anthem-louisiana.html?playlistId=100000002500298> )
  - **Research consensus vs. research hypothesis** - While students are free to formulate any hypothesis, instructors have to maintain moral integrity and be the messenger for the research consensus of their discipline. For example (and this frequently arises), there is no evidence for so-called reverse racism against white people, including the use of affirmative action (which does not allow, let alone prescribe, quotas under U.S. law and policy). In one of the most comprehensive studies, the award-winning book, *The American Non-Dilemma*, by Nancy DiTomaso (2013: pp. 263-264), she finds among 1,463 jobs held by over 200 white respondents interviewed in depth, only 2 cases of even possible reverse discrimination in hiring (0.001%). [Note the use of data.]
- **Be respectful, yet firm:** Students all deserve respect in the classroom and our classes should be places open to different perspectives. One of the best ways to work through erroneous ideas is to allow people to express them and they are more likely to do so when they do not fear being attacked or dismissed; however, these views need to be engaged and some need immediate, clear correction. There may be times when one student disrespects others by sharing certain views and may even deliberately cause disruption or seek to antagonize. Be prepared to hold everyone to the same standard of respect for all of God's children (e.g. stand up for minority groups or people not even

present) and be familiar with the FHSS Diversity and Inclusion syllabus statement and university policies on [Inappropriate Classroom Behavior](#) that you may need to deploy. It may be best to address certain views and behaviors with a student individually outside of the classroom, especially if they have a tendency to monopolize a class discussion. Former Africana Studies student and current Sociology Master's student wrote: "There are some things I wish would change at BYU to improve the experience of black students. For instance, I think professors need to be well-educated on topics of race and be sensitive when they are talking about race in a class, with or without racial minority students present. A class at BYU could easily be made up of all white students, and I can imagine there are a few insensitive and racist comments spoken openly without a person of color present. Professors need to be our allies and have sensitivity training by others who know how to teach topics on race, racism, and African-American History." - [Kirstie Stanger Weyland, Dialogue, Fall 2019](#)

- **Reach out to, but don't single out students of color:** Don't assume students of color are willing or prepared to speak on issues regarding their own people or race and racism in general; don't expect them to be the experts. It is a great burden and an enactment of stereotypes to expect them to spontaneously and frequently speak for their race or all people of color. Reach out to students individually to let them know you value their opinions and experiences but respect their desires about when/how to contribute and invite their feedback on the classroom environment if they have any. Or, you may find a way to send an invitation to the whole class that would allow your students of color to let you know privately how they would like to participate. If they would like to participate by giving a presentation on their own country or culture, be sure to help the other students receive it with curiosity and respect.
- **Apply the gospel and have teachings by church leaders on hand:** Because of our Church's racial past, many don't think of our church as advocating for racial justice or as anti-racist. However, there are teachings and statements out there that directly apply and you can share them with your students to help them see how working against racism should be part of who we are as Christians and members of the Church. This will require you to understand the racial history of the church and be familiar with recent teachings and statements (see resources below). It can help to appeal to a higher authority and remind students of the ideals for which we should all be striving.
- **Be comfortable with being uncomfortable:** Addressing these issues is rarely easy and not everyone may leave your classroom satisfied. But learning and growth are naturally uncomfortable processes. Don't get discouraged as you learn and grow yourself. Keep going. Don't be deterred by troubled or disgruntled students. Be respectful and persistent. Be open with your students about the discomfort that comes when addressing these issues and invite them to employ humility, empathy, and introspection. Remind them of the ultimate goal and challenge them to do what they can to get there. Give them examples of how you have learned and grown yourself regarding these issues to invite them to learn as well. As Kimberly Tietter (one time BYU CAPS employee) said "... the discomfort of contention and the discomfort of correction are two different things." Or as influential Social Work scholar [Brené Brown said](#) "Being held accountable for racism and feeling shame, is not the same as being shamed."

- **Promote the expertise and positive images of a variety of people of color:** Help combat negative implicit biases and help your students see people of color as experts by bringing in readings, guests, and positive examples from scholars and other people of color. You don't need to always make this a big issue. Just do it. Check your syllabus before you finalize it. Can you add or change some readings? Check your examples and topics. Can you include more topics that address race/racism or include more people of color or minority groups as positive examples or models? Even better, provide your students with different perspectives from the same group of people to help them understand the diversity and humanity of these groups. See a list of questions to ask ourselves from a health policy analyst below.
- **Get help from campus resources:** If you want more resources, feedback, or help in just getting started, there are resources on campus. Go to [race.byu.edu/resources](http://race.byu.edu/resources), or The Office of Student Success and Inclusion, or the College of FHSS Diversity, Collaboration, and Inclusion Committee.

### Common Challenges and Suggested Responses

- Nonracist vs. antiracist - Some may defensively state that they are not racist. There are compelling arguments that we cannot be non-racist or “not a racist” because it actually supports racism. Scholar Ibram X. Kendi also argues that as complex human beings we can hold racist thoughts at one time and antiracist thoughts at other times. It might also disarm defensiveness to tell students that we all have stereotypes or other prejudicial thoughts that will come into our minds but we can recognize them for what they are and then dismiss them or interrogate them.  
Here is a good article on the distinction: <https://theundefeated.com/features/ibram-kendi-leading-scholar-of-racism-says-education-and-love-are-not-the-answer/>
- Partisan vs. political - This is a hard one for many white students who have not confronted their privilege to not “make it political,” but important to reassure students that no one should change their political party--they should lift where they stand and be antiracist no matter their affiliation. Everything about race is inherently political because racism is not individual level prejudice or animus--it is the laws, policies, and practices codified into law and embedded in our social norms that arise from and shape the law (including positive reforms). For example, immigration is a political issue, a racial issue. We can illustrate how both Democrats and Republicans instituted harsh policies since 1790, 1882, or 1924, including Bush and Obama, who deported over 5 million immigrants. However, we can also discuss how Ronald Reagan was a leader on refugees (with notable exception of Central Americans, and we talk about that, too) and how he signed the last immigration reform in the U.S. in 1986. The important thing is to help students analyze from a social science perspective using objective methods why it is that Reagan or Bush would *not* be nominated in the current Republican party when it comes to immigration, why LDS Republican Jeff Flake, a pro-immigration conservative, was pushed out, etc. When students see how over history the political parties have realigned they can understand it as a product of social forces and not demonize those of other parties, etc. I think the best example to use is the example of antiracism in housing policy in the case of George Romney Republican governor and presidential nominee,

and Mitt Romney's father. We use examples of Evan McMullin embracing Black Lives Matter in 2106, etc.

- "Africans practiced slavery too" - There seems to be a tendency for some people to point the finger back at communities who have suffered oppression as a way to downplay any responsibility to recognize the oppression. Some feel the need to expose African involvement in slavery and the slave trade, as if it is a dirty secret. There is actually a lot of work out there on African slavery and slave trades. Slavery was accepted in many societies at that time and was varied in its treatment of slaves, although overall being a slave was not desirable. But the key is that slavery meant something different in the Americas and the racism that came with it in the Americas was damaging to the slaves and society broadly. This affected free people of color who did not have all the freedoms white people did. We are still suffering from the legacy of this racialized slavery today. In fact, scholars argue that modern racism arose because of the slave trade.
- "I'm sure they had good intentions" - Some may express the idea that not all European colonizers or other white people in positions of domination were bad or that they were following the knowledge and conventions of their time. While it is important to understand people in the past in their context, understanding does not necessarily mean agreeing with, or as Paul Reeve put it, "[Explanation does not equal Justification.](#)" Furthermore, there are times when historical actors made choices when other, more humane choices were available or they were in fact acting to an extreme level of violence and oppression even for their day. Taking into account all of the evidence is important in these cases, to show the blatant racism or the violence and damage done by those with those prejudices, plus efforts to combat it by other Europeans/white people as well as Africans or people of African descent (i.e. examine the language used by those enacting violence, protests against how Africans were being treated by colonial armies and governments, the violation of slave laws, and abolitionists vs pro-slavery groups). So, some had bad intentions and good intentions are not enough to make things right. You might also consult [Lawrence E. Corbridge's BYU devotional](#) wherein he discusses how good people can just simply be wrong: "People say, 'You should be true to your beliefs.' While that is true, you cannot be better than what you know. Most of us act based on our beliefs, especially what we believe to be in our self-interest. The problem is, we are sometimes wrong.... The challenge is not so much closing the gap between our actions and our beliefs; rather, the challenge is closing the gap between our beliefs and the truth. That is the challenge."
- Public Health - Racism is considered by many in Public Health to be a public health crisis. Research evidence clearly demonstrates the connection between structural racism and physical/mental well-being. We're seeing this now with COVID-19, and we've seen it for decades with police violence and most other health issues. While it's obvious to BYU public health students that racial health disparities exist, students sometimes seem to have a hard time accepting the structural causes of these disparities. They often cite "culture" as the root cause of intergenerational poverty and health disparities as they describe how poor minority populations are lacking the work ethic they need to get ahead. When they're willing to engage with it, I've found that Ta-Nehisi Coates' [The Case for Reparations](#) is an eye-opening read for students that provides a helpful starting

point for discussing structural issues. See below articles of different types that discuss racial health disparities.

### Special Topics Specific to BYU

Race and the Church: There are a number of resources out there. These are a good place to start

- The Church's official Gospel Topics essay "Race and the Priesthood": <https://www.lds.org/topics/race-and-the-priesthood?lang=eng&old=true>
- "Spencer W. Kimball and the Revelation on the Priesthood," by Edward L. Kimball, *BYU Studies*, 47, no. 2 (2008): 4-78
- Blacks in the Scriptures website with videos on Skin Color and Curses, etc: <http://blacksinthescriptures.com/>
- Paul Reeve presentation at BYU: "From Not White Enough to Too White" on youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=38ghAZpmVL4> (based on research for his book *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* by Paul Reeve)
- "African Converts without Baptism," by [E. Dale Le Baron](#), *BYU Speeches* 3 Nov 1998, and film: *Pioneers of Africa* (BYU HBLL)
- Official Church Statements - February 2012: <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/race-church> and August 2017: <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/church-statement-charlottesville-virginia>
- "39 years later, priesthood ban is history, but racism within Mormon ranks isn't, black members say," June 9, 2017 <https://archive.sitrib.com/article.php?id=5371962&itype=CMSID>
- Search for recent conference talks where general authorities mention racism
- **Excellent *NEW* article by W. Paul Reeve June 30, 2020: "Making Sense of the Church's History on Race:"** <https://faithmatters.org/making-sense-of-the-churchs-history-on-race/>

Many students struggle to consider the possibility that the priesthood ban may have been a mistake and that the experiences people of color have in the Church are often not the same as their own. Using the official church statement and hearing from black members can open the eyes of many students and help in discussing the lasting impact of the priesthood ban and what we can do now to address racism in the Church.

### Other Recommended Resources

*White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo

*Blindspot* by Mahzarin Banaji

### *Racism and Public Health*

- [Racism is killing black people. It's sickening them, too.](#) – Washington Post, 6/4/20
- [Racism is a public health issue](#) – The Economist, 6/17/20

- [“I Can’t Breathe:” The chokehold of racism on America’s public health response to covid-19](#) – BMJ Opinion, 6/19/20
- [Police brutality is a public health crisis](#) – Vox, 6/1/20
- [Black Lives Matter: A Commentary on Racism and Public Health](#) – Am J Public Health, 8/15
- [Racism as a Determinant of Health: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis](#) – PloS One, 9/23/15

### *Structural Racism and Health Outcomes*

- [Structural Racism, Historical Redlining, and Risk of Preterm Birth in New York City, 2013–2017](#) – American Journal of Public Health, 6/10/20
- [Cancer Stage at Diagnosis, Historical Redlining, and Current Neighborhood Characteristics: Breast, Cervical, Lung, and Colorectal Cancer, Massachusetts, 2001–2015](#) – Am J Epidemiology, 3/27/20
- [Associations between historical residential redlining and current age-adjusted rates of emergency department visits due to asthma across eight cities in California: an ecological study](#) – The Lancet Planetary Health, 1/1/20
- [Historic lynchings tied to mortality today](#) – American Public Health Association, 10/18
- [Structural racism and health inequities in the USA: evidence and interventions](#) – Lancet, 4/8/17
- [Mass incarceration, public health, and widening inequality in the USA](#) – Lancet, 4/8/17
- [Why Your ZIP Code Matters More Than Your Genetic Code: Promoting Healthy Outcomes From Mother to Child](#) – Breastfeed Med, 8/11/16
- [The Unique Impact of Abolition of Jim Crow Laws on Reducing Inequities in Infant Death Rates and Implications for Choice of Comparison Groups in Analyzing Societal Determinants of Health](#) – Am J Public Health, 10/17/13
- [Structural Violence and Clinical Medicine](#) – PloS Med, 10/24/06

“On Being” podcast episodes found to be helpful for ways to teach about and discuss race/racism:

- Krista Tippett interviews Claudia Rankine: <https://onbeing.org/programs/claudia-rankine-how-can-i-say-this-so-we-can-stay-in-this-car-together-jan2019/>
- Krista Tippett interviews Eula Biss: <https://onbeing.org/programs/eula-biss-talking-about-whiteness/>
- Krista Tippett interviews Isabel Wilkerson: <https://onbeing.org/programs/isabel-wilkerson-this-history-is-long-this-history-is-deep/>
- Krista Tippett interviews Resmaa Menakem: <https://onbeing.org/programs/resmaa-menakem-notice-the-rage-notice-the-silence/>
- Krista Tippett interviews Richard Blanco (especially his poem, Declaration of Interdependence): <https://onbeing.org/programs/richard-blanco-how-to-love-a-country/>

A health policy researcher (@valeriealewis) tweeted the following thread that could be helpful: “A thread of questions white academics might use as a starting point to reflect on our own role

in perpetuating racism in academia. I start with counting (to force us to reckon with hard numbers) and then go to reflections (to force us to reckon with silence):

- how many of the students I advise are students of color?
- what proportion of readings I assign on my syllabus are written by scholars of color?
- what proportion of my course do I devote to issues related to equity?
- what proportion of my grants have only white co-investigators?
- how many of my grants include an equity component or focus?
- what proportion of my papers have only white coauthors?
- what proportion of citations in my papers are to scholars of color?
- what proportion of speakers I invite to speak on my campus are scholars of color?
- what proportion of my lab are people of color?
- what proportion of applicants to my lab, postdoc, research staff positions are from marginalized groups?
- how many people have I recommended or nominated for awards are scholars of color?
- when is the last time I raised an issue related to equity in a faculty meeting or committee I'm a part of?
- when is the last time I read a book focused on racism in higher education?
- can I think of times I said things that were racist in a scholarly space? How many?
- can I think of times I committed a microaggression in a scholarly space? How many?
- can I think of times I did work to repair for a microaggression?
- can I think of scholars of color I have stereotyped, written off, or pigeon-holed?
- can I think of scholars of color that leadership have stereotyped, written off, or pigeon-holed? Have I spoken up on their behalf?
- how many times have I observed racism (blatant or microaggressions) in scholarly spaces?
- how many times have I spoken up when I observed that?
- how many times have I read or seen disparities work and considered it "not of general interest"
- how many times have I read a work-in-progress for a paper focused on equity, and suggested the author send it to a specific equity journal (instead of a general interest journal)?"