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Editor

# Teaching Race and Anti-Racism in Contemporary America

Adding Context to Colorblindness

 Springer

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## Chapter 8

# Getting Students to Say What They Are Not Supposed to Say: The Challenges and Opportunities in Teaching About Race in a College Classroom

**Paul R. Croll**

It happens to all of us, but especially those of us who teach about race in the classroom. It is the moment when a student says something *wrong* about race. “But isn’t it because blacks commit more crimes?” “Well, it’s because their families are just different.” “They aren’t from here what do you expect?” There is the sense that students *know* what they are supposed to say and not supposed to say about race. In my experience these moments, as well as how they are handled, are crucial in creating a space where students can really talk about race and experience deep learning about racial inequality in the United States.

The biggest challenge in teaching about race is finding ways to create a space within the classroom where students can say what they believe they are not supposed to say. For example, on the first day of class, I remind students that they all come from different backgrounds with different life experiences. As a result, students may hear perspectives they are not familiar with. Some of these perspectives may challenge their own beliefs or even offend. They are reminded to be respectful of each other and listen to what their classmates are saying, even if they disagree. This is a unique opportunity for many of my students.

The opportunity to help students learn about race in this way stays with students well after the course is over. We need to make sure that students know that the goal of the course is not to “out” hidden racists in the room. Students cannot be afraid to say what they are thinking for fear they will be labeled racist by the instructor or other students. We all have prejudices, stereotypes, and racialized beliefs that we bring into the classroom this cannot be avoided or ignored. The United States is an incredibly racialized and segregated society. Our experiences shape who we are and what we say. The challenge is to get the “wrong” beliefs about race out in the open so that we can dissect them and then work through them together. This is not an easy feat, but I think it is central to successfully teaching about race.

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One way to create a space where this is possible is to ensure that the overall focus of the course is about institutional racism and white privilege, not individual racism and bigotry. This is not just a course on race; it is a *sociological* course on race. This makes all the difference. The course should be designed around social structures, institutions, and broad sociological patterns about race; such as the educational gap between whites and African Americans, racial disparities in the criminal justice system, and historical legacies of racism that endure today. Individual experiences certainly matter, but only in so much as they are used to understand the bigger sociological story. My students regularly provide their own personal examples and experiences, but we always use these to look at the broader issues. Students say “well that wasn’t the case at my high school . . .” This gives us the opportunity to critically examine how what we are studying is reflected (or not) in their experiences. It is not about the student and it is not judgmental. Rather, their own experiences growing up in racialized environments allow us to bring important ideas and misconceptions into the classroom.

It is important to allow students to say an unpopular or an otherwise uneducated or even an incendiary racial statement. My best discussions are often the result of a student saying something potentially offensive. In the right environment, this can be incredibly productive. In a class on the sociology of race, this is essential.

In order to achieve an atmosphere where this kind of discussion is possible, it is important to set expectations from the very beginning. After our conversation on the first day of class where we’ve discussed the fact that we all have differing backgrounds and agree to be respectful of one another, we continue to focus on our learning community. Students may hear their classmates ask questions or state opinions that go against their own core beliefs and values, but it is clear to everyone that this is part of the learning process that needs to occur if we are to study race and ethnicity as a community. On course evaluations, students often tell me that my class is a comfortable environment where everyone is allowed to state their own opinions. They say that they were able to talk about race in ways that had not been possible before my class and they valued this experience. Taking these comments from my students seriously, I would like to provide an example that I believe illustrates the environment I have been fortunate to create in my courses about race.

One topic I cover in my courses is that many Latinos choose to self-identify as either white or Latino. Census data shows that those who self-report as white have higher incomes, higher education, and higher levels of success. My students read articles on this topic and then we discuss this topic in class. In the discussion, I ask students which identity they would choose for themselves if they were (or are) Latino (I realize this is a provocative question). Last fall when I asked this question, one student said what needed to be said. She said, “Well why wouldn’t you choose white? I mean if you choose Latino, people will think you are lazy, you don’t work hard, you are, you know, a bad person . . .” At this moment, the room froze. There were comments and sidebar conversations, students looked to their neighbor and whispered, “I can’t believe she just said that!” Laughter, snickers, can you believe her? Students looked at me not sure how I would respond or what I would do. I believe this is one of the moments where what you do as an instructor makes

all the difference. You have to tackle it, face it head on, be blunt, and help the conversation to continue. The last thing I would suggest you want to do is silence the conversation or end it there because this is where the deep learning and connections to the course material occur. So here is what I did instead. I said,

Jane (not her real name), I have to pick on you for a minute.

I say this with a smile to show I am not attacking her. She knows she said something “wrong” and she is visibly nervous. I continue,

Thank you for saying that. Now everyone listen. It’s not a question of whether or not Jane believes this. That doesn’t matter. People believe this. Millions of Americans, most of them not in this classroom, not taking a college course on race, completely believe what she just said. This is the issue, this is what we need to discuss. So Jane, tell us again what you said.

Jane says it again, this time qualifying her answer in response to my comments, and she says,

What I mean is that if someone presents themselves as white instead of Latino, if they choose to identify as white, they may avoid common stereotypes that people make. That if you have the choice, if you choose the nonwhite option, there are going to be some people who unfairly judge you; that is what I meant to say.

This is much better. Now we can talk about this. This is the opinion students know they are not supposed to say but it is now in the room and it can now be analyzed, discussed, and unpacked. I needed her to do this. I even pull her aside after class and thank her for saying it. Jane is relieved to hear that I appreciated her willingness to make this comment and that I helped her clarify her position. She tells me that she was really nervous after she said it, that she was afraid what her classmates would think, but that she feels better about it now.

What’s the alternative when this occurs in the classroom? Rewind the tape. “So class, what would you choose, white or Latino?” An alternative would be that Jane makes her comment and the instructor gets nervous and uncomfortable and therefore quickly moves on to the next topic, making it clear to the students that these comments are not acceptable in the space they are creating together in the classroom. If something like this has occurred previously in the course, it could even go something like this: “So class, what would you choose, white or Latino?” Silence. The dreaded silence we all fear as instructors. The crickets chirp and students avoid making eye contact with you for fear they will be called on to speak. No one wants to say what Jane said in this environment. No one wants to say the “wrong thing.” No one wants to offend someone in the room, look stupid or ignorant in front of their classmates or their instructor. But these comments need to be made. We need to get these opinions into the classroom. We need to tackle these stereotypes and prejudices straight on. This is how we teach about race in a safe and respectful environment.

Another important point to make is that social context matters. Teaching about race varies depending on the institution, the racial and ethnic identities of the students and the instructor, and countless other demographic characteristics (including gender, class, sexuality, religion, and more). Our students’ lives and biographies

(as well as our own) affect what happens inside the classroom. I am a white male and I teach at a small liberal arts college in the Midwest that is comprised of a largely white, heavily suburban group of college students. While my college is currently increasing the diversity of our students and faculty in significant ways, the majority of our students continue to be white. Our students need to feel comfortable talking about their own experiences growing up, especially those experiences directly and indirectly connected to race and racial inequality. Many students attended well-funded, suburban public schools and these experiences inform who they are and what they believe. Just as we need to talk about school districts that are struggling, we also need to talk about districts that are successful, especially when there are stark differences between districts in their racial composition and socioeconomic position. Talking about successful districts often involves getting students to talk about white privilege, a topic they are resistant to recognize in their own lives.

White privilege is a topic that students think they are not supposed to discuss. Many students (especially white students) are not comfortable talking about white privilege. However, I spend a lot of time in my courses talking about it, in large part because it is precisely one of the things students think they are not supposed to say. I discuss white privilege at a societal level, in the students' own lives, and in my own life and experiences. My own experiences inform my views and what I bring into the classroom. For instance, I do not get nervous when I am pulled over by a police officer. I have received warnings in situations where I know non-white friends have received tickets. I know I am perceived in a particular way when I walk into a room on the first day of a class. My race and gender do not raise questions of credibility for my students. I know that white privilege has helped me get where I am today. I attended a mostly white, suburban high school that gave me many opportunities and advantages.

It is clear to me that white privilege has also helped many of my students get to college. Therefore, I believe it is my job to show them how this has happened. One way I do this is by making white privilege one of many formal topics covered in the course. My students read key articles and ideas from whiteness theory and I regularly use "Unpacking the Knapsack" by Peggy McIntosh to introduce students to the idea of white privilege. But this is not enough. I also give students evidence that shows stark racial inequalities continue to persist in our society. The tendency for many whites in our society is to believe that we are somehow living in a "post-racial" colorblind society where the goals of the Civil Rights Movement have already been accomplished. This belief needs to be addressed and challenged. I find the way to do this is to show repeatedly, week after week, that racial inequality is still present in every facet of our society. Presenting hard evidence of enduring (and even in some cases increasing) racial disparities in education, work, crime, and other areas helps show students that whites still benefit from privilege across a myriad of institutions and social locations.

I believe this approach is effective for many reasons, but especially because in almost every course I have found that a handful of white students tell me that their friends and family don't like them anymore. Obviously this is an exaggeration, but

what I find is that some white students in my courses start to take the ideas I present back to their social circles and families. These students tell me that their friends say “What’s going on? You used to be more fun, now you are all serious whenever we are just talking.” Or, “Dr. Croll, I went home this weekend and got into a huge fight with my parents about healthcare! That has never happened before. I never used to question what they said on issues like this.” To me, this is evidence that students are not only learning in these courses, but they are taking what they learn outside of the classroom and applying it to their own lives.

Critically examining my own social location, I do wonder at times how I can possibly understand race given my standpoint as a privileged, white male. This does raise some valid questions about authenticity. My answer to these issues of authenticity is that I make sure there are always a wide range of diverse perspectives and voices in my courses through the readings and videos I select. I acknowledge on the first day that I cannot speak for others with different experiences, but that I can bring their voices and experiences into the classroom. We read personal narratives of people from all different social locations and watch videos and web clips that bring people from diverse backgrounds and experiences into the room. My students do hear people from many different racial and ethnic groups speak; it just cannot come directly from me. My job is to help them make sense of the stories and perspectives they encounter and to help them use the ideas and theories from the course to make sense of it from a sociological perspective.

It is also important to bring in contrasting views on racial issues in our society. Students read, see, and hear from those who believe we are in a post-racial, colorblind society. We hear white men in videos say that the playing field is wide open. We read Ward Connerly’s argument that we need to stop tracking people based on their race and we listen to Bill Cosby’s NAACP speech where he attacks poor African American communities for failing their children. These perspectives are equally important to discuss in a course about race. Many students say that before the class, these perspectives all seemed reasonable to them. That before this course, they would have agreed with these opinions. But now, after learning about the history of race in the United States, after being presented with evidence that minorities still face barriers at all levels of society, and – possibly most important – learning that whites benefit from many privileges throughout society, students are able to argue against these post-racial, colorblind arguments. They see the flaws and even wonder out loud in class how these people can make these arguments and claims, given everything they now know.

The college classroom provides an opportunity for our students to be critical thinkers and can help prepare them to be engaged citizens in our society. Creating a safe, respectful space inside the classroom where students can truly talk to each other about race can help make these classes more successful. Giving students the chance to say what they are not supposed to say allows students to critically analyze and evaluate racial thoughts and beliefs. This can provide students with the opportunity for deep learning about race that is essential as we prepare them for the ever-changing society they will face after leaving our classrooms.

# Chapter 14

## Bringing Students into the Matrix: A Framework and Tools for Teaching Race and Overcoming Student Resistance

Abby Ferber

### 14.1 Part One: The Context

To understand the challenges of teaching about race, we need to begin with an exploration of the context of post-racial ideology that informs students' expectations and experiences in our classrooms.

Sociologists continue to document how racial oppression remains entrenched across institutions of U.S. social life, including education, housing, workplaces, the economy, the criminal justice system and healthcare (Feagin 2001; Plaut 2010). Despite our history of “undeserved impoverishment” for African Americans and “undeserved enrichment” for whites, many white people believe that discrimination against people of color is a thing of the past (Feagin 2001). Forty percent of whites and ten percent of blacks polled believe that racial equality has been achieved (<http://www.pollingreport.com/race.htm>). As Patricia Hill Collins (2004) argues, “recognizing that racism even exists remains a challenge for most White Americans, and increasingly for African-Americans as well. They believe that the passage of civil rights legislation eliminated racially discriminatory practices and that any problems that Blacks may experience now are of their own doing” (5).

The election of Obama has been frequently evoked to support claims that we are a color-blind nation (Bonilla-Silva 2010; Cunnigen and Bruce 2010). A color-blind perspective assumes that discrimination is a thing of the past, and denies the reality of race and racial inequality today. This approach argues that we should treat people as simply human beings, rather than as racialized beings (Plaut 2010). Color-blind ideology leads to the conclusion that we've done all we can, therefore any differences we see in the success of racial groups is due to inherent differences in

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the groups themselves. While many people naively embrace this view as non-racist, it reinforces and reproduces contemporary systemic racial inequality by denying its reality.

When making race and racial inequality “visible” for those who do not see it, they often exhibit resistance. One of the most significant features of white privilege is that those who experience it do not have to think about it (Ferber and Samuels 2010; Goodman 2001 and Johnson 2001). People of color are confronted with the reality of inequality and oppression on a daily basis, and are thus more likely to “see” it, but those who experience privilege are often unaware of it and the full extent to which it impacts their own lives (Kendall 2006; Kimmel and Ferber 2010). Consequently, those with white privilege, or any form of privilege, often become angry when confronted by the fact of their privilege, having been taught to see their own accomplishments as based on their own efforts and hard work alone (Ferber et al. 2003; Stewart et al. 2012).

Many faculty have examined this resistance as it manifests in the classroom, and offered a variety of pedagogical approaches and activities to undermine this resistance (Keating 2007; Fox 2009). One of the significant challenges we face is balancing our efforts to reach resistant students with the educational needs of students that already “get it.” How do we create a learning community that fosters respect and learning for *all* students? Too often, our preoccupation with “bringing white people into consciousness about white privilege and racism” ignores the experience of students of color in the “anti-racist classroom” (Blackwell 2010, p. 473). Deanna Blackwell recounts her own experiences in supposedly anti-racist classrooms, where students of color are expected to serve as “experts,” “witnesses,” or “cultural experts,” revealing their own experiences of racism for the benefit of white students’ learning (2010). Blackwell critiques much of the literature addressing student resistance for ignoring the needs of students of color. It is important for teachers to hear this critique, but I would add one caveat – the division between the students in our classrooms that get it, and those that don’t, does not fall along strictly racial lines. For example, as the research shows, a significant number of people of color also embrace a color-blind perspective.

## 14.2 Part Two: The Framework

The framework I have developed for teaching about race is based on Patricia Hill Collins’ conception of the *Matrix of Domination* (Collins 2000). In my 12 years directing and co-facilitating *The Knapsack Institute: Transforming Teaching and Learning*, my co-facilitators and I have developed what we call the *Matrix of Privilege and Oppression* Framework. This framework is the foundation of our *Matrix Reader: Examining the Dynamics of Oppression and Privilege*, designed for introductory race and gender courses. This framework is informed by both theoretical and practical priorities. First, it reflects our ongoing efforts to bring contemporary research and theorizing on both privilege and intersectionality into our teaching. My own research trajectory began with my work examining the

construction of white masculinity, and the defense of white male privilege, in contemporary white supremacist discourse (Ferber 1998). Yet most of the classroom textbooks I found for my race and ethnicity classes included little if any focus on whiteness or gender.

The second concern is pedagogical and strategic: minimizing student resistance to examining inequality and oppression, and meeting the needs of all students in our classrooms. Each year, this is the most frequent request we hear from faculty attending the KI: how do we deal with student resistance and hostility? How do we respond in those instances straight out of faculty nightmares: when a hostile student says something incredibly offensive; when the class erupts into a shouting match; or when students storm out of the classroom in the middle of a lecture.

Key features of the *Matrix of privilege and oppression framework*:

1. *Sees Classifications of Difference as Socially Constructed*: This framework is based on a sociological approach which examines race, gender, disability, etc. as socially constructed systems of classification and power. These socially constructed systems vary cross-culturally and historically, and take different forms in different contexts.
2. *Brings in Privilege*: This framework emphasizes that oppression and privilege are two sides of the same coin; you cannot have one without the other. While sociology as a discipline has long focused on issues of race and ethnicity, it is only recently that whiteness and white privilege has entered the literature. Those with white privilege have greater access to rewards and valued resources simply because of their whiteness. Our failure to interrogate white privilege has serious consequences. The invisibility of whiteness serves to “reinforce the existing racial understandings and racial order of society” (Doane 2003, p. 11.) Making whiteness visible allows us to examine the ways in which all white people gain benefits from their race, expanding the discussion of racism and racial inequality beyond the actions of individual “racists” to examine institutionalized, systemic racism and the racist culture which nourishes it (Feagin 2001; Hartigan 2010). White privilege can be a highly contentious subject to teach, and can potentially increase white student resistance. However, by examining white privilege in the context of intersectionality (see below), this resistance is preempted. Instead, the focus on privilege is turned into a pedagogical strength by making clear that *everyone’s* life is shaped by their race, and thus *about* and *relevant to*, every student.
3. *Intersectional*: The matrix framework emphasizes that forms of privilege and oppression interact and intersect at multiple levels, and in everyone’s lives. No one has just a racial identity. Intersectionality leads to an examination of diversity within racial groups, emphasizing that no racial group is homogenous group. The experiences of African-Americans, Asian-Americans, latin@s, Native Americans and Whites vary depending upon other social identities such as gender, class and sexual orientation. Employing an intersectional theoretical foundation is key to minimizing resistance.
4. *Inclusive and Connectionist*: Anna Louise Keating argues that faculty must embrace a “connectionist” approach in the classroom. A “connectionist approach

is relational, starting with what ties people together, beyond their differences, and is non-divisive” (Keating 2007). While the danger here lies in the potential avoidance of issues of power and inequality, we avoid this pitfall by focusing on privilege as the point of connection. When we begin with privilege, situated in an intersectional context, students are connected by this shared position. This framework emphasizes that everyone experiences privilege (whether race, gender, sexual orientation, class, age, ability, or nationality). Students see themselves as part of a larger struggle for social justice, where each of them must be accountable for the privilege they are the beneficiaries of.

5. *Does not blame individuals*: Another assumption of this approach is that privilege and oppression are not characteristics of people, but of society. According to Allan Johnson, “Oppression and dominance name social realities that we can participate in without being oppressive or dominating people” (13). Emphasizing this sociological insight also contributes to minimizing resistance, as well as feelings of guilt or shame that often accompany the recognition of privilege.
6. *Sees oppression and privilege as harmful to everyone*: We emphasize that narrow group identities can be harmful to everyone, even those in the privileged group. For example, boys experience many negative effects from our culture’s narrow definition of masculinity and others have examined the negative effects of white privilege on whites. While being careful not to allow this point to lead students to conclude that everyone is thus equally oppressed, noting these harms increases student buy-in.
7. *Proactive*: The matrix framework recognizes that we are all a part of the problem *and* the solution. Racism can no longer be assumed to be just a people of color problem. We all must take ownership for these issues and responsibility for creating change. Emphasizing this point can be empowering for students, and can help minimize the hopelessness and despair many students feel once they understand the reality and extent of inequality. It is helpful to provide examples of role models from privileged groups fighting to end inequality, and to examine what it means to be an ally. This also serves as a mechanism for community building in the classroom.

### 14.3 Theoretical Foundations

This approach is built on the foundation of intersectionality. Sociologist Patricia Hill Collins developed the concept to the matrix of domination to provide insight into the experiences of African-American women. Moving beyond approaches that conceptualized their experiences as dual oppression, or explained black lesbians as facing “triple jeopardy,” the concept of the matrix is not additive. Rather, it reveals the ways in which social identities intersect, are contingent and mutually constitutive. Theories of intersectionality have been most fully developed and advanced by women of color, seeking to understand the reality of their lives where race and gender could not be separated. Historically, women of color have

repeatedly faced demands that they prioritize one or the other identity in their social movement activism, finding that their experiences end up represented in none. In the suffrage movement, women were divided by race when asked to focus only on gender; in the civil rights and chicano movements, women were often asked to abandon issues of gender and prioritize the struggle for racial equality. In these cases, the specific experiences, needs, and voices of women of color end up marginalized. Collins' use of standpoint methodology shifted the focus specifically to black women, and started from their standpoint. Examining the lives of those who are multiply oppressed lead to the development of an intentionally intersectional approach arguing that categories of race, gender, class, sexuality, and others (depending upon the context) cannot be easily separated (Collins 2004; Crenshaw 1989).

Legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) is credited with coining the term "intersectionality," and her analyses demonstrate the need for an intersectional perspective in addressing major social problems. She examines issues such as domestic violence and affirmative action to argue that: "Intersectionality is a concept that enables us to recognize the fact that perceived group membership can make people vulnerable to various forms of bias, yet because we are simultaneously members of many groups, our complex identities can shape the specific way we each experience that bias. For example, men and women can often experience racism differently, just as women of different races can experience sexism differently, and so on" (3).

Intersectional theorizing has blossomed to examine intersectionality on many levels, beyond just focusing on lived experience. For example, the work of Siobhan Somerville explores the nineteenth and twentieth century narratives of race and sexuality, demonstrating that "the concurrent bifurcations of categories of race and sexuality were not only historically coincident but in fact structurally interdependent and perhaps mutually productive" (286). Her research examines the ways in which racial ideologies influenced and made possible the arrival of medical definitions of homosexuality.

This approach has been very successful at limiting and preempting resistance for a number of reasons. Because the focus is on privilege from an intersectional perspective, "us vs. them" divisions among students are avoided. Instead, every student sees her/himself as experiencing some form of privilege, whether it is tied to gender, disability, nationality or some other social identity. This allows us to focus on the dynamics of privilege and oppression without some students feeling like they are specifically being targeted as the villains.

This approach is also the best method I have found to respond to the negative experiences of students of color in many anti-racist classrooms, as suggested by Blackwell. The focus here is not about seeing and decentering whiteness, but coming to see all forms of privilege, and examining their intersections. Each student is asked to examine her/his own position, in terms of the interactions of race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability. In this context students are positioned in the classroom not as bad guys and victims, but as students who all experience some forms of privilege, which interact in shaping their lives. As we move beyond that point, it is

crucial to examine the ways in which these experiences of privilege are nevertheless not the same, or equal, and we avoid attempts to rank them.

One of the common misperceptions of intersectionality is that it is a “let’s look at everyone” approach. Too often we slip back into an additive perspective. For example, when leading a recent teaching workshop, one participant objected and explained, “I don’t want to focus my efforts on women. I am interested in serving the Native American community. That is where my passion lies. I don’t want to shift my attention away from the Native American community to work on women’s issues.” She imagined Native Americans and women as two separate and distinct groups, rather than recognizing that about half the Native American population is women, and their needs and experiences may differ from men’s.

Examining classifications of race, gender, and other classifications from the matrix framework, they are seen in their complexity and variability. “Contrary to the dominant framing of some of these issues, contemporary immigrants are not all Latino; prisoners are not all men; affirmative action beneficiaries are not all African American; and LGBTs are not all white and middle class. Recognizing that these constituencies are multiply-constituted means that interventions and programs designed to address group interests can no longer be framed in exclusionary terms. There are constituencies within constituencies that are not well-served by such categorical thinking” (Crenshaw 1989).

Intersectionality does not mean that there is equal emphasis on every social identity. This approach can be implemented in any class. For example, when I teach my “Race and Ethnic Relations” courses, I focus specifically on race, but from an intersectional perspective. This means that students see race within a broader context, where gender, class, sexuality and other social identities shape each person’s experiences of their racial identity, and we examine the ways in which systems of racial inequality are intertwined with other systems of inequality.

I have seen in my own classes the ways in which this approach changes the dynamics and impacts student learning. I have been teaching for close to 20 years. I remember examples from my first few years teaching about race that raised pedagogical questions I was not well prepared to deal with. On numerous occasions I had students of color in class that argued against the reality of ongoing racism. The first time this occurred I was shocked: a young woman who self-identified as African-American and multi racial, vehemently argued against racism as a contemporary issue, and claimed she had never experienced racism in her life. She had been raised most of her life outside of the U.S. in a very wealthy family. I had mistakenly assumed that all students of color would recognize that racism still exists. The white students in the classroom quickly co-opted these students’ statements to support their contention that we sociologists need to stop making such a big deal about race, because even people of color were arguing it did not exist. In some cases this also led to students of color being pitted against each other.

In other cases, I remember reading the journals of some of the students of color that revealed the emotional distress the class was causing them. They expressed frustration, dismay, and hopelessness at the extent of inequality that still existed, the lack of knowledge most students possessed, and the resistance they were witnessing

in classmates. These students often remained silent in class, feeling that their voice would not be heard in that context. I met with these students individually to try to address their needs, yet at the same time, did not know how to adequately address all students' needs within the classroom itself.

Over time, my experiences teaching these same courses have changed dramatically, as I have gradually implemented an intersectional, privilege-focused framework. Using this framework, students in the class are connected in terms of struggling to see the ways in which they are privileged. This is still a difficult issue for students to engage, and requires a lot of emotional labor, but they see themselves as united in that struggle. There are still arguments and moments of tension, but they do not take place along color lines. It is not a case of white students trying to understand their privilege, and students of color having to teach them, and make themselves vulnerable at the same time.

In addition, this framework provides an avenue for students of color to come to understand their experiences of race more deeply. A few recent experiences demonstrate this. In a recent race and ethnicity class, an African-American student who declared on the first day that she never experienced racism and did not see race as a problem anymore, within a few weeks began to see her own experiences as shaped by her family's class privilege. Over the semester, she came to examine race sociologically, understanding systematic and institutional racism, and her own position in relation to those structures. As a class we were able to focus on structural racism and the ways in which it operates in interaction with other systems of inequality so that individuals experience racial inequality differently. In this same course, a number of working class, white, male students followed a similar trajectory, moving from a position of denying racial inequality and blind to their own white privilege, to a position where they were beginning to understand the ways in which their lives had been shaped by class inequality, while at the same time recognize that they were nevertheless beneficiaries of white privilege. By minimizing the defensiveness that so often occurs, they were more open to learning about systemic racism.

In another recent course, the feedback I received from a Latina student is representative of a number of students' experiences. She explained that it was the first course she had taken on race where she did not leave feeling angry each week. She recounted stories similar to those shared by Blackwell, where she felt she was always compelled to focus on educating white students. Instead, she felt her knowledge and understanding of Latina identity, culture, experience, and inequality deepened and became more complex. Working from an intersectional, privilege based approach, it was the first time she began to examine her own heterosexual privilege, and the way in which it manifests itself in her anti-racist activism. She began to examine issues of sexual orientation within Latina community organizations, and questions of who was being included or excluded. Bringing sexual orientation into the picture did not detract from the focus on race, but instead afforded an opportunity to examine diversity within the Latina community, and to understand more clearly how Latina experiences of racial oppression vary, as well as to develop more successful strategies for bringing local Latinas together across their differences to work for social change.