

RACE AND BIBLICAL STUDIES

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RACE AND BIBLICAL STUDIES

Antiracism Pedagogy for the Classroom

Edited by

Tat-siong Benny Liew and Shelly Matthews

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Abbreviations

| | |
|---------|---|
| AB | Anchor Bible |
| AMAEJ | <i>Association of Mexican American Educators Journal</i> |
| AmPsych | <i>American Psychologist</i> |
| AT | <i>Anthropological Theory</i> |
| AThR | <i>Anglical Theological Review</i> |
| BASOR | <i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i> |
| BCT | <i>The Bible and Critical Theory</i> |
| BibInt | <i>Biblical Interpretation</i> |
| B.J. | Josephus, <i>Bellum judaicum</i> |
| BTB | <i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i> |
| C. Ap. | Josephus, <i>Contra Apionem</i> |
| C&P | <i>Culture & Psychology</i> |
| CBQ | <i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i> |
| CC | <i>Christianity and Crisis</i> |
| CEB | Common English Bible |
| ChrCent | <i>The Christian Century</i> |
| CLJ | <i>Community Literacy Journal</i> |
| CLR | <i>California Law Review</i> |
| CS | <i>Cultural Studies</i> |
| CTTA | <i>Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses</i> |
| CurTM | <i>Currents in Theology and Mission</i> |
| DSCPE | <i>Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education</i> |
| EAL | <i>Early American Literature</i> |
| EAQ | <i>Educational Administration Quarterly</i> |
| ERS | <i>Ethnic and Racial Studies</i> |
| EvRev | <i>Evergreen Review</i> |
| ExAud | <i>Ex Auditu</i> |
| FemT | <i>Feminist Theory</i> |
| FSJ | <i>The Foreign Service Journal</i> |
| GFACF | <i>Global Forum on Arts and Christian Faith</i> |

| | |
|--------|---|
| HER | <i>Harvard Educational Review</i> |
| HLR | <i>Harvard Law Review</i> |
| HM | <i>Harvard Magazine</i> |
| HS | <i>Hebrew Studies</i> |
| HTR | <i>Harvard Theological Review</i> |
| Human | <i>The Human: Interdisciplinary Journal of Literature and Culture</i> |
| HWLJ | <i>Harvard Women's Law Journal</i> |
| ICC | International Critical Commentary |
| IJQSE | <i>International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education</i> |
| ILR | <i>Iowa Law Review</i> |
| IOT | Issues of Our Time |
| JAfRel | <i>Journal of Africana Religions</i> |
| JBL | <i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i> |
| JFSR | <i>Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion</i> |
| JHE | <i>Journal of Higher Education</i> |
| JITC | <i>Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center</i> |
| JLE | <i>Journal of Latinos and Education</i> |
| JNE | <i>Journal of Negro Education</i> |
| JRT | <i>Journal of Religious Thought</i> |
| JSJ | <i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods</i> |
| JSNT | <i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i> |
| JTS | <i>Journal of Theological Studies</i> |
| LXX | Septuagint |
| MLR | <i>Michigan Law Review</i> |
| MRW | <i>The Missionary Review of the World</i> |
| Neot | <i>Neotestamentica</i> |
| NIB | Keck, Leander E., ed. <i>The New Interpreter's Bible</i> . 12 vols. Nashville: Abingdon, 1994–2004. |
| NIV | New International Version |
| NKJV | New King James Version |
| NovT | <i>Novum Testamentum</i> |
| NRSV | New Revised Standard Version |
| NTL | New Testament Library |
| Numen | <i>Numen: International Review for the History of Religions</i> |
| PC | <i>Palgrave Communications</i> |
| PCS | <i>Pedagogy, Culture & Society</i> |
| PF | <i>Peace and Freedom</i> |

| | |
|-----------|---|
| PM | <i>Practical Matters: A Journal of Religious Practices and Practical Theology</i> |
| Pss. Sol. | Psalms of Solomon |
| PT | <i>Poetics Today</i> |
| QT | <i>Qualitative Theory</i> |
| RelComp | <i>Religion Compass</i> |
| RelEd | <i>Religious Education</i> |
| RSV | Revised Standard Version |
| SA | <i>Small Acts</i> |
| SAm | <i>Scientific American</i> |
| SBLGNT | The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition |
| SCJ | <i>Sixteenth Century Journal</i> |
| SEÅ | <i>Svensk exegetisk årsbok</i> |
| SID | <i>Studies in Interreligious Dialogue</i> |
| SP | <i>Sociological Perspectives</i> |
| SPE | <i>Studies in Philosophy and Education</i> |
| SRev | <i>Southern Review</i> |
| TCR | <i>Teachers College Record</i> |
| TIP | <i>Theory into Practice</i> |
| TTR | <i>Teaching Theology and Religion</i> |
| UCLF | <i>University of Chicago Legal Forum</i> |
| UE | <i>Urban Education</i> |
| USQR | <i>Union Seminary Quarterly Review</i> |
| WCJT | <i>The Wabash Center Journal on Teaching</i> |
| WisC | Wisdom Commentary |
| WMJWL | <i>William and Mary Journal of Women and Law</i> |
| WSIF | <i>Women's Studies International Forum</i> |
| YLJ | <i>Yale Law Journal</i> |

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Introduction: Racism, Classroom Teaching, and Beyond

Tat-siong Benny Liew and Shelly Matthews

There is a poignant episode within Jhumpa Lahiri's (2003, 56–60) novel *The Namesake*. Following the Bengali tradition of giving each person two names (a “pet name” used by family and close friends during one’s childhood and a “good name” to be used by people in the outside world), a couple of South Asian immigrants to the United States think that it is time for their US-born son to go by his formal name, Nikhil, instead of his pet name, Gogol, when he enters kindergarten. Despite their attempt to explain this practice to Mrs. Lapidus, the school’s principal, they fail to convince her. Rather than seeking to understand what she does not know, the principal, whose last name in Latin means “stone,” decides that it is right for her to keep using Gogol as the boy’s name in school.

We begin with this episode because it captures in many ways the concerns of this volume. The admission of a racial and cultural Other into a school does not necessarily preclude an expectation or even imposition of unilateral adaptation. In fact, if politics is defined by who is given the time and space to see and to speak, then racial politics is undoubtedly present in a school and inside its classrooms (Rancière 2013, 8). Whiteness sees “no need for ... a moment of quietude that encourages listening” (Yancy 2004, 12). In this episode, “the school stands as a metaphor for a mode of power that begins to declare that it knows how to place and recognize” different races and cultures (Ferguson 2012, 166–67). Finally, this story about a minor is fitting for our purposes because minoritization often involves a form of infantilization, through which adult students of color are belittled as dependents who lack the maturity to see independently or the capacity to speak sensibly (Lloyd 1990, 382; Bailey, Liew, and Segovia 2009, 6–8). Without awareness, sensitivity, and intentionality, teachers of biblical studies, especially those of the dominant culture, can easily stifle and stultify students of color in their schools and classrooms.

All teachers of biblical studies must remember (1) that the presence of diversity does not mean the absence of racism and (2) that we do not just teach materials but that we teach them to students (Liew 2016). Since the civil rights movements and the immigration laws of the 1960s, most of our classrooms have become diverse. For various reasons, including economic ones, schools have also accepted more international students. To teach students well, we must see them and listen to them, especially when they come from racial and cultural backgrounds that are different from our own. This statement does not deny the challenges that teachers of color often experience with white students “who are not accustomed to their leadership or embodied otherness in the classroom”; it only emphasizes the role and responsibility that we have as teachers to teach and teach well (Byron 2012, 108).

Education and Racial Management

We must remember that racism “is not only a personal ideology based on racial prejudice, but a *system* involving cultural messages and institutional policies and practices as well as the beliefs and actions of individuals” (Tatum 1997, 7). Education can, therefore, facilitate a form of domination “when the other forms..., the most spectacular and coded ones, beat a retreat” (Derrida 2002, 104). As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (1986, 9) writes about the colonialization of Africa, “The night of the sword and the bullet was followed by the morning of the chalk and the blackboard.” Those of us who live in the United States can also think of the boarding schools for Native American children in the late nineteenth century. These schools were not only “created by the military and operated under military authority,” but also designed to “destroy children’s Indianness” (Briggs 2020, 47–48). Craig Steven Wilder’s (2013) study has shown “the troubled history” of higher education in the United States, involving not only indigenous erasure but also slavery. Although Jacques Derrida (2002, 2004; see also Haddad 2020) is focused on philosophical education, his point about the induction of students into a discipline as a colonial process is applicable to the teaching and learning of biblical studies. This is so because education takes place in many contexts within institutions that are not only “predominantly white” in demographics but also “dominantly white” in terms of history and culture (Pittman and Boyles 2019, 316).

In addition, schools are often supported by and subordinated to other powerful institutions, such as the state or civil society (Ferguson 2012,

9–11), so the teaching and learning of disciplines requires attention to all these institutions and their larger sociopolitical contexts (Derrida 2002, 23). English as a discipline “historically was used to rule, manage, and control the Indian Empire” in Asia (Sharpe 1993, 21; see also Viswanathan 1989). Another more recent but no less glaring example is the invention of area studies as a discipline in the university system by the US government in the 1940s and 1950s. Using research by area studies scholars, including the production and perpetuation of orientalist knowledge about the non-Western world and non-Western peoples, our state was able not only to intervene in but also to advance and benefit from the structuring of global power (Szanton 2004). The same is true of American studies, which was also “founded with government funding with the expectation that [the discipline] would, through an affirmative elaboration of the ‘American character,’ help advance the cultural Cold War” (Duclos-Orsello, Entin, and Hill 2021, 2).

Schools, as a part of the ideological state apparatuses (Althusser 1971, 127–86), have the power to “control meaning ... preserve and distribute what is perceived to be legitimate knowledge ... [and] confer cultural legitimacy on the knowledge of specific groups” (London 2002, 98). Through their repeated exposure to the so-called classics of the Western canon in schools, students are encouraged to forget their particularities by identifying with what they read and learn to become not only guardians of the Western tradition but also “good citizens” of a nation (Eng 1998). The very establishment of a canon is an act of evaluation through which some cultural products are elevated while others are relegated or rejected (Lloyd 1990, 380). On the one hand, we see this in Thomas Babington Macaulay’s insistence in the 1830s that “the British Indian Government ... should direct its attentions solely to promoting western knowledge” through the medium of English rather than “patronize ‘Oriental’ knowledges” (Seth 2007, 1). On the other hand, we also see the seduction that such a colonizing education offers in Derrida’s (1998, 32–41) own experience, when he talks about a hyperbolic desire that he “also contracted at school” as an Algerian Jew, partly because the learning of other languages (such as Arabic, Berber, or Hebrew) was either not available or not encouraged: “As if I were its last heir, the last defender and illustrator of the French language ... speak in good French, in pure French ... ‘more French than the French,’ more ‘purely French’ than was demanded by the purity of purists” (47–49). These words of Derrida may resonate with some of our contribu-

tors and readers of color. Our desire might not be French, but we knew what it meant to be interpellated through what we read and studied into whiteness, which “circulates as an axis of power and identity around the world” (Rasmussen et al. 2001, 3).

What We Teach

Derrida’s monolingualism speaks to the importance of curricular requirements and content materials, but it also speaks particularly to our role as teachers of biblical studies. One of the reasons Derrida (1998, 54) did not learn Hebrew growing up had to do with a “Christian contamination”: “The churches were being mimicked, the rabbi would wear a black cassock, and the verger [chemasch] a Napoleonic cocked hat; the ‘bar mitzvah’ was called ‘communion,’ and circumcision was named ‘baptism.’” One should not forget that the educational endeavors in Africa, the Americas, and Asia coming out of the North Atlantic were all attempts to simultaneously “civilize” and “Christianize.”

Practices of racism and the invention of whiteness have long been linked with religion, particularly Christianity and the Bible (Heschel 1998, 2008; Goldberg 2003; Johnson 2004; Kidd 2006; Carter 2008; Jennings 2010). As Denise Kimber Buell and Caroline Johnson Hodge (2004, 251) argue, “the familiar idea that Christian identity renders ethnoracial differences irrelevant provides a problematic loophole for white scholars to deny or overlook the saliency of race.” The ironic way this dismissal of racial difference ends up reinforcing whiteness can be seen in the pervasive image of a white Jesus (Blum and Harvey 2012) or in the persistent erasure of North Africa and West Asia from the geography of the so-called biblical world (Sadler 2007). Wongi Park (2021, 454) argues cogently that “whiteness as identity and method is fundamentally connected to an underlying Eurocentrism in the framework and sources of biblical scholarship.” It is hard to deny the “racecraft” of biblical studies as a discipline: “a kind of fingerprint evidence that *racism* has been on the scene” (Fields and Fields 2012, 19, emphasis original).

Educators—with what they call explicit, implicit, and null curricula—have helped us realize that alongside what we deliberately teach, there are also important lessons we teach unintentionally or teach by what we leave out, so we can be reinforcing whiteness as the norm in many ways, wittingly or unwittingly (Kim-Cragg 2019). For example, since disciplinary power, as Michel Foucault (1995, 177, 202) explains, is “disindividualize[d]” and

“everywhere,” it is distributed over multiple sites, so whiteness as a norm is also present in the publishing industry just as it is present in the state and in schools. This explains why most introductory textbooks—with a few notable exceptions (e.g., Smith and Kim 2018)—are written by whites. If one adopts one of these as a main textbook and tries to supplement it with articles by biblical scholars of color, students quickly get the implicit signal, intended or not, of where the real authority lies. Once again, having a diverse representation can still end up reinforcing and regularizing the status quo of our discipline as dominantly white. The reinforcement of whiteness here is “something *educational*, something which happens to you ‘at school,’ but hardly a measure or decision, rather a pedagogical mechanism” (Derrida 1998, 37). Speaking from her own experience, Gay Byron (2012) points out that neither biblical scholars’ academic research about race and the Bible nor their own experience of marginalization as racial/ethnic minorities necessarily changes their pedagogical practice, partly because such integration requires reflection and intention. As teachers of biblical studies, most of us know and teach the process of canonization as one of politics and power. Why, then, can we not engage our students in understanding also the politics of course-material selection as well?

Pedagogical practices cannot be antiracist if they do not involve any kind of epistemological challenges that make room for other kinds of being and knowing (Ferguson 2012, 42, 51–52). Otherwise, pedagogical innovations, even or especially those that attend to racial difference, are only legerdemain that function to “blunt,” “absorb,” “contain,” and “incorporate” any impetus for change (Omi and Winant 2015, 186). While the Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels is worried about putting “new wine” into “old wineskins” (Matt 9:16–17, Mark 2:21–22, Luke 5:36–38), we as teachers of biblical studies may need to pay more attention to the problem of packaging old wine in new wineskins. After all, that is what missionaries from the geopolitical West excel at when they talk about inculturating their specific version of the gospel in different cultures. We need vigilance so pedagogy will not become an alibi for not disrupting, not to mention rupturing, the dominantly white practices of biblical studies. We are particularly alarmed by a sobering question raised recently by our colleagues in American studies: “What if [our discipline] is defined not so much in the pages of the most cutting-edge publications, but through what happens in our classrooms?” (Duclos-Orsello, Entin, and Hill 2021, 6).

If education is not only about knowledge dissemination but also about knowledge production, then our classrooms must be spaces that enable

the production of new knowledge without reproducing a white subject of the geopolitical West. For example, the Bible as canon fits with what Roland Barthes (1974, 4) calls “classic” or “readerly texts,” which mean they “can be read, but not written.” In other words, *classic* and *canonical* imply that these texts are exempted or “protected” from critique and change (Ferguson 2012, 39). If we are to produce knowledge, we will need to somehow help our students, of any race or ethnicity, to turn the Bible into what Barthes (1974, 4–5) calls “writerly texts”: namely, texts that are not for our consumption but for our production of new writings, new texts, and new knowledge.

If our teaching of biblical studies for racial equity implies the opening up of new horizons, then it should not be merely about introducing readings from various minoritized perspectives, which can easily be consumed by students (including students of color) in essentialist ways. Without denying the importance of changing our habit of citation (Eng 1998; Liew 2008, 7–9), we need to do much more than to diversify whom we consider to be important or influential biblical scholars by adding scholars of color to a reading list for students or lifting up certain scholars of color as exemplary or even exceptional. We need to teach that racial difference is “infinitely plural,” so we and our students must be willing to engage “the naming, un-naming, and renaming” of difference (Ferguson 2012, 176, 179). We also need to continue to undertake the genealogical work necessary to understand and teach how our discipline developed (e.g., Long 1997; Moore and Sherwood 2011), especially how race has factored in both its framework and practice (e.g., Kelley 2002; Park 2021, 435–56).

How We Grade

Given Foucault’s interest in interrogating the process of subject formation, it is not surprising that his exposition of disciplinary power carries another important implication for our work as teachers of biblical studies: our role as graders, grade givers, and assessors. According to Foucault (1995, 190), disciplinary power works “to classify, ... to determine averages, to fix norms.” With what he calls “scales around a norm,” Foucault shows how disciplinary power can “hierarchize individuals in relation to one another and, if necessary, disqualify and invalidate” (223). Looking back at the civil rights movement (particularly the demand of black and Puerto Rican students for reforms in admission policies and curricular designs) and three texts from the 1960s (John Gardner’s [1961] *Excellence*; Clark

Kerr's [1963] *The Use of the University*; and June Jordan's "Black Studies: Bringing Back the Person"), Roderick Ferguson (2012, 76–102) shows how discourses of standards and excellence were developed and used by many in the academy for managing and limiting the presence of people of color, who are always already pathologized as lacking the capacity for educational advancements, in a long-standing and ongoing racist and colonial project. Framing education as a competitive and an individualist endeavor in the shape of a pyramid, an emphasis on excellence becomes "a technology of power" that "ingratiate[s] minorities by making ability not only a standard of incorporation but a mode of surveillance, exclusion, and measurement" (83, 86).

In addition to (1) whom we teach and (2) what we teach or do not teach, we need to consider how our evaluation or assessment of students can become an antiracist project rather than a racist project. Ferguson helps us think about not only the implications and consequences of extolling excellence but also the connection between our assessment practices and certain types of cultural ethos such as individualism or competition. In other words, what we need may not be simply more fair evaluation standards that can minimize the impact of teachers' racial bias, but something more transformative that changes the underlying cultural ethos of assessment—even or especially when traditional evaluation practices feel rational, natural, or normal.

Willie James Jennings's diagnosis of theological education is in many ways applicable to education in general. According to Jennings (2020, 31), the education project is a racist project driven by "the vision of the [white] self-sufficient man," who masters his discipline and controls everyone and everything around him. Comparing this vision to a plantation with a powerful owner surrounded by free women, children, and slaves, Jennings explains that education cultivates behaviors and relationships that are combative or perhaps even cutthroat in the name of academic standards or rigor, with participants trying to stay in the game by "outperforming" each other (77–104). As a result, we are "caught between an isolating individualism and ... a soul-killing performativity aimed at the exhibition of mastery, possession, and control" (18). Through the shame and humiliation of grades and evaluation being handed out by teachers, many (especially people of color because of the racialized evaluation standards) get the signal that they do not belong. Instead, Jennings wonders whether we can envision an education project that emphasizes community and belonging to replace "a pedagogical imagination calibrated to

forming white self-sufficient men” and commanded by an “exclusionary logic” (65, 66).

While Jennings does not give specifics on how we may concretize his vision of “an education in belonging” (see Jennings’s subtitle) when we evaluate student performance, others have attempted to address the dominantly white practices of grading. Arguing that traditional, so-called quality-based grading practices not only produce “political, cultural, linguistic, and economic dominance for White people” but also “seek to exclude ... by their nature and function ... regardless of how we justify them or who uses them,” Asao Inoue (2019, 8, 11) proposes an alternative: a labor-based grading model that promotes inclusive and equitable habits among teachers and students by evaluating students on the basis of how much labor they put in and whether their labor helps their classmates learn as well. Although Inoue’s Marxist-informed proposal is focused on English writing courses in college (25, 28), many of our assignments for biblical studies involve writing, and there is no denying that a “white racial *habitus*” and a “white language supremacy” are both inherent in our current educational institutions and systems. At the same time, questions have been raised about whether evaluation by students’ “*willingness to labor*” (247) may disadvantage students with disabilities or from underprivileged backgrounds who simply cannot afford to labor as much as others (Carillo 2021), especially given Inoue’s (2019, 127) own acknowledgment that “we can only labor at the paces we can.” This takes us back, of course, to attend to whom we teach: that is, the actual students who are present in our classroom, who may engage course materials and create knowledge in different way (Carillo 2021, 56–57).

We do not mention Inoue’s and Carillo’s work to endorse either but to show that we as teachers of biblical studies must also think about how our grading and evaluation practices can not only work for or against specific bodies but also may support or subvert certain types of racial ethos and cultural values. Expressions of quality and excellence may have a racist underside that we cannot ignore if we are serious about antiracist practices as teachers.

Contexts, Contours, and Contents

Contributors to this collection first presented their pedagogical concerns and practices in the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature program unit Racism, Pedagogy, and Biblical Studies. They are diverse

in race/ethnicity and gender; they also come from various institutional contexts and represent different stages in terms of teaching career. We are grateful for their enthusiastic responses when we reached out to them about putting their presentations into an anthology. Though varied in length and in focus, all their presentations, now revised in the form of essays, seek to interrogate racist assumptions and practices of teaching biblical studies.

We have organized these essays into three sections. The first section, “Naming Contexts,” includes six essays, beginning with one by Randall C. Bailey, who prefaces his best practices for teaching against white supremacy with a fascinating tour of some of the key ways by which scholars have, wittingly or not, infused biblical studies with race and racism. He clearly delineates a concerted effort, across cartographic, artistic, and linguistic dimensions, to “de-Africanize and de-Asianize the characters and lands of the text” in service of white people’s self-identification with the texts. With examples from both the Hebrew Bible and New Testament, Bailey reveals Europeanizing traditional interpretive moves, from racialization of the peoples of the biblical world to the creation of a Western trajectory with designations such as “ancient Near East” to the “translation gymnastics” employed to reverse the biblical binary wherein whiteness represents cursedness. Bailey therefore provides the reasoning, if not the urgency, behind the need for antiracist pedagogy before offering practical guidance.

After making the case for employing “anachronistic whiteness” as a lens to study the ancient Christian past, Denise Kimber Buell draws on Sara Ahmed’s phenomenological approach to whiteness to situate the field and predominant approaches to biblical studies in relation to whiteness. She then offers examples of how critical attention to whiteness and its institutional and norming effects might enable us to encounter ancient notions of embodiment and early Christian practices, as well as ancient and modern debates about authority, including notions of canonicity and orthodoxy. Ending with a pedagogical example that juxtaposes Frank Yamada’s reading of Gen 2–3 through the experience of Japanese Americans in the United States during World War II with readings of Gen 2–3 preserved in texts from Nag Hammadi, she raises questions of social context and scriptural authority. The task of reorienting away from whiteness, Buell concludes, is a call to, in James Baldwin’s words, “do our first works over.”

Julián Andrés González Holguín’s essay considers the deployment of *diversity* in the academic space today. According to him, emphasis on

diversity tends to treat the category of Other as monolithic, to thereby dehumanize the Other, and to blind even well-intentioned interpreters to ongoing enmeshment in oppressive global capitalism. Instead of offering a panacea-like use of diversity, Holguín builds on Michael Fishbane's notion of poesis to undergird the development of "a pedagogy of coexistence and compassion." This approach requires "the textualization of existence," with readers employing the ideals of Scripture into their lives in real, embodied ways. Such a way of reading and living, Holguín argues, is a critical endeavor, one that is necessary "to prevent the overformation of the text and its naive application." It will center the suffering in both texts and life, encourage continuing experimentation and midrash, disrupt prevailing narratives of scriptural formation and anamnesis, and challenge the dominance of neutrality in biblical studies. He concludes with a strong caution to scholars to beware of antiracist practices that may nevertheless reinscribe racist ideologies by their participation in a world permeated with racism.

Noting that nationalism and religious identities are useful lenses for exposing "religious supremacist thinking," Sharon Jacob tells a tale of the parallel ascendancy of racist and religious nationalism in both India and the United States. As in India, where *hindutva* serves as a political ideology seeking to make India a Hindu state at the expense of racial and religious minorities, so a Christocentric form of white religious nationalism in the United States marginalizes those outside the dominant race and religion. Jacob then turns this lens onto the book of Revelation, noting how this apocalyptic text often gestures toward a similar sort of nationalism, where John of Patmos envisions "a multilingual people transformed into a monolingual empire." In closing, she advocates for the importance of attending to religious nationalism in the biblical studies classroom—one that offers to students the opportunity to reflect critically on the politics of citizenship and belonging, and particularly on the role of language and linguistic racism, in the construction of empire.

Heeding the challenging statement of Vincent Wimbush in his 2010 presidential address to the Society of Biblical Literature that critical interpretation requires coming to terms with "the first contact—between the West and the rest, the West and the Others," Jean-Pierre Ruiz recounts the history of the colonization of Puerto Rico. Ruiz's essay offers up an investigation of the thoroughgoing racism that has colored the policies and attitudes of the United States toward Puerto Rico and its inhabitants from its takeover in 1898 until the present day. Engaging in an exegesis of that

racism by focusing first on several images that date to the beginnings of the US colonization—images that vividly illustrate the depth and pervasiveness of racism and the policies and practices it fuels—Ruiz notes the most recent devastation of the island, by Hurricane Maria in 2017, and shows how the post-Maria appearance of a US president provides “a vivid example of the colonial condescension that continues to be typical of how the United States treats Puerto Rico.” For Ruiz, these “deliberately racist policies and practices of colonial oppression” are supported by scriptural underpinnings.

In the final essay of this section on contexts, Abraham Smith argues that changes in the biblical studies classroom require awareness of the complexity of structural racism, and thus his essay begins by reviewing the history of the development of critical race theory and introducing important tools and concepts belonging to critical race theory. Understanding race as a construct, these tools and concepts include the construct of whiteness, racism as structural rather than individual, and differential racism as the means by which a number of racial groups are scripted against one another in the service of an exploitable workforce. Smith then moves to a number of suggestions for reorienting biblical studies “away from whiteness,” calling for shifts at the institutional, disciplinary, and classroom level. He ends with a call for curricular transformation highlighting minoritized approaches, a critique of colonizing cartographies, and “deploying ‘pedagogies from home’ that interrogate the notion that knowledge emanates from a dominant culture.”

The second section, “Empowering Students,” has four entries. Questions of race, racism, and racialization in the biblical texts, in the guild and its methods, in pedagogies, and in the lives of students form the basis of Eric D. Barreto’s reflections. His self-conscious musing that we might have “underestimated the ways biblical scholarship has misshaped public imaginations” serves as a call to biblical educators to take seriously identities, which he notes are shaped in and by colonialism, as “vibrant sites of reading, of imagination, and of the making of a people.” In service of this belief, he offers five realistic and critical best practices for foregrounding Latinx students in biblical studies. Throughout Barreto insists on taking seriously biblical studies’ role in colonization and complicity in the making of colonial subjects, while also pointing out that biblical studies itself is a colonized space. Ultimately, Barreto challenges his readers to see equality as realizable not through erasing differences but by embracing them.

Greg Carey’s contribution is inspired by a faculty workshop at his institution devoted to discussing Claude M. Steele’s book *Whistling Vivaldi*:

How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do, in which Steele attributes struggles of minoritized students to anxiety related to racist stereotypes and offers several principles for reducing that anxiety. These principles from Steele include fostering intergroup conversations, allowing students opportunity for self-affirmation, and assisting in the development of a narrative concerning the learning context that “explains their frustrations while projecting positive engagement and success in the setting.” Carey then provides several specific examples of how he adapts Steele’s principles to his teaching context, including how he manages first-day introductions, shapes writing assignments, and thinks about the grading process. He shares detailed steps of an exercise in film criticism and of how he sparks conversation by employing a collection of images of John the Baptist. Both exercises are designed to elicit the wisdom and expertise of each student through shared conversation.

After charting how the field of biblical studies has been racialized through its historic embrace of the (white) “myth of the West,” Kay Higuera Smith advocates for a decolonized pedagogy that empowers students—especially students of color—to become confident in their capacities as knowledge producers. Here, she turns to the model, often used in Latinx critical theory, of the *testimonio*. Students of color in her class are assigned to write *testimonios* reflecting on their social-cultural geographic experience. Students from the dominant culture, ideally in partnership with students of color, are also asked to write *testimonials* to reflect on their social and institutional location, but they need to do so by centering their partner’s knowledge production. From this highly effective centering or recentering exercise, students move to careful readings of biblical texts. Higuera Smith helpfully lays out this pedagogical process step by step, before closing with additional sample teaching exercises inspired by concerns for social justice and transformation.

Building on his own work teaching biblical studies with an intercultural approach and leading travel seminars to the border wall between the United States and Mexico, Francisco Lozada Jr. presents a threefold method for engaging Latinx students, specifically, in biblical education: critically knowing oneself, knowing one’s history, and knowing the Other. Foregrounding connectivity between the students with this method, Lozada encourages students to learn from their own experiences and those of their classmates in order to create space for cultural and biblical education, empathy, connection. This ethos is then embodied in the assignment to exegete the border wall as a text. Overall, Lozada’s method

strives to give Latinx students permission to challenge dominant (colonial) histories, racial hierarchies, and minoritization, especially of the self. Lozada connects these modern experiences to the biblical world, highlighting similar complexity, flux, and negotiations of identity—a similarity that makes it possible and necessary to take such aspects of modern identity seriously, even and perhaps especially in the biblical studies classroom.

Sonja Anderson's contribution is the first essay of the third and final section of this collection, "Reframing Contexts." Anderson offers a specific pedagogical exercise demonstrating how questions of race, gender, and class might be engaged critically and empathetically in biblical interpretation, noting that such engagement is especially crucial for nonwhite students in majority-white classrooms. Informed by art historian Jennifer Roberts on the importance of patience to the understanding of visual art, Anderson invites her students to patiently study Diego Velázquez's seventeenth-century painting *Kitchen Maid with Supper at Emmaus*. Among the many outcomes of this pedagogical exercise, Anderson notes that "the juxtaposition of image and text shows students how little information is conveyed by the text 'itself' and how much must be supplied by the reader" and how "making images of biblical characters ... involves decisions about race." Providing important exegetical context both for the Lukan Emmaus episode and for Velázquez's location in the slave-trading center of Seville, Anderson makes a passionate argument for reading Scripture with "vivid imagination."

Haley Gabrielle makes the case for dislodging traditional historical criticism as *the* single appropriate method in biblical studies and calls into question the traditional historical-critical approach as the only method for writing biblical history. She first surveys three alternative approaches to history writing that challenge the secular framing of traditional history: Walter Benjamin's "historical materialism," Saidiya Hartman's "critical fabulation," and M. Jacqui Alexander's "queer, decolonial, and transnational/women-of-color feminist approaches." Then Haley engages Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak as her primary interlocutor in reading the story of the enslaved girl in Acts 16:16. After elaborating Spivak's dilemma in writing about subaltern Indian women—wherein the nineteenth-century Hindu widow she studies cannot speak but is rather lodged between the discourses of imperialism and patriarchy—Haley argues that this subaltern figure in Acts is in a similar bind: caught between the discourses of "exclusivist Christianity," on the one hand, and "individualist feminism," on the other.

Wilda C. Gafney's personal situatedness—living and teaching in Fort Worth, Texas, during the initial stages of the Black Lives Matter movement—frames the content of her essay. Even as she began creating an ever-lengthening timeline of the extrajudicial killings of black people in America, Gafney also began crafting a course at the intersection of biblical studies and Black Lives Matter. The goal of the course was for every student to develop and to articulate “a functional Black Lives Matter hermeneutic,” using Black Lives Matter's stated goals and commitments. In this course, Gafney and her students read Black Lives Matter in light of biblical texts and vice versa. With womanist praxis at the heart of the Black Lives Matter hermeneutic, Gafney shows how students wrestled with questions of race and ethnicity in the biblical world, analyzing which lives mattered then and there and which matter here and now, and how biblical texts must be challenged and read against in order to interpret any text through a Black Lives Matter hermeneutic.

Roger S. Nam explains how historical criticism, which still dominates both the guild and the biblical studies introductory curriculum, reifies whiteness and Western dominance in biblical studies. Focusing primarily on introductory biblical studies courses, Nam notes that other approaches are only offered as supplementary and of secondary importance—when presented at all. He concludes that “any inclusive pedagogies must interrogate the nearly exclusive primacy of historical-critical approaches to introductory classes” if we are to deconstruct hegemonic Eurocentric notions. The importance of such deconstruction, Nam argues, is both to avoid anachronistic readings of ancient texts and to prevent reinscription of white- and Western-dominant interpretations. Nam suggests that biblical studies educators employ ethnographic practices to challenge the deeply Western-oriented collective subconscious of the modern reader. By studying non-Western cultures and comparing their meaning-making and cultural practices with those of the ancient contexts, students can “access a wider range of meanings” for crucial biblical concepts such as kinship and land.

After identifying several challenges pertaining to teaching about racism in biblical studies at predominantly white institutions in general, Wongi Park focuses specifically on Matthew's story of the Canaanite woman (15:21–28) to offer up pedagogical strategies for using this pericope as a springboard for discussing race in this context. Park first invites his students to identify racial/ethnic markers that they see in the story and then works to unpack those markers. Typically, these discussions lead to

awareness that Jesus exhibits ethnocentrism at best, and racism at worst, in this encounter. Park then situates this passage within the larger Matthean narrative, noting the tension between particularism and universalism in this gospel. The juxtaposition of the unflattering story of the Canaanite woman with the larger ethnocentric currents in Matthew leads Park to argue that “Jesus’s mistreatment of the Canaanite woman is rather unremarkable in the scope of the gospel.” His goal is to challenge the widespread notions among his students that Christianity is a universal religion, devoid of racial and ethnic bias.

Beyond Classroom Pedagogy

Although this volume is about classroom practices, we cannot emphasize enough the connection between our classrooms and larger institutional and societal dynamics. Even the best antiracist pedagogues will not be able to make much of a difference for students of color if they do not have enough financial and research support for their studies. To enter our classrooms, students today must show their passbooks—and also their passports if they are students of color. Unless and until the racist structures of our schools and of our society are transformed, changing our classroom pedagogy will not be enough. We are not saying this to discourage or belittle pedagogical reflection and renewal but to encourage and emphasize the need for all of us to set our sights wide. For example, can we push for institutional audits so we will know how our schools are doing in attracting and enrolling students of color? What about in recruiting and maintaining faculty and staff of color? Are numbers of students and faculty of color increasing, declining, or flatlining?

Talking about faculty of color, it is important for a school to have white faculty who teach in antiracist ways, but it is also imperative that a school hire faculty of color. According to Stefano Harney and Fred Moten (2013, 40), institutions of higher education are arguably the best exemplars of neoliberal asociality. Writing in the late 1960s with debates raging over university admission policies and the place of black studies, June Jordan (1969, 71) emphasizes the importance of community for black students and states, “We request Black teachers of Black studies. It is not that we believe only Black people can understand the Black experience. It is, rather, that we acknowledge the difference between reality and criticism as the difference between the Host and the Parasite.” Jordan is suggesting here that students of color need more than good and thoughtful teachers,

more than even teachers who are sympathetic to them and their experience. They need teachers who have walked where they walk, teachers who literally occupy the same position as they do in dominantly white schools, where they are not at home and are often pathologized as free-loading hangers-on.

Jordan's distinction between host and parasite points again to a larger question that goes beyond (1) admitting people of color as faculty and students and (2) adding minoritized materials to the curriculum. Using literary studies as a case study, Jodi Melamed (2011) shows how the issue of race for those in power can become only a means for achieving other purposes rather than the targeted end in itself, so demographic representation can be used to reinforce white culture and dominantly white institutions as the norm. That is also why Ferguson (2012) repeatedly raises the need for people concerned with racial equity in education to attend to racist structures that not only organize knowledge but also distribute power and resources. Without radical changes to the biblical studies guild and our schools as citadels of whiteness, our students of color will remain caught in the contradiction between the rhetoric of racial integration and the reality of racial insulation.

We also need to expand, or even explode, our concept of what it means to do and teach biblical studies. For instance, taking a clue from Lisa Lowe's (2015, 1) *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, which focuses on "the often obscure connections between the emergence of European liberalism, settler colonialism in the Americas, the transatlantic slave trade, and the East Indies and China trades in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century," we can think about teaching biblical studies less in terms of communicating or making textual meanings of a biblical passage or book and more in terms of exploring relations that are not readily visible for students. These relations (whether in complicity with power, or resisting power, or both) can turn on different axes (e.g., temporal, geographical, racial, religious, or disciplinary), but reading and rendering them legible should have a twofold purpose: (1) to question "epistemicide" (Santos 2016), "*epistemological apartheid*" (Harrison 2016, 161, emphasis original), and knowledge formation (e.g., changing assumptions of what constitutes our scholarly repertoire as biblical scholars, particularly knowledge of academic studies of race and ethnicity) and (2) to effect social transformation (e.g., challenging both white supremacy and Christian triumphalism in biblical studies). While we love to talk about the Greco-Roman context as New Testament scholars, for example, we need to better research how Muslim scholars

during the so-called Dark Ages translated and preserved much of what we know of that context, so we can understand that “the West as West, or the West as the world” is a fiction because many kinds of Western “institutionalisations are being produced by something that is being perpetuated outside of the West” (Spivak 1990, 5; see also Appiah 2018, 192–202).

Byron has also been trying to push biblical scholars to question or expand our conception of what constitutes the historical contexts of the biblical writings. With her research on Africa, particularly on Ethiopia, she challenges us to reconsider what count as relevant resources to study these writings (Byron 2009, 2016). Alternatively, one may, as Wimbush (2017) suggests, focus on helping students see various sociocultural phenomena, although they may seem far removed from the Bible, as effects entailing if not born of processes of scripturalization and racialization. In sum, we need to think of antiracist pedagogy in ways that far exceed the redesigning of syllabi, class activities, or course assignments. Aligning our teaching of biblical studies with an explicitly antiracist commitment necessitates a reconceptualization of the discipline of biblical studies because our discipline, being developed in modernity during the formation of the North Atlantic empire, is “an archive of colonial uncertainty” (Lowe 2015, 78) that seeks to disavow the racial and religious violence. This disavowal, which often works by isolating or simplifying a “cacophony” of complex relations (Byrd 2011), demands that we review and renew the discipline itself and not just how we teach the discipline. This must be our ongoing goal, even if it is not immediately legible or achievable in this volume.

Conclusion

The discipline of biblical studies, as a part of humanistic discourses, can be “used as a smokescreen for oppression, to divert attention away from discriminatory practices and identity-based patterns of segregation and exclusion” (Alcoff 2006, 290). At the same time, the recent fury over the 1619 Project and critical race theory indicates that the classroom can be a place that helps bring about personal and social transformation. We as scholars of the Bible should never underestimate the impact of our role as teachers, especially considering that most of our published books in biblical studies are not likely to sell more than a few hundred copies. At a time when white supremacists under the banner of Christian nationalism are once again becoming unabashed about their claim of superiority over and domination of other peoples, it is imperative and urgent that we spend time reflecting

on the assumptions and practices of both our discipline and pedagogy so our guild and our classrooms can understand and repudiate racism and all the intersectional dynamics co-constituted with it. We must also remember that our pedagogical practices take place neither in vacuums nor with bolted doors. There is no impermeable membrane around biblical studies: it receives input and generates output in historically specific and sociopolitically complex ways.

Going back to the episode from Lahiri's *Namesake* with which we began this introductory essay, we as teachers should keep in mind that students who come into our classrooms can also help us learn, unlearn, and relearn if we remain open to listening to them. This reeducation is especially crucial for white teachers. Having said that, teachers of color, even those committed to resist white supremacy, can still stultify their students, including their students of color. A classroom as a teaching and learning community should mean that everyone in it, including the teacher, can potentially learn from other members. Sources and resources for learning and teaching can come from many unexpected places and persons, even those that are not institutionally or professionally legitimated.

Classrooms as communities are temporary, but the racial effects and affects that occur in classrooms can be long term. Teaching, like religion, is generative and worldmaking (Kondo 2018; Chuh 2021, 320, 324–25). The question is what kind of a world we are making for and with our students in and beyond our biblical studies classrooms.

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