

Toward a Pedagogical Praxis that Radicalizes Social Awareness

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Jack A. Hill
Associate Professor of Religion (Social Ethics)
Texas Christian University

Abstract

This paper argues that effectively confronting the values of the marketplace in higher education requires a radicalizing of social awareness. Utilizing qualitative interviews with humanities and theology professors of color who are expressly concerned with teaching for justice, it explores how faculty can address issues of oppression in their teaching. The thesis is that if we are to develop efficacious alternative pedagogies for the 21st century, we will need to be much more intentional about encountering differences—especially differences of race and ethnicity—and the varieties of perspectives that persons who embody these differences bring to the table. This paper describes pedagogical narratives of three colleagues of color who adopt critical approaches to the reality of oppression in the U.S., as well as additional pedagogical practices that represent alternative or revolutionary strategies for challenging traditional ideas about educational experience. It concludes by offering glimpses of new assessment competencies.

Introduction

In recent years, the discourse of “revolutionary or radical pedagogy” and the categories “liberation” and “oppression” have lost currency in the academy. Giroux and McLaren observed that by the ‘70s and ‘80s, educational reform was being geared toward either serving the “imperatives of big business” or exalting a “narrowly defined Western tradition conveyed through a pedagogy unencumbered by the messy concerns of equity, social justice or the need to educate a critical citizenry.”¹ Indeed, when I began teaching at TCU in 2000, I quickly became aware of a disjunction between the school’s stated mission of “educating ethical leaders and responsible citizens for a global community” and what we professors were actually doing; namely, providing largely white, upper middle class consumers with the skills to carve out for themselves a comfort zone at the center of an otherwise fractious and threatening world. I began to wonder, “How can one teach about social justice issues that challenge students’ taken-for-granted worldviews and cultural assumptions in predominately white colleges and universities?” “Is it possible or desirable to preserve “safe” comfortable spaces in classrooms when the majority of students have always felt unsafe?” “And, if such comfort zones are disrupted, how is one to successfully traverse the resulting emotional minefield?”

I theorized that it would be useful to find out how those who are marginalized in society and who also self-identify with underrepresented communities in the academy deal with these questions in their own teaching. My assumption was that many faculty of color—because of real-life experiences of marginalization—were best positioned to provide insight about how

¹ Henry A. Giroux and Peter L. McLaren, eds., *Critical Pedagogy, the State, and Cultural Struggle* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 236.

encounters with difference could be utilized to generate more inclusive, ethically sound, pedagogical strategies. Accordingly, I embarked on a major research project during a study-leave (2006-07)—conducting in-depth, qualitative interviews with over thirty faculty of color in twenty colleges, universities and seminaries in the U.S.²

Drawing on that project, this paper articulates three narratives of pedagogical practice and then expands upon those narratives in search of best practices for radicalizing social awareness. It is aimed at addressing a core question of the SVHE Summer Conference; namely, “How can educators utilize radical, alternative pedagogies that challenge traditional ideas about educational experience and its assessment in predominately white colleges and universities?” Each of the narratives challenges traditional ideas in at least three ways. First, they explicitly expose students to the reality of oppression. “Oppression” is understood as the structural or material complex of social inequities that significantly constrict a person’s life chances and sense of possibilities.³ This is an important first step because much of higher education in the U.S. appears to be designed in such a way that this reality is frequently obscured or simply ignored. Second, the narratives speak of helping students learn about the historicity of oppressive social systems. This often entails enabling students to discern how they *themselves* are historically situated in such systems. And third, the narratives voice concerns for nudging students to see how—in thought and behavior—they unwittingly reinforce systems of privilege

² The project, “Teaching Ethics in the Borderlands: Re-envisioning the Teaching of Social Ethics in US Higher Education,” was funded by a \$70,000 Individual Study Leave Grant from the Wabash Center. Beginning in September 2006, I have conducted interviews with forty-four professors and forty-eight of their students in twenty-three different colleges, universities and seminaries in the US.

³ Or, re-stated in slightly different terms, “oppression” is the unjust exercise of power by one or more groups to put down, demean, or otherwise manipulate or control another group of people. Jamaican Rastafarian poets speak of oppression in terms of how certain social elites “step on others to gain” and “down-press” people.

today. The following exposition will examine each of these narratives in depth, explore additional teaching strategies that radicalize awareness, and conclude by proposing samples of new assessment criteria that are implicit in the pedagogical practices.

There are obvious limitations to this project. All three narratives are drawn from interviews with professors who teach in seminary contexts. And while their teaching strategies can be adapted to college and university settings, such adaptation may require considerable flexibility and improvisation. For this reason, I provide additional strategies that are utilized by professors in colleges and universities, although I do not have space in this paper to provide important biographical information or details on the educational contexts of these practitioners. Because the literature on these strategies is massive and growing by the day, it is virtually impossible to catalogue the many alternatives that could be discussed. Therefore, the aim of this paper is quite modest. In the spirit of Paulo Freire,⁴ it is to provide a few first person snapshots of how master teachers spark intellectual and emotional border crossings. It is also to theorize about those pedagogical moves in ways that invite further reflection on core aspects of creative critical pedagogy. At the very least, by viewing the radicalization of social awareness as a three-fold process of becoming conscious of the reality of oppression, the historicity and systemic nature of oppression, and one's own complicity in systems of oppression today, I hope to provide a rudimentary scaffold for further inquiry in radical pedagogy. But first, a few words about where I am coming from.

⁴ See *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New Revised 20th Anniversary edition, Tr. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 1999).

My interest in radical pedagogy is rooted in a confluence of factors.⁵ Born and raised in the U.S. rural mid-west, yet coming of age in L.A. during the sixties, I have always been a creature of more than one world. My father was a Presbyterian pastor of Scottish descent, who was committed to the theologian Karl Barth's blend of conservative theology and liberal politics. My mother was a scrappy "do-it-yourself" entrepreneur of Irish heritage who at different times sold cosmetics, ran a photographic studio and did social work. With a few exceptions, dad preached in small, poor, white church circuits; and during rough patches, shot photos for mom and went door-to-door hawking Fuller Brush products. While we always had enough to eat and I thought we were fairly middle-class, I learned that I was "lower" or "lower-middle" class at Occidental College, where I matriculated on a full financial package of grants, scholarships, loans and part-time work. I became acutely, and uncomfortably, aware of my whiteness as a Crossroads Africa participant in Nigeria; and was a graduate student at Harvard Divinity School when the feminist movement hit full stride in the early seventies. After a three-year stint co-directing a grassroots venture in religion, social action and the arts in North Carolina, I worked as an interim pastor in rural Jamaica. I went on to write a Ph.D. dissertation on the creative and empowering ethics of Jamaican Rastafarians, and then spent a decade teaching at an ecumenical, multi-cultural seminary in the Fiji Islands and at an historic black university in Durban, South Africa. For the past decade, I've been teaching religious studies and ethics to undergraduates at TCU, an essentially non-sectarian, liberal arts university in an increasingly diverse and cosmopolitan city.

⁵ For another brief autobiographical sketch, see my article, "Fighting the Elephant in the Room: Ethical Reflections on White Privilege and Other Systems of Advantage in the Teaching of Religion," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 12/1 (January 2009): 3-23.

Thus, although I am now in many ways a relatively middle-class, rapidly aging, white, married, heterosexual, male, who is also a registered Democrat, Christian humanist and tenured professor—these social location identifiers do not do full justice to who I am or to what I am yet becoming. That, as the Rasta poet says, is a story that is “too long fi I sing it straight.”⁶ But something of my years as a global nomad—including extensive travels in India, Africa and the South Pacific—has taken root in my psyche, and I often feel as if I tentatively “belong” in an ever changing, menagerie of quite distinct locales and interpersonal relationships. I am convinced that today’s world is fast becoming a complex network of “global neighborhoods;” and that as educators of all colors and backgrounds we have an ethical responsibility to find creative ways to acknowledge, engage and traverse cultural, social class, racial, gender and sexual orientation differences. As the Reverend Samuel Proctor once said many years ago, “We don’t know enough about the ingredients of community yet....We don’t know how much evil we’re putting up with that we don’t have to put up with at all.”⁷

Narratives of Critical Approaches to Oppression

Question the Questions! The Mexican theologian Eliseo Pérez-Álvarez⁸ enables his students to radicalize social awareness in the U. S. Southwest borderlands region by cultivating a capacity for critical appraisal. Indeed, the development of such a capacity is stated

⁶ Mikey Smith, “Sunday A Come,” in *It a Come*, edited by Mervyn Morris (San Francisco: City Lights, 1986), II, 6.

⁷ Quoted from an address delivered on *Facing Evil*, videotape (Princeton, NJ: Films for the Humanities & Sciences, 1994).

⁸Pérez-Álvarez is Associate Professor of Latino Theology and Mission and Director of Theological Education for Emerging Ministries for the Lutheran Seminary Program of the Southwest in Austin, TX.

as the first objective in the syllabus for his course, “Borderlands Christian Thought.”⁹ This capacity is nurtured by prompting students to ask questions in a variety of ways throughout the course.

For example, on the first day of class, students take a “Diagnostic Exercise” in which they respond to Pérez-Álvarez’s questions about their expectations for the seminar; how they understand the word “borderlands” and how they have experienced the borderlands; if they are familiar with the “Frontier Thesis,”¹⁰ and about whether or not “alterity”¹¹ is symmetrical or asymmetrical in three Biblical passages. Then, students are encouraged to raise questions about the course syllabus, which is then negotiated. Finally, pairs of students are assigned to co-facilitate each weekly seminar during the semester. Prior to the week of facilitation, the co-facilitators are asked to develop sets of open-ended questions about readings and other assignments in the form of “pop quizzes” that are distributed to the class in advance. Then when the class meets, the pop quiz is used to frame class discussion.

Furthermore, a student is assigned to take minutes of what transpires and then distribute those minutes to class members prior to the next class. At the beginning of that class, students have an opportunity to raise questions about the wording of the minutes, and thus to

⁹Eliseo Pérez-Álvarez and Javier Alanis, “Borderlands Christian Thought,” course syllabus, Lutheran Seminary Program in the Southwest, Fall, 2006, in possession of author. Javier Alanis, who co-teaches this course with Eliseo, is a liberationist theologian and missiologist, who is Associate Professor of Theology, Culture and Mission at the Lutheran Seminary Program in the Southwest.

¹⁰The “Frontier Thesis” is the contention that the vast majority of the U.S. was essentially an empty frontier that God had somehow foreordained to be settled by Anglo Europeans and their descendents.

¹¹“Alterity” refers not only to the reality which “the other” introduces into our life-world experience, but also to a moral commitment to engage that other as an end and not as a means. I appropriate this term from the work of the Jewish Lithuanian philosopher, Emmanuel Levinas. See his *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trs. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969).

pose questions about how others have responded to the core questions raised in the previous classes. According to Pérez-Álvarez, this exercise enables them to see how different members in the class may have very different recollections of what was said, and thereby become more aware of differing vantage points in the class. Pérez-Álvarez also deepens and guides this whole process of questioning by challenging students to examine conventional ideological assumptions that students may be presupposing in the ways they frame their questions. For instance, at one point in the class I observed, in response to a student's comment that a question was not very helpful, Pérez-Álvarez remarked, "But I told you to question the questions!"

Thus, in the first instance, Pérez-Álvarez enables students to become more aware of dynamics of oppression by entering into a multifaceted process of raising certain types of questions. These questions are focused on eliciting perspectives of others who are marginalized. For example, the first "text" presented in the course is an eight stanza excerpt from Gloria Anzaldúa's seminal work, *Borderlands/Frontera: The New Mestiza*,¹² which is attached as a cover sheet to the course syllabus. The stanzas depict lived experience in the borderlands. After beginning with references to the interculturality of living "while carrying all five races on your back" and being "forerunner to a new race," Anzaldúa stresses the theme of violence.¹³ "To live in the Borderlands means you fight hard to resist...the rope crushing the

¹²(San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987).

¹³ *Borderlands/Frontera*, 216.

hollow of your throat.”¹⁴ The Borderlands are where “you are the battlefield...wounded, lost in action, dead, fighting back.”¹⁵

In addition to this excerpt from Anzaldúa, students read three writings from the Latina feminist theologian and historian Daisy Machado.¹⁶ In “The Historical Imagination,” Machado begins by quoting Anzaldúa’s description of the “longest international border in the world”:

The U. S.-Mexico border *es una herida abierta* [an open wound] where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab can form it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country – a border culture...Gringos in the U. S. Southwest consider the inhabitants of the borderlands trespassers...Do not enter, trespassers will be raped, maimed, strangled, gassed and shot...Tension grips the inhabitants of the borderlands like a virus...and death is no stranger.¹⁷

In these ways, by utilizing Machado’s and Anzaldúa’s writings, Pérez-Álvarez immediately focuses attention on an experience of the reality of oppression in the U. S. Southwest borderlands. Then, as students read all the essays from Machado, they confront the question of how one accounts for this violent legacy. Machado argues that, “it is the product of a history that has been shaped by capitalist economics, racial ideologies, political interests and military force that were fueled by a very particular spirit, the spirit of Manifest Destiny.”¹⁸ Quoting the

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ The writings are “The Unnamed Woman: Justice, Feminists, and the Undocumented Woman,” in María Pilar Aquino, Daisy L. Machado and Jeanette Rodríguez, eds., *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology: Religion and Justice* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 161-76; “The Historical Imagination and Latina/o Rights,” Lecture presented at Plenary III, “Latino/a and Native American Land Rights,” the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Lectures in Public Ethics, Union Theological Seminary, 11 October 2002; and “Women and Religion in the Borderlands,” *Union Theological Quarterly Review*, 57/3-4 (2003): 146-158.

¹⁷ *Borderlands/Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 3-4. Quoted in Daisy Machado, “The Historical Imagination,” 155.

¹⁸ “Historical Imagination,” 156.

historian Albert Weinberg, Machado depicts Manifest Destiny as “the doctrine that one nation has a preeminent social worth, a distinctively lofty mission and consequently unique rights in the application of moral principles.”¹⁹

Machado then relates Manifest Destiny to a “national self-image” that was already developing among the early seventeenth-century Puritans. It includes a spirit of U. S. exceptionalism, which was used by U.S. Presidents to justify war against Mexico and the seizure of Mexican territory north of the Río Grande. Machado connects this national self-image to the idea that “Americans” have “civilized” the “wild frontier.”²⁰ In another assigned essay, she elaborates on how this national self-image provides U.S. citizens with a way of re-imagining history itself, including racist understandings of Mexicans as “mongrels” and the subordination of women in the Cult of True Womanhood.²¹ She also relates how this national self-image, utilized in Euro-American, mainline discourse in theology, leads to a fearful, exclusivist mentality. Following Isasi-Díaz, Machado notes a tendency, by those who occupy privileged social locations, to define difference as absolute otherness and categorical opposite, “Where one group serves as the measure against which all the others are to be measured.”²²

¹⁹ *Manifest Destiny: A Study of Nationalistic Expansion in American History* (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1958, 8). Quoted in “Historical Imagination,” 157.

²⁰ “The Unnamed Woman,” 170. This ideology of settlement is a reference to the “Frontier Thesis.”

²¹ “Women and Religion in the Borderlands,” 156.

²² Isasi-Díaz, *En La Lucha/In the Struggle: Elaborating a Mujerista Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), 80. Quoted in “Historical Imagination,” 167.

After having exposed students to Machado's account of the ideology of a developing national self-image, Pérez-Álvarez challenges them to begin posing questions about that account. Sample questions from students, which appear in the form of pop quizzes, include:

- What is Machado's social location and how does it reflect her borderlands theology?
- What role does scripture, tradition and reason play in Machado's work?
- How is the sense of exceptionalism in the Manifest Destiny doctrine to be understood?
- Where does borderlands theology stand in relation to the Cult of True Womanhood?²³

In the class I observed, these questions prompted, in turn, additional questions about the intentions and presuppositions of the student who was asking the questions.

At this juncture in the day's seminar, Pérez-Álvarez's co-teacher, the liberationist Hispanic Javier Alanis, asked a fresh question, "Can you connect with some unnamed person in your own experience in the borderlands?"²⁴ After a brief, but heavy laden silence, this question sparked several personal, first-hand stories from students. In other words, coming when it did in the class, the question elicited tales of actual, albeit somewhat ephemeral, "border crossings"—an experience on a field trip, an interaction with a Mexican laborer, a handshake with an Hispanic neighbor. There was a shift of focus, in other words, from esoteric conversation to reflection on actual encounters—from abstraction to material reality. It was not that theoretical reflection was in any way devalued, but that at this particular point in the

²³Student paper, distributed in Eliseo Pérez-Álvarez's Borderlands Christian Thought course, Lutheran Seminary Program in the Southwest, Austin, TX, 21 September 2006.

²⁴This question was asked when students, discussing Machado's essay, "The Unnamed Woman," (which is a narrative of Elena, a native of El Salvador) got caught up in a highly theoretical conversation about "the distance" of what they called "the objectifications" in the text. This was somewhat ironic from my perspective as an outside observer, because Machado's actual description of the horrors Elena experienced, culminating in having her nose cut off, was anything but "distancing" and "objectifying."

seminar, the class had begun to uncritically use an Enlightenment paradigm that distinguished too sharply between the concrete and the abstract, with a primary focus on the latter. Alanis' query shifted the topic of discussion to actual experiences of "the other." Finally, in the same class session, Pérez-Álvarez prompted students to not only focus on how they are situated in relation to people in the borderlands, but to consider how they might participate in a reinforcing of oppressive dynamics when he asked them, "What is your experience with migrants?"

Pérez-Álvarez' then initiated a discussion about insights students had gained from site visits to base communities in Mexico City and Cuernavaca, where they lived "corner-to-corner"—meaning every corner of a house bedroom is occupied—in people's homes. He also encouraged multi-sensory learning by using poetry readings, and sharing food and drinks in class. During the session I visited, students ate snacks and drank refreshments while watching clips from two videos (*Lone Star* and *Alhambrista*) that depicted life as it is lived in the borderlands.

In sum, by enabling students to generate questions about questions, Pérez-Álvarez challenges them to reflect critically on their own national self-images, to deconstruct classist and racist images of U.S. history, and to question an uncritical use of Enlightenment paradigms—a use that may inhibit a full-fledged engagement with difference. He immerses students in the context of the U.S. Southwest borderlands through texts (poetry and prose), film, food, inviting them to tell their stories and accompanying them on site visits south of the Río Grande.

“Please Remember Our Struggles” The Asian (Korean) religious educator Boyung Lee²⁵ utilizes what she calls a “participatory and empowering approach”²⁶ to pedagogy with her mostly white, upper middle-class seminary students. She begins to expose her students to encounters with difference by first telling them stories about her own experiences of marginalization. She relates, for example, how as a young student in Korea, she did well in school and eventually received a scholarship for academic excellence that helped her enter college. But although she excelled in college and later, in graduate school, Boyung encountered resistance when pursuing employment opportunities.

And then my advisor, who often told me I was one of his best students, when there was a job market opening up, he didn’t recommend me; he recommended only male students, telling me that they are bread winners for their families. So it was my first awakening moment about my status as a...woman.²⁷

Lee comments that this encounter “opened up my journey as a feminist.” But her “real learning experience” as a “middle-class, highly educated” person occurred when she became involved in ministry in a local church. This involvement happened when she was a graduate student at Yonsei University in Seoul, Korea. It was during a time of harsh, repressive rule by military and political dictators. Korean translations of texts considered to be subversive, such as Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, were banned. Lee witnessed police whisking away classmates who

²⁵Lee is Associate Professor of Educational Ministries at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, CA. She describes her approach to religious education as “Asian, feminist, post-colonial.”

²⁶See Boyung Lee, “Introduction to Christian Education,” course syllabus, Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley, CA, spring 2007. Photocopy in author’s possession.

²⁷Boyung Lee, Interview by author, Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley, CA, 21 February 2007. All subsequent quotations attributed to Lee were taken from this interview unless otherwise stated.

had participated in protests against the ruling elite. As she put it, “So going to college really opened up new worlds for me and I had a conversion experience through that.”

The result was that she decided to minister to people who lived in a “radically different location.” She became a part-time education minister at an urban church in Seoul that was attended by “very, very poor people.” Some church members did not have running water, and in several families, both parents had to work seven days a week in order to survive. Many children came—or were picked up by Lee and brought—to Sunday School hungry, barefoot and in need of baths. And the immediate future was extremely precarious because most of the members lived in homes erected on government land that was being sold to private developers who planned to build high rise apartments. When community residents protested, construction companies hired gang members to terrorize them. Lee vividly recalls her fears about aligning with community residents in their fight to keep their homes:

And so it was a big challenge, you know, do I want to stand next to them or do I just want to withdraw to protect my life? And often these women would take me to their home on Sundays and force me to take a nap, and we would eat from the same pot, same rice bowl.

Today, recalling that these poor women had said, “Please remember our struggles,” Lee’s primary pedagogical goal is “to speak for justice.” She remains conscious of this goal by continually asking two questions about her own work: (1) “Is my academic research and teaching bringing substance to people, especially marginalized people?” and (2) “Are we acting as a community of resistance in church, academy and communities together?” By being transparent with her students about holding herself accountable to these questions, Lee models a way of radicalizing social awareness by relating narratives of her experiences with the poor and politically marginalized. She continues to speak out in support of higher wages for

groundskeepers and housekeepers at campuses in the vicinity. Further, she has enabled all her students to see how they are socially situated in systems of advantage by empowering students of color to speak up about recent incidents of racism. And, finally, by humbly confessing her struggles with her own privileged status—as an “upper middle-class, heterosexual” educated woman with a PhD, who is married to a Caucasian man”—Lee invites her mostly white, upper-middle class students to struggle with their own privilege.

Lee also encourages students to discover how religious education is practiced in different ethnic, racial and sexual orientation contexts. In her “Introduction to Christian Education” course, she divides them into small groups that, in turn, are intended to become miniature learning communities. Each group or community is then assigned a particular contextual approach to Christian religious education. In the most recent iteration of the course, groups were assigned to each of the following approaches: Orthodox,²⁸ African American, Asian and Asian American, Latino/Hispanic, and Queer. At the end of the course, each group shared their research with the whole class in a group presentation. For instance, the African American group structured their presentation in terms of a funeral service, teaching the class about African American moral and religious experience in the process.

Lee’s “participating and empowering” pedagogy is thus a context-oriented approach. She distributes handouts with three paradigms—traditional, liberal and radical—for interpreting scripture, and then asks small groups to evaluate how they might view a Biblical narrative or contemporary song differently, if examined through each of these paradigms. Lee also provides information about multiple intelligences and challenges students to identify how

²⁸The Orthodox Christian approach was viewed as “an underrepresented white experience” within the U.S., where white Protestant approaches to religious education dominate.

they and others, especially members of underrepresented groups in the academy, tend to learn; and to consider the implications of different intelligences for developing educational curricula in their own contexts.

Moreover, Lee facilitates encounters across racial, ethnic and sexual borders through assigned readings from such figures as Paulo Freire, Fernando Segovia, Maria Harris, bell hooks, David Ng, Mary Ann Tolbert and Jay Johnson.²⁹ By assigning one-page “reflection notes” on the required readings, Lee prompts students to critically reflect on the ideas and themes voiced by underrepresented religious educators, with a practical critical concern for how an idea or theme might be utilized in the student’s own ministry.

“All White Ethics Is Satanic!” During extensive interviews, the Hispanic social ethicist Miguel De La Torre³⁰ spoke about being converted from a Cuban who was “in solidarity with the dominant (U. S.) culture” to being a Cuban who was “in solidarity with the mass majority of Cubans who are not rich.”³¹ This reference to a conversion to solidarity with the poor recalls Boyung Lee’s story about her own decision to minister among the urban poor. For both educators, a genuine encounter with otherness necessitated a turning away from solidarity with those from middle and upper-middle class backgrounds and toward the poor. For De La Torre, such a “turning toward the poor”—in the U.S. context—results not only in a

²⁹For a complete list of these and other assigned readings associated with each of the small groups, see “Introduction to Christian Education” course syllabus.

³⁰De La Torre is Associate Professor of Social Ethics, and Director of the Justice and Peace Institute, at Iliff School of Theology in Denver, CO.

³¹Personal Interview, Miguel De La Torre, Iliff School of Theology, Denver, CO, 1-3 November 2006. All subsequent quotations are taken from this series of interviews unless otherwise noted.

rejection of economic domination, but also in a repudiation of white privilege. To make this point in a dramatic fashion, De La Torre begins his ethics classes by proclaiming that, “All white ethics is satanic!”³² That is, all thinking about moral experience that is in solidarity with white privilege and/or oppressive economic practices and systems, is evil.

Accordingly, De La Torre practices what he calls a “two-by-four” approach to radicalizing social awareness. Because he seeks to bring about radical conversions in the ways his students view social life, he believes that a correspondingly radical pedagogy is required. He argues that this is particularly the case if one’s students are virtually all white affluent U.S. citizens. And he believes that this is *especially* the case if such students self-identify as liberals, because liberals have real difficulties acknowledging their own complicity in racist practices and systems.

By stating that “All white ethics are satanic” at the outset of each course, De La Torre metaphorically “clobbers” students with a two-by-four piece of lumber.

And I leave it at that, and I don’t come back to it until a couple days later so I mean, I leave them *stewing* in it...and they want to talk about that...And literally, we don’t talk about it for two or three classes later. And then you have [them thinking]...“He hates white people.” And in a way, that’s not bad because (it) lets them feel what people of color have always felt, that they’ve been hated...because of their race...I don’t have a problem with them thinking that for awhile, because it might be the first time that they’ve ever been judged because of their race... (and) most of my white students don’t realize that they have a color.

Rather than creating “safe spaces” in the classroom, De La Torre thus believes that it is important to impact students in a way that disrupts their sense of entitlement to safe spaces. In his words, “Throughout my entire academic life I never had a safe space. And I think that safe space is part of white privilege.”

³²De La Torre acknowledges his debt to James Cone. See Cone’s *God of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975).

De La Torre also notes that this “two-by-four” strategy, which he acknowledges is “risky,” can only succeed if the professor simultaneously attends to several factors. First, it will entail emotional vulnerability on the part of teacher and students alike. For example, students became very vulnerable in his “Womanist Ethics”³³ seminar, when they began to discuss the theme of physical abuse in *Embracing the Spirit: Womanist Perspectives on Hope, Salvation and Transformation*.³⁴ As De La Torre reports:

People started sharing personal abuses and we were able to then compare the abuses of white women with black women, and have that conversation...A few times I thought people were shaken... But in that vulnerability...I think this was the class that I broke through.

Second, a critical ingredient of the two-by-four approach is challenging students to seriously engage authors who self-identify with marginalized communities. In “Womanist Ethics,” all four required texts are written by womanists. In that course, for example, once the coherence of the intellectual argument is acknowledged, understood and placed on the table, it becomes possible to address psychologically troubling themes, such as physical abuse, more candidly and less defensively. And third, while using a two-by-four approach it is essential to inject humor. De La Torre even jokes about ethnic and racial stereotypes, but then quickly moves the discussion back to a serious inquiry about oppression.

In addition to his aggressive, sometimes confrontational approach, De La Torre also introduces students to critical perspectives on oppression by stressing the pedagogical value of autobiographical reflections—what he calls “*testimonios*.” He contends that, whereas Euro-

³³See Miguel De La Torre, “Womanist Ethics” course syllabus, Iliff School of Theology, Denver, CO, Fall, 2007. Photocopy in author’s possession.

³⁴Emilie Townes, ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997).

American scholarship rarely privileges autobiographical information, in the Latino and black church there is an emphasis on the *testimonio*. For example, in a Latino church a member might well say something along the lines of, “This is what Jesus did for me today.” But as De La Torre elaborates, “It’s not only what Jesus did but what the community then must also do, so then it becomes a way of saying, “This is my struggle.” And as others listen to the *testimonio* it resonates with their own experience in concrete ways. Someone says, “You know, I lost my job because the boss says that I cheated.” And then someone else says, “My boss did the same thing.” And then a third member says, “Well, yes, that happened to me too!” De La Torre adds that in this way, one *testimonio* leads to another and the entire process becomes a way of consciousness raising that not only radicalizes awareness, but also builds communal solidarity.

De La Torre provides an example from his “Womanist Ethics” course in which the sole Latina student in the class talked about racial dynamics between her aunt, who was white, and her sister who was black. The white sister was favored over the black sister, but when the latter began to use bleaching cream she gained a status that impacted the dynamics between her and the white sister, who was no longer as favored as she had been. For De La Torre, the *testimonio* provided an existential validity for what he was trying to argue about racial stereotypes. However, he also noted that it was difficult to solicit such *testimonios* in cases where there was no person of color in the classroom.

Additional Strategies of Radicalizing Awareness

In the above narratives, Professors Pérez-Álvarez, Lee and De La Torre each articulate ways to uncover and sharpen the social awareness of their students. First, they present them with the reality of oppression—whether it is a story of a migrant worker, a tale of life in an

urban slum, or a jolt to the psyche that shatters a comfort zone. Second, students are enabled to see how they have been born into long standing legacies of privilege and domination. Three, they are nudged toward becoming cognizant of how they reinforce systems of advantage. These three pedagogical moves, in turn, represent opportunities for revolutionary breakthroughs regarding understandings of oppression in everyday life, its historical manifestations, and its institutional, systemic nature today. As pedagogical foci, these three themes are all interrelated with one another, and need to be addressed simultaneously during a course. For example, in order to fully comprehend a news story about the beating of a migrant laborer, one needs to be able to see the incident in historical context and to view it in the light of contemporary manifestations of institutional racism. But at the same time, arguments about systemic exploitation can appear rather abstract or incidental unless one can visualize someone like Machado's Elena or learn about overt instances of sexism, such as Boyung's encounter with a mentor. Let us thus look deeper into the rationale for, as well as examine additional illustrations of, radical pedagogical strategies.

Acknowledging the Reality of Oppression Eliseo Pérez-Álvarez observes that, “when you think you are all that is, encountering those who are other is painful.”³⁵ So the first task in enabling an acknowledgment of oppression is the de-centering or de-powering of our students—questioning taken-for-granted beliefs that they are the authorities on the nature of reality. It becomes more feasible, in Pérez-Álvarez's words, to “un-silence the silence”³⁶ when

³⁵Class observation, “Borderlands Christian Thought” seminar, Lutheran Seminary Program in the Southwest, Austin, TX, September 21, 2007.

³⁶ Ibid.

there is a critical mass of students of color and/or lower income backgrounds in the classroom. Such students can be empowered by small group work or encouraged outside of class to tell their stories in class.³⁷ In this way, white affluent, Anglo students can begin to hear from students who are often silent because they have been socialized to adopt a marginal status.

Videos that depict suffering that is explicitly associated with oppressive behaviors constitute another potential learning tool. For instance, De La Torre asks student to see the film *Romero*—which portrays the life and death of a champion of human rights in El Salvador—before the first class in “Implementing Social Ethics from Liberation Perspectives.”³⁸ The film graphically depicts the economic and political struggles between poor farmers and wealthy landowners. It also shows the collusion between religious, political, military and economic elites, so that students can begin to see an interconnected, institutional power structure involving church, state and the military in El Salvador, and an international power elite involving El Salvador’s military in cooperation with covert U. S. operatives. The film also enables many students to identify with the person of Romero, and to empathize with his struggle against violent authorities.

Although students may still resist making certain connections between, for example, the assassination of Romero and right-wing death squads, or between those death squads and U. S. agents; nonetheless, if they can identify with this initially “moderate” bishop who becomes, albeit reluctantly, a voice of the poor, and then a prophetic voice for liberation; they can begin to open up to an alternative perspective on reality. Other videos that professors have found

³⁷Class observation, “Introduction to Christian Ethics,” Pacific School of Religion, February 20, 2007.

³⁸Personal interview, Iliff School of Theology, Denver, CO, Fall, 2007.

helpful include *The Laramie Project*, a documentary film about the brutal murder of Matthew Shepherd, a gay student at the University of Wyoming; and *Color of Fear*, a story of a liberal who begins to recognize his own racism. Jeffrey Dirrim, who worked at the Center for Gay and Lesbian Studies at the Pacific School of Religion, spoke highly of the film *De Colores*,³⁹ which is a documentary that depicts Hispanic, Roman Catholic families struggling with LGBT issues. His experience was that “it didn’t matter how for or against LGBT issues the people in the room were, they could relate to families and what they’re feeling” such that watching the film “led to wonderful conversations and learning moments” that raised “intercultural issues.”⁴⁰

At the same time, professors can collect and utilize stories about oppression that are published in local newspapers, magazines or other news outlets. It may be especially possible to get students’ attention by using reports from campus publications. Of course, more traditional textbooks can also be effectively utilized. But students often perceive these as “academic” tomes that have little to do with their own experience of reality. Consequently the choice and use of texts requires great care. In student interviews, college and university students often mentioned children’s stories in this connection. For example, Boyung Lee’s student assistant spoke of Shel Silverstein’s, *The Giving Tree*,⁴¹ as a learning tool for gender analysis.⁴² In the story, a boy takes and takes from a tree, which is presented as female; until, at the end, there is nothing left of her but a tree stump. After reading the book, students then

³⁹Produced by Peter Barbosa, Eyebite Productions. The video is available at the following web site: <http://www.eyebite.org>.

⁴⁰Personal interview, Center for Gay and Lesbian Studies, Pacific School of Religion, February 21, 2006.

⁴¹(New York: HarperCollinsPublishers, 1992).

⁴²Personal interview, Kacey Alexander, Pacific School of Religion, February 22, 2007.

discuss whether or not this is a just portrayal of gender roles. The discussion is informed by feminist perspectives drawn from Rosemary Ruether's *Feminist Theologies: Legacy and Prospect*.⁴³

De La Torre's *Handbook of U.S. Theologies of Liberation*⁴⁴ provides perspectives on overlapping issues in different liberation theologies, especially "suffering structural oppression." Martin Luther King's *Letter from the Birmingham Jail*⁴⁵ illustrates how to walk with those who suffer close at hand. *Feet-On-The-Ground-Theology: A Brazilian Journey*⁴⁶ provides narratives of grassroots engagement with oppression. Students have also found other texts helpful, including bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*;⁴⁷ and L. William Countryman, *Dirt, Greed and Sex*.⁴⁸

But for maximum impact on radicalizing awareness about oppression, site visits are perhaps the best available teaching strategy. There are of course a host of problems with utilizing site visits as pedagogical tools, but if carefully planned and rigorously structured, they can lead to once-in-a-lifetime transformative learning experiences.⁴⁹ A good example is the two-week field trip that students at the Lutheran Seminary Program in the Southwest take to

⁴³Rosemary Radford Ruether, ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007).

⁴⁴Miguel De La Torre, ed. (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2004).

⁴⁵(San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1994).

⁴⁶Clodovis Boff, trs. Phillip Berryman (MaryKnoll: Orbis Books, 1987).

⁴⁷*Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

⁴⁸*Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and Their Implications Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988).

⁴⁹ See my discussion of the problems and pitfalls associated with site visits in "Teaching for Transformation: Insights from Fiji, India, South Africa and Jamaica," *Teaching Theology and Religion*, 8/4 (October 2005): 218-31.

Mexico City and Cuernavaca. They visit “base communities,”⁵⁰ stay overnight with Mexican families and attend cultural events, such as the Balet Floclorico. As one student remarked, “we saw for ourselves the economic situation and learned why it is how it is. We also learned what people in Latin America are doing about the situation and what we can do here in North America.”⁵¹

When such site visits are not feasible, professors have brought students face-to-face with the reality of oppression by sending them into nearby communities with special assignments. For example, one professor encourages students to find and talk with a homeless person, all the while imagining that this person is kin.⁵² At Hawaii Pacific University, students attended a weekend writing workshop in which they meet and speak with indigenous local writers and come away with a whole new appreciation of the range and scope of what constitutes proper English and by extension, legitimate literary expression.⁵³ De La Torre prods students to attend local Hispanic churches, arguing that even if they don’t speak Spanish, they could arrange to have radio transmitters installed that translate the Spanish into English.

An additional approach is to try to elicit stories from white, affluent students that deal with marginalization. For example, the educator Peter Frederick describes how Lee Knepfelkamp, former Professor of Psychology and Education at Columbia University, began her course by

⁵⁰“Base communities” refer to local, grassroots intentional communities, often consisting of ten to twenty persons, who gather to worship, pray and reflect on social issues and personal problems in the light of Biblical scriptures.

⁵¹Ryan Pederson, “Students, Faculty Spend January Term in Mexico City,” *LSPC Table Talk* [newsletter of the Lutheran Seminary Program in the Southwest], Spring 2006, p. 1.

⁵² Personal Interview, Archie Smith, Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley, CA, 2 May 2007.

⁵³ Personal Interview, Micheline Soong, Hawaii Pacific University, Honolulu, HI, 27 November 2006.

asking students to tell two stories: “One about an incident in their lives when they mattered and one when they felt marginalized.”⁵⁴ Along these lines, Frederick asks students to reflect on times when they have personally experienced issues of discrimination or injustice and to tell a story about the incident.

I suggest that they think of a vivid story that had strong emotional or intellectual power for them. Give them some time to write...and then ask them...to tell their stories to each other. I urge each group to listen for patterns, themes, and issues and to be prepared to report both commonalities and significant differences.⁵⁵

It is also possible to generate the telling of stories of marginalization by staging humorous games such as “What’s My Line?” in which one of three students on a panel is lying about something they did.⁵⁶ In the process of trying to identify the prevaricator, the students in the class ask questions which elicit the very true stories of the other two students on the panel.

Cultivating a Historical Awareness of Legacies of Privilege It may well be the case that many of today’s undergraduates are more “horizontally” oriented in time than previous generations. Recent technological innovations have exacerbated the desire for instant gratification, and there has been a concomitant shrinking of temporal horizons in ways that intensify awareness of the “here and now.” And as the pace of technological change accelerates, students tend to view the past as more and more of an archaic relic that has little if any relevance for their lives today. Just as the future is now, so the past is also now. This

⁵⁴ “Walking on Eggs: Mastering the Dreaded Diversity Discussion,” *College Teaching*, 43, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 87. Frederick is Professor Emeritus at Wabash College, Crawfordsville, IN.

⁵⁵ Frederick, “Walking on Eggs,” 87.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

truncation of time into a narrow linear channel means that it is increasingly difficult to even make a case for studying history.

But perhaps more problematic is the notion of “history” itself. Traditionally, it has been distinguished from “myth” and “legend” which were viewed as imaginary or unverifiable, as opposed to the historical record, which pertained to “facts.” Because history was based on supposedly verifiable entities, it was therefore viewed as more “objective” than myths or legends, which were “subjective” by comparison.⁵⁷ But this distinction between the realms of the objective and subjective proves inadequate. For who decides what counts as “facts,” which facts will be written about, and how will these facts will be articulated, prioritized and structured in larger narratives? Further, as our feminist colleagues have argued for some time, “history” has largely been the telling of “his-story,” omitting women’s contributions and perspectives. And, as liberationists such as Eliseo Pérez-Álvarez contend, “history is written by the winners.” At best, it is murky. It is about both what has taken place and also primarily reflects what the most powerful, well-connected and well-heeled actors have viewed as having taken place.

In my estimation, it may be more fruitful to address issues of temporality with the concept of “culture.” “Cultures” are complex patterns of meaning and action that have been passed down among a people from generation to generation.⁵⁸ To the extent that bona fide

⁵⁷There is not space here to enter into the very difficult topic of the nature methods in historical studies. Suffice it to say that to the extent that researchers can independently develop a consensus about a piece of data, such as a birth date on a tombstone or a name on a marriage certificate, one can speak of a degree of verifiability. But this does not make history anything like a hard science. For one quickly moves down a slippery slope the further one moves from such “hard data”—such as dates and names—to the meaning and appropriate contexts of such dates and names, let alone entertaining the larger questions of “Why this date? Why this name? Who are *you* the investigator? For what purpose are you ruminating on this date?”

cultures transcend any single generation, we can say that they consist of “historically transmitted” patterns of meaning and action. So perhaps the most useful point of departure for talking about legacies of privilege is to speak in terms of “cultures” not histories. For one thing, this can enable us to explore the earliest known beginnings of groups of peoples, without having to debate the contested distinction between “history” and “pre-history.” It can help us enable a process of de-construction that De La Torre sums up as a need “to undo all of our paradigms of *us* to understand *us*!”⁵⁹ A good example would be acknowledging the violence associated with what the Native American Tink Tinker calls, “the Thanksgiving meta-narrative.”⁶⁰ If we focus on cultural legacies, where myth and legend, as well as “historical” findings are all valued as meaningful parts of the total picture, we can begin to avoid privileging certain legacies of privilege.

Consequently, one way to radicalize awareness is to introduce ourselves and our students to the imaginative, mythopoeic worlds of indigenous peoples in the Americas. In her “American Indian Women: Myth, Ritual and Sacred Power” course, the Choctaw Michelene Pesantubbee challenges students to unlearn terms such as “civilized” and rituals, such as beauty pageants.⁶¹ Pesantubbee also immerses students in Native experience by assigning

⁵⁸Here I draw on the interpretive sociological perspective of Alfred Schütz. See his *Collected Papers*, 3 vols., edited with an introduction by Maurice Natanson, vol. 1: *The Problem of Social Reality* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967).

⁵⁹Class observation, “Implementing Social Ethics,” Iliff School of Theology, October 30, 2006. In making this statement, De La Torre cited as his source, the Native American scholar, George E. (Tink) Tinker, Professor of American Indian Cultures and Religious Traditions at Iliff School of Theology. In the quote, “your paradigms” refers to the paradigms associated with white, upper-class privilege and “*us*” refers to peoples of color.

⁶⁰Video tape recording, installation service of Tink Tinker as Professor of American Indian Cultures and Religious Traditions at Iliff School of Theology, 1998.

selected articles and chapters that provide bridges into the life-worlds of American Indians.⁶² Students of Inés Hernández-Ávila have also found particular texts helpful in this regard, including *Tonto and the Lone Ranger: Fist Fight in Heaven*, which illustrates creative uses of humor,⁶³ and Deloria's *God is Red*,⁶⁴ which provides multi-genre and autobiographical insights into the world of the Sioux Lakota. The womanist Karen Baker-Fletcher contrasts mythopoeic with what she calls "de-mythologized historical" approaches. The latter still conjure up a western paradigm, while the former transcend that paradigm and, for her, are rooted in the African American identity.⁶⁵ Baker-Fletcher uses Alice Walker's *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*,⁶⁶ as well as her own book *Sisters of Dust, Sisters of Spirit*,⁶⁷ as introits into African American consciousness. Interestingly enough, Baker-Fletcher says that what her conservative students bring to the table is "an appreciation of myth."

Another way to unearth indigenous cultural experience is to use novels and other literary genres. Anthony Pinn assigns writings by black authors, such as James Baldwin and

⁶¹Micheline E. Pesantubbee is Associate Professor, Religious Studies and American Indian/Native Studies Program, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA. Quotations from professor Pesantubbee are all taken from a solo interview, University of Iowa, Iowa City, October 30, 2006.

⁶²Examples of these publications include David Martinez, "Lakota Philosophy and the Vision Quest," *Wicazo Sa Review* (Fall 2004): 79-104; and Martin Ball, "Sacred Mountains, Religious Paradigms and Identity Among the Mescalero Apache," *Worldviews* (2000): 264-82. Videos that graphically illustrate a Native consciousness include "Wiping the Tears of Seven Generations," "Seasons of the Navajo" and "The Peyote Road."

⁶³Ashley Hall and Cecilia Tolley, personal interviews, University of California at Davis, Davis, CA, November 7, 2006.

⁶⁴Vine Deloria, Jr., *God is Red* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1973).

⁶⁵Personal Interview, Perkins School of Theology, September 6, 2006.

⁶⁶(New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983).

⁶⁷*Womanist Wordings—God and Creation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998).

Richard Wright, to develop a sense of contemporary narrative history.⁶⁸ And in his course, “Religion and Hip Hop,”⁶⁹ Pinn introduces students to a diverse range of aesthetic and other sources that view history through the lens of a wide-ranging rendering of the black experience in the Americas.⁷⁰ While there is no easy solution to the question of how to cultivate a historical awareness of the legacy of privilege, these educators offer perspectives from the margins that can supplement, as well as provide critical perspectives on, classism and white privilege in the U.S.

Engaging Students in Systemic Analysis It is probably an understatement to say that individualism is rampant in predominately white colleges and universities across the U.S. today. While this individualistic ethos is often ameliorated by more social, communalistic perspectives, such viewpoints are usually grounded in family or workplace relationships. Sometimes there are quite significant bonds between students and mentors or, in increasingly rare cases, between former childhood friends. But these sets of relationships are not so much the stuff of cohesive community as they are complex sets of autonomous affiliations that may still be relatively unrelated to each other. On the whole, we live in small, fragmented, compartmentalized, socially precarious, life-worlds. And the jury is still out as to whether computerized, wireless communications—such as texting or twittering—will either ameliorate or intensify the distancing of the modern self from genuine experiences community.

⁶⁸ Personal interview, Rice University, Houston, TX, September 25, 2006.

⁶⁹ See syllabus, Religious Studies 157, Rice University, Fall, 2006.

⁷⁰ These sources include a host of assigned readings, including chapters from Tricia, Rose, ed., *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Middleton, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press; Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1994.); and Michael Dyson’s book, *Between God and Gangsta Rap: Being Witness to Black Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

Thus, a critical task is to help students visualize their “embedded-ness” in a labyrinth of different intersecting and overlapping communities. The Asian American (Vietnamese) educator Mai Anh Tran⁷¹ begins her religious education class by asking students to complete a “social location activity.”⁷² In the activity, students are provided with a list of terms—such as race, nationality, sexual identity, political/religious affiliations and historical markers—and asked to write in brief responses regarding how they view themselves in relation to those terms. The list of terms is followed by a series of questions that seek to elicit more nuances about values, interpretive lenses and the impact of this location on one’s thoughts about a vocation. While helping students further acknowledge and articulate different aspects of their identities, this exercise begins to push them in the direction of confronting inequalities that arise because of our social locations.

We can then help students move from a focus on their own social locations to one that is perhaps, near at hand, yet unfamiliar. At Hawai’i Pacific University, Micheline Soong teaches many students for whom the geographical location of Hawaii is far removed from where they grew up.⁷³ Early in a first-year class, she takes students on a walking tour of the Chinatown district, near the University. Then she asks them to consider this as “their new neighborhood,” where their school is located. She challenges them to discover who the residents are, where they have come from, and what their lives are like. Then, after arousing their curiosity, she organizes them into research teams:

⁷¹Tran is Associate Professor of Religious Education and Asian American Culture at the Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley, CA.

⁷² Tran draws on a draft of the activity originally devised by Elizabeth Conde-Frazier and Evelyn L. Parker.

⁷³ Personal interview, Hawaii Pacific University, Honolulu, HI, November 27, 2000.

I paired them up and said, “Ok, you gotta go and find out more information... What is the zip code? Who are the political representatives?” What are the historical buildings in this area? Check on crime statistics...Find out about the history of the ethnic groups that have lived in Chinatown.

Each group was also assigned a particular social issue to explore:

One group had prostitution as an issue, so they had to go look that up and find out what’s going on in terms of laws, current laws, and they actually went down to the police station to talk to officers to find out what was going on.

Later in the course, Soong noted that “we looked at the issue of revitalization of Chinatown,” and asked, “What has that meant in terms of clusters of art galleries, of venues for theater, performances, slam poetry, movies?”

As part of her religious education class, Boyung Lee assigns Joe Holland and Peter Henriot’s *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice*,⁷⁴ to provide students with basic sets of questions that enable students to unpack the nature of economic, political and cultural life in a specific neighborhood, larger community or the nation as a whole. *Social Analysis* includes different levels of questions, ranging from very basic to more sophisticated, so that the book can be utilized by students with different educational preparations as well. By exploring questions such as, “Who makes the decisions here?” “Who stands to benefit most from maintaining things the way they are?” or, “Whose perspectives are not being heard in the local media?” students begin to do a rudimentary form of power analysis concerning political dynamics in a concrete setting. In short, by using a text such as *Social Analysis*, professors can guide students in connecting the dots in ways that reveal unjust systems of advantage, rather

⁷⁴(Maryknoll: Orbis Books; in collaboration with the Center of Concern, Washington, D. C., 1989).

than attempting to persuade them of the findings of others, or of the theoretical importance of engaging in systemic analysis in the first place.⁷⁵

Conclusion

In retrospect, this snapshot of radical teaching strategies is suggestive of criteria for assessing whether or not one is succeeding at radicalizing social awareness in the classroom. Translating the insights of the scholars who contributed to this research into outcomes language would produce the following competencies:

As a result of this learning experience, students will be able to:

- Question the questions: Ask, “What frameworks or patterns of thought are being presupposed in this question?”
- Identify omissions of peoples of color and the ideas that they bring to the table in the media, arts and sports
- Fully investigate “others’” interpretations of the human condition, and participate in the building up of a diverse, multifaceted community of interpreters
- Become fully conscious of, and recognize discrepancies within, one’s own operating worldview and move beyond those discrepancies
- Trace ways in which commonsense knowledge and assumptions make it difficult to recognize oppression.

⁷⁵ The church historian Paul Barton helps students make systemic connections by challenging them to reflect on questions such as, “Why is there so much poverty in Mexico?” He then leads them through an analysis of how NAFTA trade terms adversely impact laborers and the Mexican economy as a whole. Barton is Associate Professor of Hispanic Church Studies at the Episcopal Theological Seminary in the Southwest, Austin, TX. The above information is drawn from a personal interview, held at the seminary, September 27, 2006.

In summation, I have argued that radicalizing social awareness entails at least three strategic moves: confronting students with the reality of oppression, cultivating a historic awareness of privilege, and enabling a capacity for systemic analysis in the present. By embodying their own experiences of marginalization, each of the three educators featured in this article has developed unique, context specific ways of helping predominately white students in the U.S. to become more conscious of issues of diversity and social justice. And by drawing on their strategies as well as by sampling some of the best practices of other educators, I have sought to illustrate a plethora of ways in which all of us can radicalize social awareness in our teaching.