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Exchange

Teaching African American Studies in the US and the UK

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This is the first in what the associate editors hope will become a series of transatlantic exchanges about American studies pedagogy. Conducted in the four months between January and April 2017, the discussion encompasses the political significance of African American studies, the role of identity in the shaping of curricula, student responses to those curricula, and the challenges encountered by teachers at a variety of career stages and in a range of educational and geographic locations.

SINÉAD MOYNIHAN AND NICK WITHAM, ASSOCIATE EDITORS

QUESTION 1: We are conducting this roundtable just as the first African American President has left office. How can African American studies help students to understand the contemporary political climate?

Lydia Plath: This is a particularly timely question for me personally because I started teaching in 2007–8, when Barack Obama was running for the

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presidency, and have just moved jobs, so am currently thinking about new modules and how to contextualize the present climate for my students. In that sense, Obama's presidency and his legacy have been central to framing my teaching of African American history. I'm struck that in 2008–9 we spent so much time discussing the notion of a "postracial" America – it was what students wanted to talk about; it was the subject of many of their essays; it was an obvious point of debate with which to conclude modules on African American history. Obama provided clear evidence of progress for African Americans: even if the US wasn't quite "postracial," my students often decided, it had come a long way in terms of race relations. Of course, we knew at the time that the notion was somewhat naive, but in the wake of the first week of the Trump presidency it just seems ridiculous.

I think that one way that African American studies can help our students (and us!) understand the contemporary political climate is through its recent emphasis on Kimberlé Crenshaw's notion of "intersectionality."[1] Understanding what has happened in recent months requires us more than ever to consider race, class, gender, and sexuality as connected: Trump is not just a populist, he is also a misogynist who was elected on a platform of racism and the rejection of LGBT rights. Recent movements for civil rights have also placed intersectionality at the forefront – Black Lives Matter being founded by queer women, for example. There are lots of people out there trying to explain how Trump got elected, but I think this is where those of us who research and teach African American studies can add a valuable perspective.[2]

Kate Dossett: Understanding African American lives, past and present, has never been only about understanding white supremacy, violence and injustice. The historical recovery work and ongoing struggle for African Americans to be understood as heroes of their own lives remains a constant theme in African American history, culture, and politics. Now more than ever it seems important to find ways to help students understand that the election of Donald Trump is neither a start nor an end point, but part of a wider and longer trajectory which stretches deep into the American past. This trajectory is profoundly shaped by African Americans.

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[1] See Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review*, 43, 6 (July 1991), 1241–99.

[2] For one example see the controversial "Trump Syllabus" and the response to it from the African American Intellectual History Society (Trump Syllabus 2.0). "Trump 101," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 19 June 2016, at www.chronicle.com/article/Trump-Syllabus/236824, accessed 7 Aug. 2017; N. D. B. Connolly and Keisha Blain, "An Introduction to Trump Syllabus 2.0," *Black Perspectives*, 28 June 2016, at www.aaihs.org/an-introduction-to-trump-syllabus-2-0, accessed 7 May 2017.

While political scientists try to theorize what it is that mobilizes the working class (read white working-class Americans) to vote against their own economic interests and to engage with the supposedly new "post-truth" politics, historians of African America have long wrestled with the fictions spun and ignorances wilfully maintained in order to subjugate communities of colour. The anger and racial violence that the election, reelection and continuing popularity of the first black American President provoked and continues to inspire remind us of the close ties between white racial violence and black achievement. There are many studies and historical examples we might draw on to help students understand this. One is Koritha Mitchell's book *Living with Lynching* (2012). Mitchell considers lynching dramas written by middle-class black women in the early decades of the twentieth century. These dramas avoid lynching scenes, focussing instead on the loving, aspirational and, that loaded term, "respectable" black family life from which black lynch victims were torn. In these dramas we see a vision of black life that denied the logic of white supremacist thought. Rather than viewing these dramas as a response to lynching, we should understand them as historical artefacts which remind their readers and audiences of what it was that provoked the white lynch mob.[3] Similarly, the dignity, humour, and achievement of the Obamas, and their confident embrace of black artists, intellectuals, and community leaders, were clearly viewed by some Americans as too great a challenge to "American" traditions of racial supremacy. As we grapple with the whitest White House in over a decade, African American studies helps remind students that black lives have always been much more than a response to white power.

Hasan Kwame Jeffries: Scholars who study the African American experience are well positioned to help students make sense of the end of the Obama era and the politically tumultuous beginning of the Trump era. As Lydia points out, Kimberlé Crenshaw's notion of "intersectionality" is a particularly useful framework for deciphering the multiple factors that motivated Trump voters. But not all of these factors operated with equal strength. Race/racism was especially forceful. Obama's race fueled white resistance to his presidency, and Trump appealed specifically and explicitly to white supremacist oppositional sentiment early – as a vociferous advocate of Birtherism – and often. And in the first weeks of his administration, he has continued to do so.

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[3] Koritha Mitchell, *Living with Lynching: African American Lynching Plays, Performance, and Citizenship, 1890–1930* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2011).

Trump's election, therefore, was very much the "whitelash" that political commentator Van Jones described on election night – whites responding politically to changes real and perceived, substantive and symbolic, that were embodied by Obama's presidency. The history of Africans in America tells us, though, that a response of this sort was likely to occur. Periods of racial progress (and having an African American in the White House as a tenant rather than a servant is definitely progress) have always given rise to movements that aimed to preserve the racial status quo or even to turn back the clock to a time before the perceived progress – to "Make America Great *Again*." Whites responded in a similar vein to Emancipation, to the passage of the Reconstruction Amendments, to the school desegregation ruling in *Brown*, to the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights and 1965 Voting Rights Acts, and to affirmative-action decrees. By making clear that the path of racial progress in America has never been an uninterrupted forward march, but rather one with abrupt breaks and significant rollbacks, African American studies makes clear to students underlying currents that swept Trump into the presidency.

Alan Rice: These copious answers give us an excellent flavour of the multiplex importance of the Obama presidency. I want to give a short answer informed by the teaching of African American studies abroad, or, as I would prefer to nuance it, teaching black Atlantic studies in Europe and specifically in Britain. It seemed to me in those optimistic days of 2008 that it was important to give students a sense of the long view – that is, of how Obama's presidency stood on the backs of the slave labourers who had built his White House, and that his domestic achievement should be a beacon for progressive black movements elsewhere in the world and in the future. In that sense, I now could teach Frederick Douglass and his powerful rhetoric and show its importance as part of a historical struggle that could end one day with a black President, using a similar rhetorical power. Obama's presence as President also suddenly catapaulted my ghettoized field to centre stage so that I was invited to speak on local radio about the importance of this moment. I and other scholars here in the UK seized the time to insert our specific knowledge of the long history of struggle that pre-dated the civil rights movement which many of the news commentators wanted to restrict the discussion to. For me in particular it was important to talk about black British history and its continual interrelation with the Americas, to insert discussions of the transatlantic slave trade and the abolitionist movement and the shining rhetoric of freedom that took place on both sides of the Atlantic in the period from the 1840s to the 1860s as much as in the following century. Furthermore, Obama's own biography, with its resonances of British imperial atrocities in Kenya, allowed us a platform to talk about the links between British and American imperial follies. I realize my answer seems to avoid talking about the contemporary and African American studies, but I feel that students need the long historical lens first before they can even begin to understand the frenzied future. As Trump reinstates, in pride of place in the White House, the bust of that arch-imperialist and apologist Winston Churchill, to the orchestrated cheering of the tabloid press in Britain, we need more than ever to teach our students the importance of symbols and their transatlantic resonances then and now. Back to the future indeed.

Annette Joseph-Gabriel: Teaching African American studies has taken on a sense of increased urgency since the presidential election. This sense of urgency is not because the whitewashed US history and nationalism that have been core components of the current administration's discourse are necessarily new. It arises instead from some of our students' questions, fears, and uncertainties as they engage in politics as voters and community activists, many of them for the first time. I absolutely agree with Kate's analysis of the importance of a historically grounded pedagogy, one that emphasizes African American agency in our present era of erasure and so-called alternative facts. As a literary scholar, my teaching also engages in this work of recovery, but with an emphasis on the use of language to create meaning. Slave narratives, for example, are at once historical archives and literary texts that attest to the long-standing contributions of people of African descent to the literary and intellectual history of the United States. Novels by Toni Morrison and Zora Neale Hurston allow us to center the voices and experiences of black women whose articulations of community, citizenship, and belonging continue to resonate in contemporary debates about the implications of the oft-quoted statistic that 94 percent of black women voted for Hillary Clinton. Moreover, teaching African American literature in a French department as I do, rather than in an African American studies department, demands that I situate African American writers in a broader geography as interlocutors in a diasporic and even global conversation. Even as works such as Eslanda Robeson's chronicles of her travels through Central Africa in 1946, and James Baldwin's essays about navigating race in Paris, contribute to the discourse on black internationalism, they also reveal much about the history of racism in the United States and the lens through which these writers view and decode their international experiences. Ultimately, these narratives allow us to transmit to our students the linguistic and conceptual tools they need to make sense of the *longue durée* of racism in the United States, as well as of antiracist and anti-imperial movements such as Black Lives Matter, experiences and movements which have found echoes beyond the borders of the United States.

Karen Salt: Right after the referendum about the status of the UK's continued place within the EU, the UK experienced a sharp rise in race-based hate crimes. That rise precipitated immense reflections, internally, about the role of race within contemporary society. The UK Prime Minister responded to these actions by calling for a race disparity audit.[4] A few months after this call by Theresa May, the US electorate voted in a candidate that vociferously rejected the postracial fantasies that some identified with Obama's initial election. For many of my students (and I speak as a UK-based scholar), they looked at the political events of 2016 with horror and a huge dose of apprehension. The contemporary political climate – from the US to Burundi – appears as one less hopeful than haunted.

In these shaky moments, I take comfort from the political and cultural agitation that has taken place throughout history as black bodies – of various types – have questioned, theorized, rebelled and refused. In learning about this history and the politics of such a wide arc of people, our students are exposed to the many performances of power that have guided past actors and given others a future. How can the study of these flashpoints and lived theories help today's students? I hope that it gives them a series of signposts to position their journeys within a wider and more fluid map of humanity. I also hope that it gives them – in some small way – the tools and the courage to face tomorrow. In many ways, we have been here before. What we need, all of us, is assurance that we have seeded the ground with histories and knowledge that will live on far beyond this moment.

Nicole King: These are great comments, everyone, and the intersections and crossovers in our comments are inspiring. Teaching African American studies in the UK as it looks goggle-eyed across the waters at the US, in the infancy of Trump's presidency, is nothing if not a fascinating experience. My thoughts particularly intersect with those of Kate and Alan because my teaching of African American literature encourages, indeed requires, students to attend to historical contexts. My students have expressed to me that because of the extreme and extraordinary differences between the forty-fourth and forty-fifth US Presidents, they feel that their studies have taken on an immediacy and a relevance which they had not expected.

Some of the authors we are reading, like Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and Toni Morrison, write the specific history of Jim Crow, desegregation, and voting rights into their stories. This has enabled my students to make sense of the news that is popping up on their Twitter and Instagram feeds, in newspaper articles and on television news broadcasts regarding Donald Trump's policy plans and federal nominees. A good example was the strenuous objection by Elizabeth Warren to Trump's nominee for Attorney General, Jeff Sessions. Warren's silencing in the Senate, the actual text of Coretta Scott King's 1986 letter that Warren was prevented from reading, and the ongoing history of the civil rights struggle that these texts and events evoked, collectively and individually touched on issues that my students and I are grappling with in class. Such issues include feminism and the ability and right to speak, racial identity and national belonging, racial terror and psychic violence, racial antagonism and racial class and gender coalitions.

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[4] "Prime Minister Orders Government Audit to Tackle Racial Disparities in Public Service Outcomes," 27 Aug. 2016, at www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-orders-government-audit-to-tackle-racial-disparities-in-public-service-outcomes, accessed 6 May 2017.

So yes, it is very helpful for students to be studying African American literature at this moment in terms of the contemporary political climate emblematized by but hardly limited to Trump's own rhetoric and actions, because the literature allows students a broad context and backdrop against which to make sense of the present. But the literature also helps students to see that there is debate about how best to go about seeking and claiming civils rights, how best to go about opposing racist violence, how best to go about restructuring society so that it is more equitable, how best to represent history and culture in fictional form. A story like "Flying Home" (1944) by Ralph Ellison allowed us to discuss African American folklore, Jim Crow, and literary theories of signifying through its protagonist who is representative of a Tuskegee Airman. The story also opened up space to discuss the role of US Presidents and their partners in helping to shape national life when we considered Eleanor Roosevelt's connection to Tuskegee's military flight program and how she used her position and influence on their behalf, particularly in terms of dispelling the myth that black people did not have the mental capacity to fly airplanes – she did so by going flying with one of Tuskegee's pilots herself. Engaging with African American literature and African American studies more generally has become a means for my students to be critically engaged with the present political climate while also serving as a means to flesh out their skeletal knowledge of US and African American history.

QUESTION 2: How has your identity, and the identity of your students, shaped the way you teach African American studies? How has the ethnic diversity of the universities you have taught at impacted your teaching?

Dossett: I've been thinking through these questions for the last decade or so as I have taught a number of courses on nineteenth- and twentieth-century African American history and an interdisciplinary course on the Harlem Renaissance. One of the greatest challenges has been thinking through how we – and our students – reflect upon our own race, class, and gender identities and how that has shaped our interest in black history. In particular, I'm interested in why so many white British students, myself included, end up specializing in African American history. The African American history courses I teach are populated, much like the history department as a whole, by predominantly white and British students. We begin by thinking about why we all know about Martin Luther King and Malcolm X and far less about black British history (and even less about the history of black women). Students compare notes on what black British history, if any, they have studied at school and consider why there are so few black British history courses on offer at UK universities.

At the 2015 History Matters conference hosted by the University of Chichester at Senate House in London, activists, academics and educators, students and young people gathered to talk about the history problem. Nura Hassan, an A level student, voiced her experiences of black history in UK institutions of education: "If it's got to do with black people, it's always got to do with American black history. And that's not something that has got to do with me." I'm interested in taking this as a starting point for thinking about how we teach African American history in the UK. Recent studies of black internationalism remind us of how important it is to explore the relationships between the chronology of the African American freedom struggle and the systems of power and resistance which shape the history and the present of black lives globally. But we must also consider the displacement that takes place in British history departments comfortable with Malcolm X but unfamiliar with Olive Morris, Neil Kenlock or even the broad contours of the black British freedom struggle.

As a white historian and educator privileged to work in African American studies, I need to consider the role, status, and appeal of US black history within the academy, the classroom and beyond. I also need to consider my own role, and that of my colleagues in shaping a UK history syllabus in which black British students encounter black history primarily through the lens of African American history. Who benefits from researching and teaching African American studies in the UK? With only eighty-five black professors (or 0.49 percent of the professoriate) in British universities it is clearly not black men and women.[5] As William Ackah, lecturer in community and voluntary studies at Birkbeck, explains, while "white academics benefit from research income and a raised profile because of their knowledge of black communities, the communities themselves remain on the margins of academic life."[6]

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[5] Claire Alexander and Jason Arday, *Aiming Higher: Race, Inequality and Diversity in the Academy* (London: Runnymede Trust, 2015), 32.

Researchers and teachers of African American studies need to start having more, and more public, conversations with our colleagues and students about who it is for; to talk more with our colleagues who teach British history, black studies, and history in sociology and in community studies. And we also need to talk more with black British communities: historians, researchers, activists in and outside the academy can help us think through how to make African American studies and contemporary activism relevant to black British students.

King: These are all connected questions and the short answer for me is that my identity and that of my students have shaped the way I teach quite significantly. I identify as an African American woman and I have approached this question by focussing on the ethnic and racial identity of my students and, to a lesser extent, on their gender identity. (Although I do not discuss it below, students have told me that the inclusion of diverse black voices on our syllabi in relation to class identities and sexual orientation has also enhanced their learning experiences.) As I have taught in the United States and in the United Kingdom, the location of the universities I have taught at has also mattered to me. In the US I have taught on the East Coast and on the West Coast, and that geographical shift from east to west was the circumstance that effected a major change in my teaching because the ethnic identity of the students shifted accordingly.

I grew up in New York City and was educated in the Northeast in New Jersey and Philadelphia, and accepted my first full-time teaching post (south of the Mason–Dixon Line) at the University of Maryland, which is just outside Washington, DC. In other words, I grew up and developed as a teacher in or quite near to major metropolitan areas that were quite diverse. In these north and southeastern classrooms there was always some ethnic and class diversity amongst the students and, more significantly, there were different types of black students in my classes – students who hailed from the US, the Caribbean, and further abroad. Consequently, black students in my African American literature classes were rarely singled out to confirm "the" black experience, because it was fairly evident from class discussion that the black students did not speak with one voice. In hindsight I can say that the demographics of my first classrooms took a lot of pedagogical pressure off me.

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[6] William Ackah, "There Are Fewer than 100 Black Professors in Britain – Why?", *The Conversation*, 10 March 2014, at http://theconversation.com/there-are-fewer-than-100-black-professors-in-britain-why-24088, accessed 6 May 2017.

The students at Maryland had generally encountered African American authors or racial themes in literature as part of their high-school syllabi. Thus even when I assigned authors whom they had never heard of, students had a frame of reference with which to engage those authors, and many of the settings of these texts were geographically familiar to them. This shaped my teaching practice because I came to rely upon a certain baseline knowledge of some of the information in the texts and the not infrequent previous exposure to African American literature and its themes that students brought with them to university.

When I moved to the University of California, San Diego (UCSD), however, the ethnic identity of my students and the ethnic diversity of my classrooms was quite different. The city of San Diego is south of Los Angeles and thirty miles north of the Mexican border. It is also home to three military bases and it is a city that traditionally votes Republican. The change in environment and political climate felt palpable in my classrooms. At UCSD, I was often one of two black people in the room when I was teaching variations of the same modules I taught back at Maryland, at both postgraduate and undergraduate level. (I once taught a course in black feminist theory and I *was* the only black person in the room!) All of this meant I had to work in a different way, not least to discourage the positioning of any black students by the other students as de facto experts on the literature by virtue of their skin color. More importantly, I had to work a lot harder to adapt my own teaching practice to these new contexts. A welcome development was that there was a great diversity of Asian American, Chicanx and Latinx students interested in studying African American literature. Many of these students were able to draw upon their personal understanding or previous studies of exclusion, political struggle, migration and contested citizenship as a way into our discussions of African American literature. This meant that as a group we were discussing African American literature in comparative and transnational American studies terms. As a teacher I was pushed into different modes of analysis and pedagogical practice by these students. I was taught to think about African American literature in more dynamic ways and I matured and became a better teacher at UCSD because of this.

My teaching has changed yet again since 2012, when I began lecturing in the UK. At the University of Reading I consistently had one or two students who were not ethnically white in my specialist module on African American literature. Sometimes there was also an overseas student from Europe or America. I could not, however, rely on most of my students having a shared or even similar sense of either the literary traditions being studied or the historical contexts of the literature. Furthermore, unlike in most US universities, my specialist module was usually the only module devoted to African American literature that my students took – which put a different kind of pressure on my readinglist choices. Undergraduate English literature programs in the UK are overwhelmingly populated by white, middle-class women and I definitely see these types of gender ratios in my classrooms. When an unfamiliarity with African American literature that affects many UK students combines with a socialized hesitancy amongst some young women to speak up in class, I have to adjust my teaching strategies. Such strategies include regularly organizing students into small groups and assigning reflective journal writing as a means to build confidence around class participation.

When I taught at Brunel University in London, I taught a final-year module on the African American novel. This took me back to my days at Maryland and UCSD because there was great ethnic diversity amongst the students. Although students did not possess the background or the familiarity with the literature that the Maryland students had, in contrast to Reading there was a far greater eagerness to speak up and it was not as difficult to get them to talk in class, even though the cohorts were also predominantly female.

My approach to teaching African American literature is one that embraces an American studies, interdisciplinary, multimodal pedagogy. The identities of my students, my own identity as an African American woman, and the different types of ethnic diversity at the universities where I have taught have greatly impacted how I teach African American literature. At UCSD and in the UK I have had to develop my teaching practice in new and different directions from my practice at the University of Maryland by not presuming that students will bring a shared historical or cultural knowledge with them into the classroom.

Joseph-Gabriel: My experience echoes Nicole's to an extent because I too have taught African American literature in a variety of settings across the United States: in Nashville, Tennessee; Williamstown, Massachusetts; and Tucson, Arizona. In each of these places, my students' identities, backgrounds, and degree of familiarity with the courses' central themes of race and representation greatly determined the pedagogical strategies that would be most effective in furthering productive conversations in the classroom. Further, as a Ghanaian woman, my own self-positioning vis-à-vis the course material also varied significantly within these different settings.

The first African American literature classes I taught were guest lectures in African American and diaspora studies courses at Vanderbilt University. Teaching at a well-heeled private university in the South, I found that students were generally well prepared for college-level courses and that they also had some frame of reference for talking about representations of blackness on the page and on the screen. In this setting, it was important to think not only about the historical manifestations of inequality that we encountered in the different course readings, but also about the contemporary legacy of these phenomena in the very space we occupied. Making those connections across time moves students out of the comfort zone that they tend to inhabit when they think of racism as the egregious, visible acts of discrimination perpetrated by individuals "a long time ago." There is a degree of discomfort that comes with grappling with the enduring presence of that history as the foundation of contemporary social and economic institutions, particularly in the US South.

The transition from the South to the Berkshires brought significant changes. Although I found myself in another wealthy, private, predominantly white institution, my experience here was markedly different for two primary reasons. First, Williamstown is a bubble. Consequently, for many black students, Africana studies classrooms are some of the few spaces on campus in which they can acquire useful tools to navigate and contribute to ongoing conversations about race in the United States. What this meant in my course on Afro-diasporic women's literature is that all my students were black, with family and origins in the United States, Africa, and the Caribbean. They sometimes joked that if the roof caved in during class the university's black population would decrease dramatically. But on a more serious note they described the course as a unique space, or in the words of one student, her "saving grace," in a sometimes-alienating bubble of whiteness. Teaching an all-black class in a largely white institution was challenging because the stakes felt higher. Once students verbalized that the novels and theories engaged with in the classroom were, for them, much-needed tools to navigate the world around them, it shifted the course dynamic significantly. This could no longer be just another Intro to African American Studies course whose goal is to help students understand African American experiences as an integral part of American and global history, and to make students aware of the continued contribution of black voices to pressing conversations on equality, freedom, and citizenship. The concrete needs of my students to gain the linguistic and conceptual tools to better articulate their responses to their own diverse realities and experiences meant that class conversations focussed quite intensively on black feminist theory in response to that need.

Second, my time in Williamstown is also where I did the most reflection on my own self-positioning because I was now navigating my alma mater as a professor and no longer as a student. During my student days, I had felt a distinct difference among the different groups of black students present on campus. Social groups and events often brought African American, African, and Caribbean students together. There were conversations among these groups on what blackness means and signifies in the United States. These conversations sometimes took a troubling turn with the assertion that blackness could only designate a narrowly defined African American experience, and the lives and voices of all other people of African descent in the United

States were to be understood through an immigrant lens only. These memories of erasure and the limiting of blackness to a particular US experience – a phenomenon that dovetails to some extent with Kate's discussion of the erasure of black British history – followed me into the classroom. I was more acutely aware of my insider–outsider position as a Ghanaian woman living in the United States, and while I generally share very little of my personal life and background with students, I found it useful to be open with my students about my own positioning in order to more effectively guide them through texts like Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* (2013), a novel that takes up these very questions of different black identities in the United States. I do not necessarily advocate sharing one's personal life as a blanket strategy for connecting with students. These are private and individual decisions. But in that moment, that open conversation about different and shifting subject positions, guided by Stuart Hall's discussion of "positions of enunciation" in his essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," allowed us all to examine moments of convergence and divergence, and ultimately articulate a nuanced understanding of textual and cinematic representations of blackness and Afro-diasporic identities.[7]

This insider–outsider position I adopted in Williamstown allowed me to make the transition to Tucson, where I found myself in classrooms with very few – if any – black students, and where our proximity to Mexico meant that ethnic diversity looked very different as compared to Nashville, for example. At the University of Arizona, I taught a course titled "Outsiders Within: Constructing Contemporary Identities" in the months leading up to and immediately following the US presidential election. In the pre-election atmosphere, my class of predominantly nonblack students was initially hesitant to share thoughts on a text such as Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow* (2010). Students felt ill-equipped to participate in conversations about race and institutional racism, a conversation they assumed was relevant only to people who identified as black. In this setting, it helped for me to inhabit even more of an outsider position, and to encourage my students to see themselves as having important knowledge about and a stake in these conversations.

Ultimately I have learned that our students come to African American studies courses for a variety of reasons, making each uniquely situated both to contribute to the conversation and to take something away at the end of the semester.

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[7] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in Jonathan Rutherford, ed., *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 222–37.

Jeffries: I'm a brother from Brooklyn. I never lived outside the borough until I headed south to Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia, the nation's only all-black, all-male college. I stayed in the South for graduate school, attending Duke University, and taught variously in the South, back in Atlanta at Morehouse and in Tuscaloosa, Alabama at the University of Alabama, before crossing the Ohio river and settling in the Mid-west to teach at the Ohio State University.

My identity, beginning with being a brother from Brooklyn, absolutely shapes the way I teach because it is the reason why I teach. On more than a few occasions, I have found myself in discussions with fellow historians in which the question "why we do what we do" came up. And seemingly every time, there will be many in the number who will attribute their interest in history to what they learned in the classroom, in high school, or sometimes even earlier. But my interest in history – specifically studying African American history, wasn't sparked by what I learned in the classroom, but rather by what I didn't learn in the classroom; that is, until I enrolled at Morehouse College. Prior to then, my history classes were devoid of substantive discussion of the black experience. I found this especially frustrating because I looked to my classes, especially by the time I was in high school, to help me make sense of the stark racial inequality that existed all around me, that I saw every day as I rode the subway to and from school. So I studied African American history in college because I learned so little in high school and I knew, having been exposed to so much black history through my family and community, that there was a lot to learn.

Unfortunately, very little has changed over the last quarter-century. The students I encounter today, regardless of race, know next to nothing about the black experience beyond a few names and a couple of events. But they are not blank slates. They believe they know all there is to know about the black experience. My challenge, then, is not only to teach them what they don't know, but also to teach them that what they do know is often wrong. For example, before I can have a meaningful discussion about black power, I have to explain that the portrayal of the Black Panther Party in the movie *Forrest Gump*, which for most students is their only exposure to black power, is a gross distortion of the party and the movement.

I am well aware, too, that my authority as a conveyer of facts and truth is often questioned, consciously and unconsciously, at the outset because of my race and gender – being a brother from Brooklyn. At Ohio State, where my classes on African American history are always mostly white, for the vast majority of my students I am the first African American teacher they have ever had, and most certainly the first African American male. This means that I have to be especially aware of the ways my students project onto me all of their preconceived notions about black men, which affects my credibility in their eyes. On the first day of class, when I tell my students that my goal is for them to know what I know by the end of the semester, more than a few are clearly skeptical as to the usefulness of such a thing. This is why primary sources are especially important to me, especially early in the semester. I let documents speak their truths because too often white students can't/won't hear the same truths coming from a brother from Brooklyn. But after being presented with information that opens their minds to new historical possibilities, more and more they tend to want to hear what I have to say, they want me to "break my silence." Notably, the time this takes in Ohio, usually only a couple of weeks, is significantly less than the time it took in Alabama; I'm quite sure that there were many a white kid in my classes at the University of Alabama who never accepted what I had to say.

Teaching at a historically black college (I taught at Morehouse when I was writing my PhD dissertation), however, was markedly different. There, the all-black, all-male students accepted my authority as a conveyor of facts and truth from the outset. They were skeptical of the normative historical narrative, not of the person standing in front of them. And because we started in a different place, we usually ended in a different place, with a greater ability to critically analyze the past *and* the present. On the first day of class at Morehouse, when I told my students that my goal was for them to know what I knew by the end of the semester, they got fired up.

At Morehouse, being a brother from Brooklyn mattered, just as it does at Ohio State, but it mattered/matters in entirely different ways, which I have to be aware of in order to be effective.

Plath: My interest in African American history stems predominantly from a study-abroad year I spent at UCLA during my undergraduate degree. As a white, middle-class woman who grew up in rural England and who attended a very white history department at the University of Warwick, I had not encountered very many people of colour at all, let alone much black history, until I arrived in southern California. I became interested in black studies after taking classes with two African American academics at UCLA: Scot Brown in History and James H. Cones III in Women's Studies and Afro-American Studies (as the departments were then named). The discussions these professors fostered about race, gender and the politics of identity were crucial to my development as a scholar, and to my understanding of my own white privilege more generally (though I would not have been able to articulate it as such back then).

Since I returned from California over a decade ago, I have become increasingly committed to understanding African American history and culture, and the history of racism, and to ensuring that my students are able to make the connections between that history and their own lives, as I did. I'm therefore not sure I agree with the student that Kate mentioned, who did not see African American history as being "to do with her" as a black British person. Rather, I think that providing a space for British students, both black and white, to learn about how race works in society and culture as a system of oppression that can be, should be, and has been resisted, is a fundamental aspect of our role as educators. Whether we are actually able to do that, of course, is a harder question. Teaching mostly in history departments in England and Scotland (at Warwick, Leicester, Nottingham, Glasgow, and Canterbury Christ Church), I have taught in some very white classrooms! If there are students of colour, there are usually only one or two: I have never experienced the racial diversity in the classroom as a teacher that some others in this discussion have. When there are students of colour in my classes, they sometimes have become a focal point for white students: I see all eyes swivel to them whenever I ask a question; they are expected to act as "experts" on black culture. This is something that I am quick to discourage, as it can put undue pressure on the one black student in the class who possibly (probably?) knows as little about African American history as her or his white peers.

That said, my experience has been that black students are very conscious of how important it is that this history is acknowledged and taught. I have been thanked profusely in person after lectures and in feedback forms for teaching these topics, which black British students see as enabling them to better understand their own lives. White students, on the other hand, often take longer to reach the same conclusions: they are far less willing to see themselves as part of a system of racism and privilege, although they acknowledge it exists. I recall one student in Scotland saying, towards the end of a course on slavery in the US South, "thank goodness that never happened here." I felt like a failure as an educator! The following year I made sure to further emphasize the role of Britain in the transatlantic slave trade, including taking my students on a slavery walking tour of Glasgow, so that they could directly connect the city in which they lived to the horrific regimes they were learning about. Now, when I teach about racism, I make sure to encourage my white students to consider how they might have behaved had they been born in a different era: eventually some acknowledge that they might not have been ardent abolitionists had they lived in the South in the 1830s, or that they might have joined or supported the Klan, had they lived in Indiana in the 1920s.

I think it is important that I, as a white woman, make conscious use of my privilege in the classroom to facilitate conversations in the classroom which, as Hasan indicates, my colleagues of colour might receive more resistance to.

Salt: I specialize in race, politics, and power. A significant portion of my work investigates how black nation-states, such as Haiti and Liberia, have claimed independence, demanded political recognition, and fought for their continued sovereignty in a highly racialized world. I began my examination into these areas by struggling to understand certain social movements and instances of political upheaval that offered – even if only briefly – new futures for people of African descent. These journeys took me from Liberia to the Soviet Union before eventually settling in Haiti. In traversing these international journeys, I kept being drawn to the ways that place shifted particular histories – while some places (especially imaginary ones) – expanded them. Although I began some of this work during the rise of new ways of working with sources and material that galvanized many fields within the humanities, my work really solidified as the black Atlantic emerged. I studied in the US, taught various educational levels in the US and Scotland, and now teach an intriguing mix of students from different locations in England. Given my current roles and research in the UK, I do tend to interact with a range of people who are interested in thinking through particular contours and ideas. Perhaps, due to my international interests and my own international family, my version of history is just as likely to centre on Frederick Douglass's time as the US Consul General to Haiti, the centrality of the Haiti pavilion in the "white city" of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition (typically known as the Chicago World's Fair), or the political work and cultural agitation of Claudia Jones and Eslanda Robeson. For me and my work, place does matter, but as I tend to follow circuits of power and production, I may start one place with someone, but end up someplace else with them far away from their country of origin. In my scholarly work, identities have always been fluid and contested and – quite often – resisted, especially if forced on folks.

Yet I know that I'm read a certain way in certain situations. Maybe it is about skin colour, but it may also be about gender identity or nationality. No matter my approach to the subject matter, when teaching about the histories of people of African descent, I have to navigate a chasm of unverbalized (or sometimes uttered) knowledges. While I have taught students in both Scotland and England from predominantly white ethnic backgrounds, they have had to cross their own assumptions about difference as they navigated a classroom with people from nonaffluent backgrounds, many of whom embraced a panoply of non-gender-conforming perspectives. In many ways, our differences, as a group, give us a place to work. Like Nicole, I find that space a productive place to bring in stories and ideas about histories that many of them have never heard of or studied. Even with the centrality of figures such as Mary Seacole to my students' primary-school experience, many have never read her actual narrative. As eager as many are to learn about the US civil rights movement, most are blown away by the work of Fannie Lou Hammer or the activities of the Highlander Folk School. The way I teach combines an interest in situating these voices and histories within a known or presumed trajectory with a desire to shift our perspectives to include the global interactions of people of African descent. It is for this reason that I have taught both Yelena Khanga's international family memoir *Soul to Soul: The Story of a Black Russian American Family, 1865–1992* (1994) and Aminatta Forna's *The Devil That Danced on the Water* (2002), which chronicles her Sierra Leonean-born father's university education in Aberdeen (Scotland), his marriage to her white Scottish mother, Forna's transnational upbringing, and her investigation into her father's political assassination in Sierra Leone. What I try to teach is the fact that African America has always been global – and people of African descent have traversed and impacted the world. My teaching material reflects that.

My colleagues teaching in the UK have succinctly charted some of the challenges that currently face the system and learning as a whole. Yet, as the director of the first black studies PhD in Europe, and as a supporter of the first black studies undergraduate degree in Europe at Birmingham City University, I do believe that things are shifting. Navigating the waters of this time involves fighting for the centrality of the histories, politics, and cultural work noted in this forum on multiple fronts.

QUESTION 3: How do you understand the politics of teaching African American studies? Do you consider its primary purpose to be the expansion and diversification of the curriculum to include marginalized voices and experiences, or the development of a new generation of antiracist activists?

Joseph-Gabriel: As our previous conversations about geography and the demographics of our classrooms show, the stakes of teaching African American studies vary with time and across different spaces. I think, though, that the objectives of inclusion and activism are not mutually exclusive. From their very inception, African American studies departments in the United States have been responding to the need, voiced by students, to counter the erasure of the contributions of people of African descent to a variety of fields of study, including history, literature, religion, and the sciences. The demands of black students in the 1960s and 1970s that led to the creation of black studies departments across the United States resonate today in student-driven calls for universities to allocate increased resources to the staffing of classrooms and cultural centres that participate in this long-standing refusal of erasure. Inclusion and activism are therefore inextricably intertwined in the terms on which some of our students come to African American studies courses, and should therefore be jointly present in our course goals. This intertwining is crucial now more than ever, given the watered-down discourse on "diversity and inclusion" that has come to signal academic institutions' commitment to the optics of diversity rather than a real investment in addressing inequality. I think about inclusion and diversifying curricula, therefore, not in the institutional language of optics, but rather as a sustained effort to address the paucity of black intellectuals and texts in traditional disciplines as symptomatic of a deeper problem: the ways in which power is consolidated in academic institutions. The politics of teaching African American studies therefore are bound up both in the politics of the ivory tower as both a generative and a restrictive space, and in the politics of the larger world beyond academe.

Plath: I agree with Annette. For me, the expansion and diversification of the curriculum are a political act, and therefore both goals are crucial to the discipline of African American studies. That said, I find it useful to broaden the definition of "antiracist activists." I have no expectations that the majority of my students will become "activists" in the traditional understanding of that term, but I do hope that after taking my classes they will have a sense of social justice and antiracist thought that will benefit them (and others) in whatever they go on to do. So whether my students become teachers, bankers, lawyers, entrepreneurs, journalists, or anything else they aspire to be, they will take social justice and antiracism seriously, and will be mindful of the role of people of colour in their workplaces and professions. The more people in the world who are cognizant of the history of racism and antiracist struggle, the better! With this in mind, I am keen to ensure that students directly relate their learning about the experiences of African Americans in the past to life and politics in the present, and I am open with students that this is my goal.

Jeffries: I agree fully with Lydia and Annette. Expanding and diversifying the curriculum is work best done together, is very much a political act, and has always been at the heart of the discipline of African American studies. Let me add, though, that I believe that the work of African American studies professors does not stop at the classroom door. If we are serious about nurturing an activist spirit in our students, then we have to be there for them when they engage in antiracist, democratic struggles on campus. I am very much aware that my position/presence at my university exists because of the organizing efforts of black students some fifty years ago. In other words, if it were not for black students acting on their democratic impulses, I wouldn't have a job. I can repay my debt to that generation of black students by supporting the organizing efforts of this generation. This, of course, can take many forms, from public expressions of support to offering strategic advice. Solidarity, though, is key. We owe it to our students to have their back in their struggle to democratize our campuses.

King: I agree with Hasan, Lydia, and Annette, absolutely. We are engaged in political acts through curriculum design and our presence on campus. But I do not see the politics of teaching African American studies as explicitly the development of a new generation of activists; I have never thought of my responsibilities as a teacher in this way. I say this even as I recall wonderful moments when a student or a group of students move from our study of literary texts to personal (or collective) political epiphanies regarding their place in the world and what they might do with their knowledge. So my role is perhaps as a facilitator and supporter, as Hasan puts it. As for diversification, *a* purpose, but perhaps not *the* purpose, of teaching African American studies is the diversification of the curriculum. But it is important not to figure African American studies only as a corrective. Back in 1969, C. L. R. James argued that the study of "black history" was the the study of "human history" and should not be segregated in black studies courses. Nevertheless, in his role as an activist teacher, he supported his students in their bid to bring black studies to what was then known as Federal City College.[8] James's positions highlight the different, simultaneous roles we inhabit as teachers, supporters, and activists.

QUESTION 4: In the classroom, how do you intersect the topic of race with other key issues, such as class, gender, sexuality, regionalism, and empire?

Rice: I think curriculum issues are key to this question. Together with scholars at Liverpool John Moores I was a pioneer in teaching a module on the black Atlantic way back in 1997. It seemed key to me teaching in a European context to teach African American literature and culture in the broadest transatlantic context; that is, not just talking about an African homeland but also about a European diasporic element. This enabled the comparison of black British writers such as Jackie Kay and Caryll Phillips with Toni Morrison and James Baldwin in a course that showed the differences and continuities that geographies made. It also enabled us crucially to intersect African American culture with European imperial narratives, showing synergies and differences in ways that nationalist narratives would have elided. Of course we were all very influenced by Paul Gilroy's wonderful *The Black Atlantic* (1993) as it seemed to give us European scholars permission to broaden debates about black culture beyond the American space. I well remember scepticism from scholars in America when I was doing my PhD about my trying to study African American culture without more sustained recourse to being in that geographic space. My answer was to co-organize and run as a doctoral candidate the only conference commemorating Frederick Douglass's sojourn in Britain and Ireland (1845–47) in 1995. This happened in the same year the *Oxford Frederick Douglass* failed to publish any of his seminal writings or speeches from this British visit, showing that despite the brilliant work of scholars like Richard Blackett, the international character of key African American figures was not at the forefront of the canonical scholarship on them. A book like the *Oxford Frederick Douglass* – a fine volume edited by the brilliant W. L. Andrews – was ultimately designed for American classrooms where Douglass's trip to Britain was more of a footnote than a key moment in his maturation.[9] In developing my black Atlantic module, I created space for students to do archival work to find evidence of black American sojourners in Britain. One of my students discovered a playbill of Henry Box Brown from a performance in Shrewsbury in 1859 and was able to present it at a conference in Liverpool in 2010. In effect, a module I had started in order to internationalize the understanding of African American culture led to a student finding English regional black presence where little had been discovered before. Regionalism and empire combined in discovering African Americans in corners of old England.

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[8] C. L. R James, "Black Studies and the Contemporary Student" (1969), in James, *At the Rendezvous of Victory* (London: Allison & Busby, 1984), 186–201.

Away from larger curriculum issues, I use pedagogical praxis to intersect race with class and gender. I have devised a dramatic tableau of the slave trade to enable learning about movement between Europe, Africa, and America by various key historical actors. These show working-class ordinary seamen as victims of disciplinary punishment as well as perpetrators of racist aggression; enslaved Africans as survivors despite horrendous conditions; and sea captains, slave-traders, and plantation owners as lords of all they survey as they move human beings as chess pieces around their small and large universes. This insistence on biography as truth-telling is based on the scholarship of my *Radical Narratives of the Black Atlantic* (2003) added to by the students themselves who devise characters after extended research projects. Another method is to get students to use objects/texts to create mini-exhibitions on topics such as slave punishment, rebellion, slave song, etc. so that they get an understanding of how selection is so difficult for a curator trying to tell the multiple narratives of slavery and its consequences. I use my own experience as a curator with the Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester (as co-curator of the 2007–8 Trade and Empire: Remembering Slavery exhibition) to source pictures of objects for use and also to introduce arguments about the appropriateness or otherwise of different objects or artistic works. The exercise teaches the intersection of race, class, gender, and sexuality and shows the intersection of regionalism and empire through our space and place here amidst the cotton mills of the north-west of England, which because of industrialism became, in the nineteenth century, the heart of empire.

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[9] William L. Andrews, ed., *The Oxford Frederick Douglass Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

Finally, I wanted to share the way I foreground the importance of class. At an institution like the University of Central Lancashire in Preston, which was set up for the education of the working class in the early nineteenth century, it always seems germane to discuss this even when talking about canonical figures. I love to contrast Olaudah Equiano, his desire to be an English gentleman combined with his toadying to the aristocracy and the monarchy, with the wonderful iconoclastic figure of his proto-anarchist contemporary Robert Wedderburn, whose criticism of that "bloody spooney Jesus Christ who urges us to turn the other cheek" when faced with the violence of the oppressor and urging of international revolution against the moneyed establishment in Britain and in the Caribbean, where he was born, make him such a dynamic historical figure.[10] This is not to downgrade the wonderful Equiano, but to foreground the variety of black presence in Britain, which is too often forgotten. Equiano has become canonical, which is only problematic if his presence silences other voices – and to an extent his gentlemanly self as usual silences working-class voices. I still don't understand why there has been so little research on Wedderburn and why Inveresk Lodge Garden in Musselburgh near Edinburgh still refuses to acknowledge his importance in discussing black Scotland. We are leading a guerrilla campaign – research and visit and join us in the visitors' book seeking acknowledgement at the house he was turned away from in the early 1800s as an unworthy son. Hopefully intersecting race with class in the classroom will lead to activist students who refuse such amnesia.

Joseph-Gabriel: If we are to talk about intersections then we must first give black women their due for articulating the intertwined nature of forms of oppression along lines of race, gender, class, and sexuality. It is Soujourner Truth's poignant question "Arn't I a Woman?"[11] as well as the labor of working-class black feminists[12] and the theorizing done by Kimberlé

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[10] "PRO TS 11/45/167, Rex v Wedderburn, Examination of William Plush" (1819), in *The Horrors of Slavery and Other Writings by Robert Wedderburn*, ed. Iain McCalman (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1991), 120–22, 122.

[11] In her biography of Sojourner Truth, Nell Irvin Painter argues that though the ideas presented in Truth's speech were indeed Truth's, the framing and rhetoric were very much the work of the abolitionist Frances Dana Gage. See Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, a Symbol* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1996).

[12] See, for example, Carole Boyce Davies, *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Erik

Crenshaw, Patricia Hill Collins, and others that have given us today the language to talk about intersectionality.[13] This intellectual history very much shapes my pedagogical approach to putting race in conversation with class, gender, and empire. Because of the continued relegation of black women to the sometimes literal margins of archives, I endeavour to introduce their experiences and contributions to my students in their own words. Excerpts from Eslanda Robeson's travel diaries, or Shirley Graham Du Bois's letters to Kwame Nkrumah, for example, form the textual basis for a conversation on black women's discursive framing of a decolonial project that sought to dismantle the racist, capitalist, and patriarchal foundations of colonial power. My goal, in foregrounding these narratives, is to allow my students to recognize the different spaces from which disenfranchised people continue to speak, by putting more traditional genres such as fiction, autobiographies, and essays in conversation with letters, diaries, songs, and other forms of cultural production and self-expression. Alan's example of the playbill featuring Henry Box Brown is fascinating because it illustrates the kind of creative work that students can undertake when we open up the possibilities for what is considered a primary text or an archive. It also, like Alan suggests with regard to Equiano, allows us to decenter canonical narratives that otherwise become read as representative, by creating space for more voices to be heard through a variety of sources.

Plath: I'm so impressed by some of the work that Alan and Annette have done in the classroom! Perhaps I need to think further about this, because I have sometimes found that students have struggled with the intersections of race and gender in particular. When I have taught slavery, for instance, I have asked students to debate the question of the "double burden" faced by black enslaved women, and have tried to engage them in theories of agency and resistance (using Stephanie Camp's work about bodily resistance, for example, in conversation with Harriet Jacobs's testimony about refusing her master's advances). However, I have found that my students have difficulty articulating their ideas around the rape and sexual abuse of female slaves, and are sometimes unable to see these women as survivors, rather than as victims. The way in which sexual abuse was characterized in the recent film *The Birth of a Nation* (Nate Parker, 2016), as a path to rebellion for enslaved *men*, is indicative of the way in which the experiences of black women can be silenced (literally, in the case of the character played by Gabrielle Union in that

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S. McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom: Black Women, American Communism, and the Making of Black Left Feminism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

[13] For examples see Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins"; Patricia Hill Collins, "It's All in the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race, and Nation," *Hypatia*, 13, 3 (Summer 1998), 62–82.

film) in popular understandings of black history, as well as in the archives. In the classroom, I think we need to challenge these narratives as much as we can, and, as Annette puts it, create more spaces for black women's voices to be heard.

Dossett: The question of how to engage students with the issues raised by intersectionality speaks to some of the foundational questions about the purpose of African American studies raised in our discussion of Question 3. Teaching intersectionality, alongside histories of empire, colonialism, and place, is, for me, about learning with students to recognize how and when power is constructed and contested, and by whom. Relating intersectionality to the politics of knowledge production is key: without this understanding, intersectionality can too easily become a code word for checking off categories of oppression or markers of identity. The history of the archive, of knowledge production, and the role of the university in shaping both can help students to consider their own roles (and those of their instructors) as producers of knowledge both within and beyond the university. This means thinking not only about how we as instructors engage with student-led equality struggles on campus, as Hasan has suggested, but also about our roles in upholding the very notion that university is *the* place where students can and should "get" their activist education. The relationship between the university classroom and movements for social transformation has long been an issue in African American studies. In a March 2016 roundtable in the *Boston Review*, Robin D. G. Kelley cautioned student activists not to expect their radical education to be delivered by the university itself, but rather to repurpose the resources and infrastructure of the university to craft their own political education.[14] Kehinde Andrews, who with his colleagues at Birmingham City University has developed a new black studies programme, has argued that universities have historically acted, and continue to function, as producers of racism.[15] Intellectually the curriculum will be richer if marginalized voices are placed at the centre of the echelons of higher learning; it may also foster some of the activist work of the next generation. But alongside teaching intersectionality and placing voices long ignored on our curricula, we need to make space in our curriculum to reflect on the process and politics of knowledge production which shape higher education.

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[14] Robin D. G. Kelley, "Black Study, Black Struggle," *Boston Review*, 7 March 2016, at https://bostonreview.net/forum/robin-d-g-kelley-black-study-black-struggle, accessed 7 May 2017.

[15] Alice Ross, "Universities Do Not Challenge Racism, Says UK's First Black Studies Professor," *The Guardian*, 23 Oct. 2016, at www.theguardian.com/education/2016/oct/23/universities-do-not-challenge-racism-says-uks-first-black-studies-professor, accessed 7 May 2017.

Jeffries: In order for students to understand intersectionality, they have to first be able to identify points of intersection. The challenge that I have faced in the classroom is that the vast majority of students are generally unable to see how race, class, gender, sexuality, regionalism, and empire operate on their own, never mind how they intersect and interact with one another. Thus I approach the teaching of intersectionality as a process. I typically start by exploring and explaining the evolution and operation of race/racism/white supremacy in society, both locally, usually in the US context, and also globally. My goal is to get students to see race/racism/white supremacy at work, and by "see," I literally mean "see it." I have had tremendous success developing students' critical thinking skills by screening with them major motion pictures paired (and pairing is absolutely essential) with documentary films that address the subjects tackled in the films. For instance, I recently showed students Nate Parker's *The Birth of a Nation*, but before we watched it, I had them view several documentaries on African American resistance to slavery, including segments of *Africans in America* (1998) and *The Abolitionists* (2012). As Lydia points out, a glaring, unconscionable even, blind spot in *The Birth of a Nation* is the way Parker characterizes sexual assault against enslaved women, denying them, in this and other ways, their active role in resisting slavery. Accordingly, I began the post-screening discussion with a simple question: "When it comes to enslaved resistance in the film, what did you see?" After a robust discussion of what appeared on-screen, which centred almost exclusively on what enslaved men did, I asked, "What didn't you see?" By drawing on what they saw (learned) in the documentaries, they were able to piece together for themselves the glaring absence of black women's resistive agency in the film. But more than that, they began to discuss, without prompting, how the gendered experiences of enslaved people shaped the contours of their resistance. In other words, they began to *see* intersectionality.

King: Well, I am collecting lots of ideas for my own teaching – thank you, everyone! I will add just a brief comment, which is that as my modules on African American literature are often the singular such module that my students will have the opportunity to take, I try to design the syllabus and choose texts that will make it difficult, if not impossible, for students to entertain the idea that there is a singular African American literary, cultural, or political experience. As Hasan has expressed, we have to meet our students where they are, and so I find that texts which themselves emphasize intersectionality are particularly helpful. Classics such as Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) do this work well, as do more recent texts such as Andrea Lee's *Sarah Phillips* (1984) and Z. Z. Packer's *Drinking Coffee Elsewhere* (2006). However, my current favourite text for getting students to think about the complexity of race, gender, class, and power is Toni Morrison's only short story, "Recitatif" (1983). More than anything, this story reminds students how easy racial essentialism is and how difficult but necessary it is to consider race as a complex and contingent phenomenon.

QUESTION 5: What advice would you give to someone about to embark on their first journey into teaching African American studies?

Joseph-Gabriel: Our conversation thus far has shown that the stakes of teaching African American studies have always been high and remain so. I believe that we have a responsibility to students who seek out our courses as a space in which they can learn about and engage with the histories, narratives, and contemporary realities of people of African descent. With this in mind, my advice to prospective teachers of African American studies is to define the stakes of this work for themselves, to have a clear (even if changing) idea of how their pedagogy engages with the larger field. Be open to learning new and sometimes unexpected things from your students. And in grappling with difficult questions about race, power, and inequality, work with them also to imagine the new worlds that are possible.

King: While some people will have the advantage of gaining their PhDs and/or teaching in African American, American or Africana studies departments, where interdisciplinarity is presumed and theorized, many will have embarked on African American studies from a singular-disciplinary standpoint from which they also fulfil their teaching and research activities. My advice, especially to those in the latter category, is to define and devise ways to make interdisciplinarity have some meaning (and relevance) for your students. This might be as straightforward as creating a soundtrack for your literature class, or as involved as considering the material culture of African American quilting as a context for reading black feminist theory. Wherever possible, extend that effort and process of thinking and theorizing across disciplinary categories with your students.

Jeffries: My advice: don't be afraid to raise and engage contemporary political issues that concern African Americans and Africans throughout the diaspora in the classroom. African American studies is a discipline born of political struggle and teachers should not shy away from contemporary equivalents. Throughout this conversation, everyone has written movingly about the politics of what we do. Well, I am very much of the mind that helping students make sense of contemporary politics ought to be a core component of what we do. Of course, I don't mean standing on a desktop and ranting about this or that political position or party. Instead, I mean working collaboratively with students to help them develop a framework for analysing the world around them that is based on the material being studied in class. In a sense, this is a thought experiment – a challenge to students to take what they're learning in class and apply it to what they see and experience outside class. To do this is to teach in the best tradition of African American studies specifically and the humanities generally.

Dossett: Helping students find ways to legitimize – for themselves – the connections between history making and contemporary politics seems essential. It can be easier for veteran academics to assume this legitimacy, but in a still-colonized curriculum, students need space and time to trace and make connections between power, knowledge production, and the writing of history. I echo Hasan's advice to encourage students to make connections between their study of the past and their experience of the present and Nicole's call to make interdisciplinarity real. I would also place the archive and the tools of knowledge production front and centre. Whether through taking students to university special collections or local public libraries, or through encouraging them to research #ArchivesForBlackLives, histories of knowledge production can help students of African American studies understand what is at stake in creating and curating the black past.

Plath: As I've said above, I also agree that encouraging students to see the relevance of the past to the present should be at the core of what we do. However, this is such an important issue (especially given the political climate in which we find ourselves on both sides of the Atlantic) that perhaps sometimes we can take ourselves and our practice too seriously. Therefore, my advice to someone at the start of a career in teaching generally, and teaching African American studies specifically, is to have *fun*! Teaching can be such a rewarding, thrilling experience (we've all had, I'm sure, that incredible buzz from a seminar discussion that went really well) – so do take the time to enjoy it.