Teaching Anthropology

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Developing Teaching: Reports and Reflections

Teaching Race with Optimism and Hope

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Abstract: Teaching that includes exposing systematic inequalities, racism, and sexism is facing challenges in Florida, USA. While the news media covers the new legislation in Florida, laws that are being replicated across the United States and dovetail with similar political intrusions into academia across the globe, the implications are found with how practices have changed. Reflecting on two decades of teaching on race and ethnicity in global perspective, this article describes the anthropology course offered at an honors college in terms of the teaching style, structure, and content. An anthropology of optimism and hope animates the pedagogy. Yet the course faces scrutiny under 2022 state legislation and is no longer being offered at New College of Florida.

Keywords: race, ethnicity, Florida, lawfare, ethnographies

Preface

After teaching a course in Anthropology titled *Race and Ethnicity in Global Perspective* for two decades, I wanted to share the lessons from the experience even though the context was a fairly unique small liberal arts college. I drafted the manuscript in summer 2022; returned to edit my efforts in December 2022; then my institution, New College of Florida, became the centre of a political battle that received international attention (Goldberg 2023). In brief, with the financial and enrolment viability for the liberal arts college, a member of the State University System of Florida, in doubt, the governor announced new trustees who removed the college president and dismantled the office for Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity toward creating a politically conservative institution. As a tenured professor, supporting junior colleagues and students became the priority as well as teaching *Race and Ethnicity in Global Perspective* in Spring 2023 as the media swirl over teaching on race intensified. I was able to teach the course throughout the spring (a fact that was not clear in January 2023 when a trustee threatened to fire all the faculty and rehire only those who supported the new college mission). My emotional connection to teaching anti-racist anthropology in the spirit of optimism and hope continues even though my connection as an instructor at the liberal arts college became severed prematurely.

A Question

Toward the end of spring semester 2018, one of the two dozen undergraduates in my *Race and Ethnicity in Global Perspective* course asks, just as the session begins, how long I have been teaching the class. Twenty years, I tell the class. She follows up with a question: am I optimistic? She means about social relations, about Race, about ethnonationalism. Since the next class session is going to focus on genocide, I hesitate. We are covering challenging issues as we trace the historical development of the race concept in the United States, following the insights from anthropologist Audrey Smedley (Smedley and Smedley 2012) in *Race in North America: Evolution of a Worldview*, and then discuss examples of social divides around the contemporary world through primary sources and stressing the violence integral to sustaining racism.

At that point of the semester, we have thoroughly reviewed the development of race and ethnicity in the United States, moved to case studies of apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa and the minorities in the People's Republic of China, so I return the question to the student, asking that we centre our consideration of race and ethnicity in that light, and move to that class session's focus on Cyprus and the divides between Turks and Greeks. The eastern Mediterranean island offers a location for discussing the political consequences of ethnic divides; as I explain in the class presentation, British control (1878-1960) accelerated ethnic tensions and

violence, independence brought a complicated ethno-political solution, and war in 1974 separated the two communities, divides that still lingers on the island. I add personal insights based on time spend in Nicosia on a fellowship in 1988, 14 years after a coup attempt and Turkish invasion divided the capital of Cyprus and led to ethnic separation of Greeks and Turks on the island. I describe the early 21st century removal of physical barriers and the continuing social divides. The class session puts forward the continuing divide of the Cypriot capital as a problem for students to consider in light of the race concept as explained over the semester. The question about my personal optimism haunted me for the rest of the semester. The concern has accelerated with current politics in the state I am in, Florida. This article reviews two decades of teaching a course on race and racism, provides details on the class at an honors college, and offers insights for enhancing the quality of student learning on a topic at the centre of American concerns over identity, history, and heritage. I am seeking to honour those students who contacted me over the years, letting me know the content and their efforts continue to inspire them.

This reflection is an in-depth description of a course on race and ethnicity. The goal is to provide descriptions of an anthropology class that seems to have proven useful for undergraduates at an honors college. I share the information in the hope that the details and content are useful to instructors on race and ethnicity. Current political dynamics in the State of Florida suggest having a peer-reviewed publication as documentation matters.

The College Setting

In 1997, I joined the faculty New College of the University of South Florida as their third anthropologist and looked to expand the curriculum at a college with about fifty faculty members and five hundred undergraduates. New College, founded in 1960 in Sarasota on Florida's Gulf Coast, as an innovative undergraduate institution. New College of Florida does not offer grades; rather professors write narrative evaluations under a satisfactory/unsatisfactory scheme where only satisfactory courses appear on the student's transcript. The lack of grades encourages adventurous projects for course evaluations. Teaching on race and racism without grades is liberating, similar to the experience many have discussed on blogs with the anti-essay and other innovations used during the COVID-19 pandemic at various colleges and universities. The goal of the satisfactory/unsatisfactory scheme is mastery of course materials and meeting pedagogical goals with narrative evaluations delineating the strengths and weaknesses of course work including discussion, methods, theory, content, and future potential. The approach is teaching-intensive and requires undergraduates be motivated to learn and employ what they have learned. The courses, though, fit the traditional range for the liberal arts and degrees in Anthropology and other disciplines require similar coursework as other American colleges; the difference is students accumulate commentary on their course work and skills rather than a transcript list of grades and a grade point average (GPA). From my observations, graduates with degrees in Anthropology from New College have done very well in the discipline and other fields and endeavours. From its founding in 1960 to 1974, New College was a private college; with financial and enrolment challenges, the University of South Florida, based in Tampa about 60 miles/100 kilometres away, adopted the program. In 2001, the state of Florida separated the New College program from the University of South Florida and deemed the result New College of Florida, the state's honors college but financial and enrolment challenges continued.

The course radiated out of my long-term interest in social divides, one the key motivating factors in pursuing anthropology as an undergraduate and graduate student. With the opportunity created by a tenure-track position at New College, I developed the course in the late 1990s, haunted by the 1993 genocide in Bosnia and reflecting on U.S. President Bill Clinton creating a Race Initiative in February 1997; the potential to explore the science, anthropology, and social implications of race and ethnicity in a manner that would challenge undergraduates at the honors college. A colleague was offering the *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, focused on race relations in the United States, so I wanted to provide a different perspective for students in the honors college and descriptively named the course *Race and Ethnicity in Global Perspective*. I did not admit even to myself the idealism of the course offering, something I am more comfortable expressing after exposure of murders starting with Trayvon Martin in 2012 in Sanford, Florida, a couple of hours drive from the college. The idealism is best represented by the famous quote from Margaret Mead: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." The course was and is meant to facilitate civic engagement, a hallmark of democracy.

I have taught the course regularly, but the class has changed, and this article describes the class and is meant to offer the trajectory to illuminate transformations in social concerns, pedagogy, and anthropology that some might find useful. Teaching on race in the United States has always been fraught with challenges. After the

massive 2020 civil rights protests triggered by the murder of George Floyd, a political reaction has been expanding. In Florida, one aspect of the new political dynamic intersecting with teaching race and racism is the Stop W.O.K.E. Act of 2022. Before discussing the state legislation, the pedagogy for the course is described leading to the question whether the class is 'woke'.

Changing Race, Changing Course

Spanning nearly a quarter of a century and following a pedagogy that meets students where they are at, I modified, enhanced, and transformed the course over the year. Major shifts involved moving from a bottom-up view of race and ethnicity and genocide to including the perspectives of the perpetrators and elite, highlighting periods of coexistence, examining the commodification of ethnicity, and discussing tensions over immigrants. The changes are not surprising. Syllabi change over time. Or at least they should. More importantly, as I reflect on the syllabi, understanding of race and the concept itself have changed since the late 20th century.

New College is an honors college and students have proven, over the years, to engage sophisticated and nuanced discourse on social differences and their classifications so I sought, and continue to seek, to convey a central concept that would hopefully stay with class participants beyond the semester. Following the argument developed by Audrey Smedley (1993), the course stresses Race as just a way to classify human differences, one developed since the 16th century, but with wide-ranging social implications and consequences. I want students, again following the historical anthropological argument in *Race in North America*, to understand Race as shorthand for a way of knowing, of perceiving, and of interpreting the world, a worldview. We cover the five ideological ingredients to Race (Smedley and Smedley 2012:25): groupings as exclusive and discrete, inequality, outer features reflect inner qualities, behaviours are inherited, and differences are fixed and unalterable. I simplify those notions by noting that Race, as a worldview, connects culture to biology. That simple notion is reformulated as social differences are made to be assumed to be unalterable by linking groupings to the supernatural, biological evolution, geography, intelligence testing, and genetics – different rationalizations, depending on the time and place – but with one clear goal: making social inequalities seem natural. I explain that Race is a powerful tool for the powerful: one can see a person and know something of them, even though it is rarely if ever true. Some students recognize these dynamics quickly and delve into its implications and continually changing dynamics while others wrestle with the concept over the semester and through case studies.

The central argument is built on the analysis by Smedley; across the four editions (1993, 1999, 2007, and 2012), the point reflects the insights from critical anthropology and found its way to a statement by the American Anthropological Association (1998) and a public exhibit – Race: Are We So Different? Integrating the strands, Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015:7) in *Between The World and Me* lays it out concisely:

> Americans believe in the reality of "race" as a defined, indubitable feature of the natural world. Racism – the need to ascribe bone-deep features to people and then humiliate, reduce, and destroy them – inevitably follows from this inalterable condition. In this way, racism is rendered as the innocent daughter of Mother Nature, and one is left to deplore the Middle Passage or the Trail of Tears the way one deplores an earthquake, a tornado, or any other phenomenon that can be cast as beyond the handiwork of man.
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> But race is the child of racism, not the father. And the process of naming "the people" has never been a matter of genealogy and physiognomy so much as one of hierarchy. Difference in hue and hair is old. But the belief in the preeminence of hue and hair, the notion that these factors can correctly organize a society and they signify deeper attributes, which are indelible – this is the new idea at the heart of these new people who have been brought up hopelessly, tragically, deceitfully, to believe they are white.
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> These new people are, like us, a modern invention.

Like many, if not all anthropologists, my books shelves are lined with books on racism, critiquing race, and documenting and tackling social divides. Especially after the summer 2020 demonstrations in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd, even more books, articles, essays, videos, presentations explored, explained, and confronted racism. Keeping up with publications can be challenging; reviewing previous scholarship, particularly in Anthropology, expands the task. Somewhere in the mass of scholarly and popular literature are the tools, approaches, and inspirations for overcoming racism, at least that is the academic assumption.

My motivation for offering the class on race and ethnicity comes from my training in Anthropology, from my undergraduate through graduate education. The centrality of race and anti-racism animate my research and my

commitment to the study of human variation across all space and time, with a clear sense of what the American Anthropological Association (2023) states on its website: the study of what makes us human. And, when I developed and offered the class for the first time in the late 1990s, I understood the course as my opportunity for a sustained critique of racism that could empower the undergraduates to use their observations of social relations, to read more on social divides, and to research and reach meaningful conclusions on the structure of social inequalities and to locate avenues for productive actions to make the world better. That idealism has sustained me. None of us from those classrooms ended racism but might have contributed, in the ways we could, to addressing and confronting racism. I think often of the repeated story that Franz Boas was delivering a speech on December 21, 1942, concerning ways to fight racism when he collapsed and died in the arms of Claude Lévi-Strauss. Boas made the critique of Race, the idea that biology is destiny for humans and that groups of people can be grouped in rank order, central to anthropology and his life's work. The intersection of American Anti-Black racism, his family in Germany suffering from anti-Jewish terror and genocide, and more animated his contributions to the science of Anthropology. Boas' students followed that pathway. Boas and the critique of racism made anthropology an appealing field of study for me. As an undergraduate, I wandered into anthropology and when I began fulfilling requirements for the major the class on the history of Anthropology theory, taught by Audrey Smedley, intertwined the rise of the race concept with the history of anthropology. Much of my graduate research focused not on continuing that argument but on using the argument to historicize social differences in the eastern Mediterranean in order to open up the past for positive possibilities. The engagement with those critiques of racism continued into the present in my recent research on marronage in Florida (Baram 2022). The ontology comes from the timing of Professor Smedley's (1993) *Race in North America: The Evolution of a Worldview* just as the opportunity to teach on race opened up at New College. I had a central text and scholarly argument for a course on race and ethnicity.

Teaching Style

Holly Swyers (2016) in "Rediscovering Papa Franz: Teaching Anthropology and Modern Life" describes using Franz Boas as a co-teacher. Swyers (2016:214) explains "Certainly the textbooks that regularly appear in the mail for me suggest that what I should be using would have lots of pictures and call out boxes and real-world examples from the twenty-first century, plus an online supplement and premade PowerPoint slides." Swyers (2016) shows using the 1928 *Anthropology and Modern Life* with Boas' insights is more engaging than PowerPoint slides. For *Race and Ethnicity in Global Perspective*, I also envisioned the course as having co-teachers, on two levels. In terms of the course readings, students work through race, ethnonationalism, and a cases study through publications. Audrey Smedley was the guide on the history of Race for the first two decades I offered the course, with *Race in North America* going through four editions; with the last edition in 2012, written with her son, I felt I needed an updated volume and substituted Ibram X. Kendi's 2016 *Stamped from the Beginning*. For nationalism, Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* (which has gone through three editions in 1983, 1991, and 2006) was the guide. Finally, an ethnographer of a social divide somewhere outside of the United States, with the case study shifts frequently (see below). The books as co-teacher approach makes the seminar pop: the students are seeing me in dialogue with a scholar and can join in the conversation, with the goal being to join in other conversations beyond the course and the semester. On the other level, I see the course as part of a long conversation on Race and though students read about and a bit from Franz Boas (1858-1942) and W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963), they engage those scholars of Race to recognize the intellectual achievements and political limitations of their academic, social, and transnational tremendous efforts.

Like Stephen Brookfield (2009:14) notes for the contributions to *Teaching Race*: "anyone engaged in this work constantly feels that they have made the wrong choice or could have done better." Brookfield (2009:15) stresses the point: "The fundamental reality and experience of teaching race is feeling as if you're not getting it right." The detailed description of *Race and Ethnicity in Global Perspective* might ground concerns for other instructors in comparison to the experiences and choices I have made.

A key part of my teaching anthropology has been, and the nature of a small honors college allows this approach, to decentre myself in the discussion-based classroom, where undergraduates have intellectual space to question and critique the scholarship. The goals are to grapple with the existing scholarship, hone skills in reading about and observing social inequalities in specific places and striving to be productive actors in reducing if not eradicating the legacies and continuing reproduction of social inequities and inequalities. Anthropology is critical, self-reflective, and argues their examples, all of which facilitates considering, analysing, and struggling against racism.

The Structure of the Course

Building on the extensive and wide-ranging anthropological scholarship on race, the course over the decades changed examples and research projects but sustained its structure. Ever since my college started using Canvas, I think of the course in terms of weeks to fit the virtual platform. Meeting twice a week for ninety minutes each session allows time for presentations and discussions; like many other instructors I start each session with a concise overview of the previous class and end with what I believe we accomplished and foreshadowing the next class.

The semester is fourteen weeks long, with a Fall and a Spring break at the half-way point of the term. The first week is the introduction to the course: I choose several current examples of race and ethnicity in the news from around the world for the first class session. The goal is to situate the study in the contemporary, sending the message that the focus is the present even through much of the first half of the semester is historical. The second class session focuses on the changing meaning of race over time and around the world, allowing a return to themes from the first class and setting the stage for discussion of the semester's goals. Those goals are analytical, and I spent time explaining that the personal can and should be addressed but outside of the classroom with me, fellow students, and (when extant) the Director of the campus Gender and Diversity Center.

The second week focuses on theory, giving the students several examples from anthropology and sociology of definitions and approaches to the study of race; I differentiate those approaches from social psychology's contributions, through short readings. That second week is when students have a feel for the course, and I acknowledge a significant critique of my approach: my insistence that the class discussion focus on the readings rather than personal experiences. I lay out that the classmates can discuss, debate, critique the readings we are sharing; I go further to assert it is challenging, maybe even not possible or polite, to discuss classmates' personal experiences. The social aspect of that pedagogical decision is personal. As a Jew, an Israeli-American, an immigrant, a first-generation in college I was not a good fit for the faculty at the College, even after a quarter-of-a-century of successful teaching and research, so I avoid, as much as possible, my identities while teaching. That is typically read by students as respect for their autonomy: over the semester, some will share their backgrounds and others do not. Given the opportunity, I turn the moments when a student situates themselves in the course to stress the differences between WEB Du Bois and Franz Boas, including a discussion of their personal backgrounds, giving a sense of those scholars' long-term grappling with race in the USA in global perspective. I would expand on the Boas/Du Bois dynamic below.

The next seven weeks move through the time periods, following *Race in North America* by starting with western Europe just before Columbus. Examining Spain and England opens up the contrast between those two colonizing powers. I associate selected USA ethnic groups with each week: Irish, Native Americans, Jews, African Americans, Hispanic/Latine to offer how identity formulation at specific moments had long-lasting consequences. The history and analysis are not tightly tied together, I stress ambiguities and generational dynamics to open up a complex model for social. Throughout the historical trajectory for race in North America, the goal is to allow exploration of present and past as we move through initial colonization, development of chattel slavery, the rise of scientific racism, intelligence testing, and more and their lasting legacies. This framework, developed for *Race in North America*, worked with *Stamped from the Beginning*; I believe it can work for other histories of the race concept in the USA.

After that exploration, we reach the contemporary and the course transitions to explicit consideration of race and ethnicity in the USA and then nationalism around the world. For nationalism, I find Benedict Anderson's (2006) *Imagined Communities* continually useful – some semesters I use the entire book and other times selections.

After a theoretical discussion of how the American concept of Race went global, the concept of nationalism, and the divides ethnonationalism, the course moves to case studies. South Africa is first, focused on the history for the development and dismantling of apartheid. With the end of apartheid coming in 1994, the case study is dated for undergraduates but continually proves useful as a heuristic example of change but no change. After South Africa, the class moves to the People's Republic of China, examining Dru Gladney's ethnographic insights into the statistically small but demographically large Muslim minority. Over the years, I have used the genocide in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the conflict in Israel/Palestine, Spain and Muslim immigrants, Sudan and Darfur, and among others.

The course concludes with Anti-Essentialist Approaches to Classifications, Places, and History for positive conclusions. I credit students who asked why I concluded the course with genocide, and I realized that the organization of the material mattered. So, we cover genocide, with examples, around the three-quarter mark of the semester and conclude with Stephen Jay Gould's conclusion from *Mismeasure of Man* and case studies of coexistence programs to bring out critical insights and highlight places of hope. We use the last two class sessions for students to workshop their final project; this is a major shift from the late 1990s when they formally presented their work to the class. Those final projects are usually research papers, but I increasingly encouraged visual representations.

Central to empowering undergraduates is the semester-long research project, whose ontology is as a traditional research paper. The project is set up as steps: first a proposal to research an example of social divides somewhere on the planet besides the USA, then a paper on the theoretical framing for the study, another paper on ethnonationalism, the workshop presentation, and then the final project. Since New College of Florida employs a satisfactory/unsatisfactory designation system with narrative evaluations, rather than grades, I stress to the class members that their success in that final paper is meaningful to me. I conjure up an image for them: I am sitting at my faculty office desk and reading their work, my hope is that the argument is clear, the connection to course materials is productive, the descriptions illuminate the people and social relations of their case study, and the conclusion is hopeful. Otherwise, I end the semester having failed them. That has resonated nicely with the majority of the students over the years. Some of their final projects were excellent and, especially with the move to visual projects, I encouraged them to share their work on their social media. Several reported to me the positive significance of my support and the feedback they received from friends and family on their efforts.

The Ethnographic Case Studies

As an anthropology course, I ensure class members, including those for whom this is a first anthropology course, gain a sense of the discipline and its approaches. One of the hallmarks of anthropology is arguing via case studies so *Race and Ethnicity in Global Perspective* follows that approach with multiple examples from around the world as well as two in-depth case studies based on an ethnographic text, dropped to one case study in the mid Aughts. The case studies changed over the years:

- Tone Bringa 1994 *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way: Identity and Community in a Central Bosnian Village*
- Dru Gladney 1998 *Ethnic Identity in China: The Making of a Muslim Minority Nationality*
- Grace Feuerverger 2001 *Oasis of Peace: Teaching and Learning Peace in a Jewish-Palestinian Village in Israel*
- Jean and John Comaroff 2009 *Ethnicity, Inc.*
- Fran Markowitz 2010 *Sarajevo: A Bosnian Kaleidoscope*
- Mikaela H. Rogozen-Soltar 2017 *Spain Unmoored: Migration, Conversion, and the Politics of Islam*
- Daniel Monterescu and Haim Hazan 2018 *Twilight Nationalism: Politics of Existence at Life's End*

Discussion focused on the development and sustaining of tensions in those communities, and opportunities to research solutions to the problems of divisions. Throughout the first half of the semester, the argument stresses avoiding blaming the victim, to examine social hierarchies as a problem of the elite not of the oppressed. Albert Einstein expressed the concept as racism being a disease of white people. Ibram X. Kendi (2016:511) explained: "There will come a time when Americans will realize that the only thing wrong with Black people is that they think something is wrong with Black people." That orientation in examination of Bosnia, China, Israel, Spain helps students develop analytical tools for approaching divides around the world and at home, as they expressed in class evaluations and messages sent sometimes years after they graduated.

Kendi (2016) is hopeful. Often times students in the course express that they are not. In the *Prison Notebooks*, Antonio Gramsci (1975 (1929):158-159) wrote:

> You must realize that I am far from feeling beaten…it seems to me that… a man out to be deeply convinced that the source of his own moral force is in himself — his very energy and will, the iron coherence of ends and means — that he never falls into those vulgar, banal moods, pessimism and optimism. My own state of mind synthesises these two feelings and transcends them: my mind is pessimistic, but my will is optimistic. Whatever the situation, I imagine the worst that could happen in order to summon up all my reserves and will power to overcome every obstacle.

Similarly, Emile Habibi titles his 1974 novel *The Secret Life of Saeed: The Pessoptimist*; the pessoptimist is the main character, a tragicomic figure whose passivity and failures show readers the dance of hope and despair under untenable historical conditions.

Following the inspiration of bell hooks and Paulo Freire, the approach in the course is hopeful. Paulo Freire, famously, critiques the banking model of learning and offers critical approaches for making change. Focusing on dialogue, mutual respect works both for the classroom and for students to work through their understandings of the oppressed in their research projects. bell hooks, throughout wide-range intellectual projects, inspires critical inquiry into what produces and perpetuates systems as well as centring the goal for new possibilities grounded in love.

To sustain that hopeful approach to social divisions around the world, the intellectual pillars continue to be WEB Du Bois and Franz Boas, with essays by bell hooks and Audre Lorde adding texture to the early 20th century concerns, encouraging students to wrestle with the history of approaches to dismantling racism. Having students read essays by these intellectuals, augmented by what I have gleaned from autobiographic and biographs, situates the scholarly activism in terms of real people not just names on publications and in books.

Liss (1998) differentiates the approaches by Boas and Du Bois. Boas focused his efforts to make science an instrument against racism and nationalism, making his arguments for social change and racial justice through scientific authority. Du Bois addressed the political issues. Du Bois understood racism as a modern problem and Boas considered racism as hatred of the stranger. While the differences are meaningful, Liss (1998:129) makes clear Du Bois and Boas shared a common "experiences of marginality and diaspora."

Continual Concerns

New College is small, with enrolment ranging over the last quarter century between five hundred and eight hundred fifty undergraduates. With small classes (ranged from a dozen to two dozen), I can ask students to delve deeply into the intellectual history of the race concept and to ensure that the intellectual exercise would have meaning for their social context. Two decades later, there have been many changes in the American worldview. Some of the historical highlights include:

- I set up the course in the late 1990s haunted by the Bosnian Genocide (1992–1995), particularly the July 1995 massacre in Srebrenica.
- In a speech at University of California San Diego in 1997, U.S. President Bill Clinton announced One America in the 21st Century: The President's Initiative on Race.
- February 2003 War and turmoil in Darfur; US Secretary of State Colin L. Powell labels the violence as genocide on September 9, 2004.
- Election on November 4, 2008, of Barack Obama.
- July 30, 2009 The White House 'beer summit' Vice President Joe Biden, Harvard professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Cambridge police Sergeant James Crowley, and President Obama after Professor Gates was arrested at his Cambridge, Massachusetts home by local police officer.
- February 26, 2012, in Sanford, Florida, United States, George Zimmerman fatally shot Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old African American high school student.
- During the Syrian civil war, large numbers of refugees from Syria and Afghanistan to Germany during summer 2015.
- Ferguson, Missouri: the shooting of Michael Brown occurred on August 9, 2014
- The 2016 election of Donald J. Trump.
- The January 2017 the Muslim Ban (Executive Order 13769, titled Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States).
- May 2018 U.S. Department of Justice announces its "zero tolerance" policy, with children separated from their parents at the US Mexico border.
- Summer 2020 triggered by the police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, a massive series of demonstrations across the United States and beyond proclaiming Black Lives Matter.
- January 2021 United States labels China's actions in Xinjiang as genocide.

At several points, I wondered to the class if the social relevance of the course had faded- as if Race faded as a pressing concern for Americans. Events proved otherwise. And the undergraduates addressed the concern with recognition of their own position in society. Although informal, the course benefited from a visitor: from 2013 to 2015, bell hooks was a visiting distinguished scholar at New College of Florida. Coming to the *Race and Ethnicity in Global Perspective* course, the Black feminist theorist/educator enhanced the meaning of the approach and concerns.

Is this 'Woke'?

'Woke' entered popular discourse organically, representing being conscious of social inequalities and inequities. As the audience for the term expanded, some became offended and transformed the term into a negative attitude, becoming a term for political battles over education. Over the two decades, I introduced students to the terminology from both those advocating for the division of people into hierarchies and those who opposed racism, including critical race theory, intersectionality, and 'woke'. None of these were essential for the anthropological argument of the course but were helpful to connect contemporary discourse with the history of race and movements, intellectual and social, to oppose racism. The terminology gained urgency early in the 2020s.

New College of Florida is a member of the State University System of Florida. In 2022, the governor signed the STOP WOKE (Stop the Wrongs to Our Kids and Employees) Act that, among other features, provides employees, parents and students a private right of action. As lawfare, a means to delegitimize scholarship, the STOP WOKE led to universities asking faculty to state that their courses are open to multiple perspectives, legitimating the concerns expressed in the act. The act made unlawful suggesting "A person, by virtue of his or her race, color, sex, or national origin, bears personal responsibility for and must feel guilt, anguish, or other forms of psychological distress because of actions, in which the person played no part, committed in the past by other members of the same race, color, national origin, or sex."

The text of the bill includes (italics added):

> (3) The Legislature acknowledges the fundamental truth that all individuals are equal before the law and have inalienable rights. Accordingly, instruction on the topics enumerated in this section and supporting materials must be consistent with the following principles of individual freedom:
> (a) No individual is inherently racist, sexist, or oppressive, whether consciously or unconsciously, solely by virtue of his or her race or sex.
> (b) No race is inherently superior to another race.
> (c) No individual should be discriminated against or receive adverse treatment solely or partly on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, disability, or sex.
> (d) Meritocracy or traits such as a hard work ethic are not racist but fundamental to the right to pursue happiness and be rewarded for industry.
> (e) An individual, by virtue of his or her race or sex, does not bear responsibility for actions committed in the past by other members of the same race or sex.
> *(f) An individual should not be made to feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress on account of his or her race.*
> Instructional personnel may facilitate discussions and use curricula to address, in an age-appropriate manner, the topics of sexism, slavery, racial oppression, racial segregation, and racial discrimination, including topics relating to the enactment and enforcement of laws resulting in sexism, racial oppression, racial segregation, and racial discrimination. However, classroom instruction and curriculum may not be used to indoctrinate or *persuade students* to a particular point of view inconsistent with the principles of this subsection or state academic standards. (Florida Senate Bill 2022, SB 148)

The italics represent the interesting nuances for this legislation. In all my years teaching, I have never been able to gage the feelings for all the students in a class. I can sense discomfort and distress, but guilt and anguish are challenging. Persuasion seems like a skill to develop and enhance in a college classroom.

The confrontation with woke is a hallmark of the current Florida governor. In December 2022, in a challenge to the suspension of a County State Attorney, a lawyer for the Florida governor defined woke as "the belief there are systemic injustices in American society and the need to address them" (Rohrer 2022). The course is meant to get undergraduates to critically think about addressing injustices, using the anthropological approach of comparisons by asking them to delve into social divides in a country other than the USA. In January 2023, the Florida governor announced new members for the New College board of trustees with a goal of transforming

the institution into an institution modelled after Hillsdale College, a conservative Christian college in Michigan. The new board of trustees removed the college president and the chief diversity officer and, in April 2023, denied all five faculty members who were candidates for tenure. As Michelle Goldberg (2023) wrote in an opinion piece for the New York Times, quoting the faculty member of the Board of Trustees, who resigned from the board and from the college with that tenure decision: "There's a grieving process for the New College that was, which is passing away. I really loved the New College that was, but I am at peace that it's gone now." I left my position as Professor of Anthropology at the end of the academic year and currently am employed at a museum.

Conclusion: Enhancing Student Learning

Courses are the source of knowledge, methodologies, and problem solving. By fronting hope, rather than optimism, by withdrawing rather than centring my own identity, and by insisting on careful, collective understandings of the trajectories, possibilities for addressing inequities are provided for the students. Trusting the undergraduates is a key aspect for avoiding divisive politics and offering avenues for change. The course, *Race and Ethnicity in Global Perspective*, will no longer be offered at New College of Florida but the description is offered as an avenue for others to consider when teaching on the critical issues of social identity.

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