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Intersectionality and Feminist Pedagogy: Lessons from Teaching about Racism and Economic Inequity

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Intersectionality and Feminist Pedagogy: Lessons from Teaching about Racism and Economic Inequity

Abstract

This paper utilizes Rochester, NY, as a case study to argue that approaching race intersectionally and across disciplines creates a stronger model of feminist pedagogy. It is based on our work in the classroom and on the Fisher Race Initiatives—a series of three interactive workshops we created on our campus to create change in the aftermath of the Michael Brown shooting in Ferguson, MO, and in the subsequent rise of the #BlackLivesMatter movement. Our goals were to promote dialogue on race, to expose participants to factual information on race, and to emphasize the intersectional causes of poverty in the Rochester region. We use the framework of Gunnar Myrdal's vicious circle theory about the perpetual cycle of black poverty and white racism to present how racism engenders and promulgates economic inequity, and we describe that framework here in the context of the Rochester region. We look at historical and current examples in the housing and education markets as specific examples of institutionalized racism and how it perpetuates the cycle of poverty. We conclude our paper by reflecting on how this intersectional interdisciplinary approach provides valuable lessons for faculty and students on diminishing unaware/unintentional racism and white privilege and promoting a more equitable campus committed to social justice.

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INTERSECTIONALITY AND FEMINIST
PEDAGOGY:
LESSONS FROM TEACHING ABOUT RACISM
AND ECONOMIC INEQUITY

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INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2014, in the aftermath of the Michael Brown shooting in Ferguson, MO, and in the subsequent rise of the #BlackLivesMatter movement, we came together at our small liberal arts college to discuss what we could do to create change on our campus, where race relations mirror some of the troubling larger cultural trends, not of overt violence, but of silence, micro-aggressions, and a lack of productive dialogue about race. Each of us teaches race issues in the classroom, and has noted that attempting to move students beyond what Gloria Yamato refers to as unaware/unintentional racism has been challenging. Yamato explains this form of racism as a lack of awareness of white privilege: “With the best of intentions, the best of educations, and the greatest generosity of heart, whites, operating on the misinformation fed to them from day one, will behave in ways that are racist, will perpetuate racism by being ‘nice’ the way we’re taught to be nice” (Yamato 100).

To help address racism, we created the Fisher Race Initiatives (FRI)—a series of interactive workshops where faculty would provide a brief lecture on a race issue based on their discipline, followed by individual round table discussions that culminated in a large group report back at the end. Our goals were to promote dialogue on race, to increase awareness of white privilege, and to expose participants to

factual information on race. When we presented our FRI experience to the Seneca Falls Dialogues at a conference, we were met in part with some of the same resistance that we face in the classroom. Some audience members expressed a desire to not differentiate into identity groups and strongly expressed that they believed there would be no “solution” to racism if we were so identity based. They argued that there was no need to differentiate between politics of white feminists, feminists of color, liberal feminists, socialist feminists, radical feminists—that such divisions took away from what feminists could achieve together. Indeed, as one faculty member participant clearly expressed: “Why can’t we all just get along?”

Such reactions in the classroom, at the Dialogues, and in our everyday lives in the current political climate have underscored for us some critical and intertwining lessons at the heart of this paper, the core of which is the need for intersectionality. The experience of preparing and presenting the Fisher Race Initiatives dialogues was enriching for the authors professionally, as we came to this project from very different fields: one with a joint appointment in Women and Gender Studies and English, another from Sociology, and a third from Biology. As a result of our experiences preparing for and presenting about the Fisher Race Dialogues, we recognized that our cross-disciplinary collaboration had broader implications for intersectional third-wave feminist pedagogy.

With Rochester as a specific case study, we have worked together across disciplines over multiple semesters on race inequity and argue that approaching race intersectionally and across disciplines creates a stronger model of feminist pedagogy. We argue that an intersectional lens is needed to fully understand the causes of poverty in the Rochester region, but also that it is essential for teachers in white spaces to examine issues of race and class that critically inform white privilege. Our collaborative work provides lessons about teaching and learning about intersectionality; in order to understand the economic status of women of color in Rochester and elsewhere, it is necessary to understand the historical, rhetorical, and sociological phenomena that engender and promulgate racism and economic inequity.

I. Race and Poverty in Rochester

One initial aim of the Fisher Race Initiative was to explore how and why the same factors that motivated the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement were present in Rochester, Monroe County, and the Finger Lakes region of New York State. The pattern in this geographic area—an impoverished population primarily made up of people of color in densely populated, aging urban areas experiencing high crime rates and aggressive policing and surrounded by higher income, whiter suburbs—is prevalent throughout the United States. The Rochester Area Community Foundation compiles data on community indicators of poverty via its research arm, ACT. Their annual report in 2016 dramatically illustrates this demographic and economic pattern, as reported in tables 1 and 2.

Table 1

Poverty Rate in the city of Rochester, NY, and surrounding communities.

	Poverty Rate
Rochester City	33.8%
Suburban Monroe County	8.3%
Surrounding Finger Lakes County	12.5%

Source: Rochester Area Community Foundation (18)

Table 2

Poverty rates (percentages) by race in the Finger Lakes, New York State, and the United States.

	All races	Whites	African Americans
Finger Lakes Region	14.3	10.6	36.2
NY State excluding New York City (“Upstate”)	11.8	9.6	24
NY State	15.6	11.3	23.5
United States	15.6	12.8	27.3

Source: Rochester Area Community Foundation (13)

The ubiquity of this demographic pattern across the U.S. contributes to a perception that it is somehow “natural.” To address this

perception, the biologist in our group examined the issue of innate differences among human racial groups in the Fisher Race Initiatives dialogues. It is definitively the case that race is not biologically meaningful, but in our experience, it is essential to address this common misperception up front. Once the issue of systemic biological difference was rejected, dialogue participants needed to examine what makes race “real”—the reality of race is that it is a social construction.

The English and Women and Gender Studies Professor asked participants to look at the scientific racism of the 19th century eugenics movement via “morphological and aesthetic trees of the human race”—images of trees whose branches were labeled with categories of human races. Rhetorically, the trees were used as markers of difference and inferiority so that at a glance, viewers could understand the racial hierarchy and know who was least worthy of legal or social consideration. Created by Europeans, human history was imaged as progressive, with the European on top as the pinnacle of progress, beauty, and development, and the African and aboriginal peoples at the nadir as the less evolved and least attractive. In the workshop, students discussed how race was constructed—and the rhetorical purpose of *creating* difference so that some races would “naturally” serve others and deserve to be impoverished or otherwise disenfranchised. Giving students a historical framework to understand the origin of racial categorization and hierarchies is critically important in avoiding victim-blaming, which so often happens to impoverished minority communities.

HISTORICAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO ECONOMIC INEQUALITY IN MONROE COUNTY: REDLINING AND INSTITUTIONAL RACISM

After developing a better understanding about the socially constructed nature of race, FRI dialogue participants were encouraged to think about factors that have created racial and economic inequity in modern Monroe County. One important contributor was the discriminatory nature of the federal government’s official housing policies in the middle 20th century, details of which we provided to participants.

Established in 1934, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) revolutionized home ownership by creating the current financial mortgage system whereby a home buyer can purchase a home by putting down 10 percent or 20 percent of the cost and financing the rest through a bank or lending institution. This made homeownership possible to millions of Americans who previously could not have afforded to buy a home outright (Smith). Mortgages underwritten by the FHA had to conform to *The Underwriting Handbook*, which, among other things, specified the types and qualities of properties considered worthy of mortgage approval. A key part of the handbook were the “residential security maps,” created by the Home Owners’ Loan Coalition (HOLC) for 239 cities between 1935 and 1940. The security maps delineated four color categories for neighborhoods—from green for those considered safest for mortgage lending—to blue, yellow, and finally red for those neighborhoods considered poor financial risks and not suitable for lending at easy credit terms. HOLC maps were purportedly used to indicate the security level for real estate investments; however, property assessments were made based on racist assumptions. The primary determinant of financial risk was the racial and ethnic composition of the neighborhood where the property existed. “Communities that were all white, suburban and far away from minority areas received the highest rating, coded green on maps. Communities that were all minority or in the process of changing, got the lowest rating and the color red. They were ‘redlined’” (Smith).

When we examined the HOLC maps for our region, it was clear that a similar pattern was true in the city of Rochester. The area encompassed by the HOLC had an African-American population of less than 1 percent in 1934—still, 69% of the mapped area was colored yellow or red, as a result of higher levels of immigrant populations (Nelson et al.). For example, redlined area “D7” on the Rochester map was composed of 20% foreign families, Italian and Polish in nationality. The map description makes clear that it was neither the property nor the location that was the reason for redlining: “This area is far better than a slum district. There is nothing particularly the matter with it ... it has

simply deteriorated into a relatively poor man's neighborhood." The writers make clear that the neighborhood's chief drawback is its inhabitants. In fact, the description continues with an overall positive assessment: "The houses are set back a little from shaded streets. The lots are a bit narrow and not very well maintained. But it is convenient and there are some light manufacturing plants affording employment. Transportation is good. Stores ... churches and schools are handy. There are all city facilities. The land is flat" (Nelson et al.). HOLC maps segregated communities across the United States for generations by enshrining the principle that white neighborhoods were safer to invest in (Denton 65). Between 1934 and 1962, the federal government underwrote 120 billion dollars in new housing using the guidance of *The Underwriting Handbook*. Less than 2% of these mortgages went to non-whites under the principle that permitting black families to move in would cause neighborhood housing values to decline—simply because they were black (Smith). In Rochester, as European immigrants assimilated as "whites" and moved to the suburbs during the mid-twentieth century, they were replaced in city neighborhoods by African-Americans moving in from the southern United States. While the government could have mandated a nondiscrimination policy or at least allowed local lenders to make autonomous decisions, they instead created a federal policy that institutionalized racism in Rochester and across the United States:

From its inception, FHA set itself up as the protector of the all-white neighborhood. It sent its agents into the field to keep Negroes and other minorities from buying houses in white neighborhoods. It exerted pressure against builders who dared to build for minorities, and against lenders willing to lend on mortgages. This official agency not only kept Negroes in their place but pointed at Chinese, Mexicans, American Indians, and other minorities as well. (Abrams 230)

Presenting this information within a historical frame at FRI enabled participants to better understand the systemic nature of institutionalized racism in the housing market. Thus when we moved to

current issues of racial inequity in Rochester, students were better able to understand how the housing market privileged white citizens as public policy and discriminated against citizens of color. This framework made students less likely to blame people of color for their impoverished condition.

By 2010, the “D7” neighborhood had an African-American population of 25 percent. In fact, in aggregate, the redlined areas on the 1934 map correspond to what Rochester city planners today refer to as “the crescent,” a ring of neighborhoods surrounding downtown that are high poverty and inhabited primarily by people of color. FHA policy thus ensured that white citizens accrued wealth in the form of their homes, while black and other citizens of color were denied access to home ownership. The maps may have been delineated in red, yellow, blue, and green, but they spoke most vividly in black and white.

In 1968, President Johnson signed the Fair Housing Act that removed racial language from the federal housing policy, officially ending legal discrimination. However, the massive project of suburbanization that occurred in the 1950s and 60s cast the die for continued segregation. Modern residential segregation helps explain why discriminatory lending practices continue even today. Under the leadership of Attorney General Eric Schneiderman, New York State led an investigation of Five Star Bank for discriminatory lending practices, including redlining. In 2015, the Attorney General’s office released its findings, including that Five Star had actively practiced redlining for at least seven years. Five Star Bank had “excluded all predominantly minority neighborhoods in the Rochester area from [its] mortgage lending business [and] deemed loans secured by property outside of the bank’s lending area to be ‘undesirable’” (“A.G. Schneiderman Secures” par. 1). The Bank had also required a minimum mortgage amount so high that many of the bank’s mortgage products were unavailable in predominantly minority neighborhoods. Just as the HOLC had done for the FHA in the late 1930’s, Five Star created a map defining its lending area to include most of the surroundings of the city of Rochester, but to exclude Rochester

itself and all of the predominantly minority neighborhoods in and around Rochester from at least 2009.

Even 47 years after the passage of the Fair Housing Act, evidence of racial discrimination in access to the mechanisms of wealth creation is still with us. Foregrounding the racial analysis within a historical context is pedagogically useful because it allows students to see the long-standing implications of living within a racist system. One of the benefits of privilege is to presume that people exist on a level playing field, and some of our white students are guilty of this assumption. Some were shocked to discover that such lending practices still continue in an America they believed offered equality to all.

For some of the students of color in the workshops, the specific history of 19th century racist housing practices may be unknown, but the current practices of racism in Rochester are often familiar. One black student approached one of us after the workshop to ask if she could take extra materials to share with her family whom she stated had been denied a loan from Five Star Bank. The profound economic impact of the institutionalized racist housing policy in the mid-twentieth century on the continued cycle of poverty and divestment of wealth in black and immigrant communities cannot be understated. It provides valuable lessons on our campus on contemporary privilege and inequality from an interdisciplinary lens.

SOCIOLOGICAL FACTORS THAT MAINTAIN SEGREGATION AND ECONOMIC INEQUITY: MYRDAL'S VICIOUS CIRCLE

In addition to our biological and historical approaches in FRI, we also employed a sociological framework, one that took a holistic perspective in explaining what appears to be a never-ending cycle of racial inequity. In *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, which was originally published in 1944, Myrdal proposed that there was a “vicious circle” that prevented blacks from full inclusion and incorporation in the U.S. In his highly influential work, Myrdal suggested that the effects of white prejudice and discrimination led to lower standards of living for blacks (vis-à-vis employment

discrimination, residential segregation, and other effects of Jim Crow laws), which also affected their supposed manners and morals. In turn, these adaptive behavioral patterns reinforced white prejudice, creating a perpetual cycle of poverty, prejudice, and discrimination for blacks.

Despite being published prior to major Civil Rights legislation in the 1960s, an era that many white undergraduate students often assume fixed all of the race problems in the U.S., Myrdal's work continued to inform the writings of social theorists interested in understanding race, poverty and justice in the U.S. Among these theorists is David James, who asserted in 1994 that the racial ghetto, a result of past overt racism and discrimination supported by the state, continues to be a "race-making situation." Referencing Elijah Anderson's book *Streetwise*, James suggested that an emergent "street" culture had become an integral part of Myrdal's "vicious circle" as an adaptive behavioral pattern which also contributes to white fear of black criminality.

In our FRI dialogues, the Sociology professor shared his expertise on racial inequality in the justice system. Segregation in cities, as we've described with Rochester above, results in lower standards of living which in turn contributes to higher rates of crime—or rather detection of street level crime—in black urban neighborhoods. Street crimes include both violent and nonviolent crimes. Some examples of violent crimes include homicide, aggravated assault, robbery, forcible rape and generally any type of offense involving the use or threat of force (e.g., domestic violence). Nonviolent crimes generally include property, drug and public order offenses. Although these are often ambiguously referred to altogether as street crimes because many tend to occur in an observable public space, the category of street crime is intended to make it distinct from white-collar crime, which often occurs behind closed doors. The division between street crime and white-collar crime reflects the social class stratification of crime itself, as white-collar crime is almost exclusively committed by middle and upper class professionals who have more opportunities to commit these types of crimes.

Still, Americans tend to be concerned almost exclusively with street crimes. Because blacks are more likely to be poor, they are also disproportionately represented in street crimes. As Shaun Gabbidon and Helen Greene detail in their book *Race and Crime*, blacks and other racial minorities are overrepresented in crime statistics. After reviewing the extensive research in the area of study that Gabbidon and Greene describe in their book, one should not be surprised that blacks and Latinos make up nearly 60% of the prison population while representing only about 29% of the U.S. population (see Sakala). Indeed, although Gabbidon and Greene do not explicitly state this, the organization of their book as well as the research they cite offer an alternative explanation for the “criminal justice funnel.” The idea of the criminal justice funnel is often taught in criminal justice courses to explain that, due to limited resources and other factors, only certain crimes actually make their way through the judicial process—from arrest to adjudication to trial to sentencing and ultimately to corrections. Their book details how nonwhites, especially African Americans, are disadvantaged throughout the entire process.

As documented by Gabbidon and Greene, at every stage of the “justice” system, nonwhites seem to have a higher likelihood to progress through the justice system while whites seem to have a higher likelihood to become excluded from it. At the level of policing, nonwhites are more likely to become included due to biased practices ranging from racial profiling to hot-spot or community policing. Throughout the process with the courts, whites are more likely to become excluded as they are more likely to be able to post bail, and posting bail increases the likelihood of a successful defense. Nonwhites are also more likely to be excluded from a jury, and thus, implicit biases against nonwhites are more likely to lead to the successful prosecution of nonwhites rather than whites. Moreover, while research indicates that public defenders are just as effective as private attorneys in defending their clients, private attorneys tend to be able to get their clients lighter sentences; white offenders—due to class divisions as we described above—are more likely to be able to hire their own private attorney. Likewise, stereotypically “black” crimes, such as

possession of crack, will garner lengthier sentences than crimes not associated with poor blacks (e.g., possession of cocaine).

The vicious circle model provided us and our FRI dialogue participants an explanation for persistent black poverty and high crime rates in urban areas that allowed us to move on from ideas of “natural” or “deserved” that sometimes infect discussions of racial inequity on campus. It also provided a hypothesis that we could begin to test given the current day conditions in Rochester and Monroe County.

The Vicious Circle at Work in Rochester

In Monroe County, municipal and school district boundaries helped to create and continue to maintain deep racial and economic segregation, aided by the principles of the vicious circle. EdBuild, a non-profit organization that advocates for more equitable public school funding processes, analyzed differences in child poverty rates across the over 33,000 school district boundaries in the United States and reported on the 50 most segregating borders (11). Three of the 50 borders were between the Rochester City School District (RCSD) and neighboring suburban districts: Penfield, Brighton, and West Irondequoit. (For our comparison in Table 3 we used data from the US Census to compare demographic and economic data of the approximate boundaries of RCSD with those of the Penfield and Brighton school districts. West Irondequoit was excluded from this analysis because the school district boundary encompasses just half of the census boundary for the suburb.) In truth, this analysis under-represents economic segregation in Monroe County, as several wealthy suburban school districts in the county do not share an immediate border with RCSD.

It is clear from the data in table 3 that the city of Rochester is significantly blacker and poorer than the adjacent suburbs. Inequality extends beyond segregation and income to differences in total wealth as measured by home value; the median value for a home in the city is less than half that in these neighboring communities.

Table 3

Economic and demographic characteristics of the city of Rochester, NY, compared to adjacent suburbs of Penfield and Brighton, NY.

	Rochester	Penfield	Brighton
% White population (2010)	43.7	92.6	79.8
% African American population (2010)	41.7	2.1	5.1
Median household income	\$30,969	\$78,469	\$66,149
Median home value	\$76,200	\$179,800	\$170,300

Source: US Census

The racial and economic segregation illustrated by tables 1 – 3 are a direct result of government policies in the past (e.g. redlining) that impoverished African Americans and that continue to feed segregation and impoverishment via the vicious circle. The circle is further exacerbated by the impact of segregation on families and thus on the academic success and prospects for their children. Table 4 summarizes data from the ACT Rochester report illustrating that those who are the poorest in the city are families with young children, especially those headed by single women. The poverty rates of all families with children in the city greatly exceed rates for similar families in the surrounding communities.

Table 4

Poverty rate (percent) of families with different characteristics in the city of Rochester compared to the Finger Lakes Region.

	All families	Families with children under 18	Families of married couples	Female-headed families	Female-headed families with children under 18
Rochester City	31	46.6	11.6	49	59.9
Finger Lakes Region	10.2	18.2	3.6	31.9	42.5

Source: Rochester Area Community Foundation (15)

The disproportionate impact of segregation on the lives of women and their young children is evident in school district rankings. Buffalo Business First ranked all 431 Upstate New York school districts with enrollments greater than 200 students using a formula based on test results from 2011 through 2014. Of the schools in our highly segregating list, Penfield was 7th in the rankings, Brighton 8th, and West Irondequoit 23rd. The Rochester City School District was 431st; the lowest possible ranking. Because families with children take the academic rankings of school districts into account when choosing housing, those with the means to generally seek to live in the highest ranked districts. These decisions result in a further decline in housing values in the city as family homes there attract fewer potential buyers. The net results of seemingly non-racially motivated individual decisions further entrench the racial segregation of the region, resulting in poor African Americans becoming concentrated in the city of Rochester and city homeowners becoming further impoverished and unable to move elsewhere as the values of their homes decline.

White families in Monroe County do not choose to live in the suburbs only because of differences in school quality; they also choose the suburbs because of perceived differences in personal safety. Upon examining arrest rates as a part of the justice system, we are able to see that there are great disparities in the greater Rochester area. In a report by Meaghan McDermott for the *Democrat & Chronicle*, an illustrative table shows that the arrest rate of blacks in Rochester for 2012 was approximately 65%, which is about 25% higher than the black population in Rochester.

In Gates, the black community represents about 10 percent of the town's population. But in 2011 and 2012, more than 40 percent of all arrests police made there were of black people, according to statistics provided by the town's Police Department to the FBI...Within Monroe County, the average disparity rate means blacks are arrested at a rate about six times higher than people of other races. The highest rate was in Irondequoit, where blacks

are nearly 8 times more likely to be arrested than non-blacks.
(McDermott pars. 1-5)

These local statistics may only represent a tip of the iceberg in racial disparities in the local justice system. Recent research by the *New York Times*, for example, suggests that there are glaring racial disparities in New York State prisons favoring whites including excessive use of force, harassment, periods of solitary confinement, and the rate of success in parole board hearings. Perhaps also very chilling is the fact that such official statistics of crime, end up reinforcing stereotypes, which brings us back to how racist ideologies affect institutional practices within Myrdal's vicious circle.

In Rochester, we have seen that historical white prejudice resulted in residential segregation. Residential segregation then produced unequal outcomes, such as in education, disproportionately creating lower standards of living for blacks. As expressed by rates of street crime, this lower standard of living leads to oppositional cultures among poor blacks. These oppositional cultures then reinforce white prejudice, which is used to rationalize continued institutional discrimination, such as in the criminal justice system (see Shaun Gabbidon and Helen Greene). White prejudice and discrimination are then used to maintain residential segregation, continuing the perpetual cycle that Myrdal originally coined as the "vicious circle."

Finally, we note that segregation, concentrated black poverty, inequity in education, and extraordinarily high levels of incarceration among black men all affect black women disproportionately. To echo the #BlackLivesMatter movement, the reason why race and poverty need to matter for feminists is because black women's lives matter.

II. The Importance of Intersectionality in Feminist Pedagogy

Teaching about race and equity at our small private liberal arts college poses some significant challenges. As Peggy McIntosh pointed out in her groundbreaking essay "White Privilege and Male Privilege," students have been trained to conceive of racism as specific bad acts that prejudiced whites do to people of color, rather than thinking of the corollary aspect of racism: white privilege, and how it benefits whites

and perpetuates racism. White students regularly express unaware/unintentional racism—that is, they don't conceive of themselves as racist, don't intend to be racist, and generally react defensively when they are implicated in racism. This occurs in large part because, as McIntosh asserts about her education, many white people have “no training in seeing [themselves] as an oppressor, as an unfairly advantaged person, or as a participant in a damaged culture” (79). For many white students, the desire to see sameness also erases the lived experience of discrimination and harassment faced by students of color. At the same time, students of color have approached us with issues of racism on campus. It is clear that there is a very real need to create a climate of greater equity.

We understand that addressing racism is everyone's responsibility in order to create a stronger, more unified campus and to better prepare students for entering the larger culture. To do so effectively, we see the value of organizing our teaching around third wave feminist principles. The third wave originated from the exclusion of women of color and the recognition by Collins and other black feminists of the *necessity* of including their voices and addressing the issues of black feminists who had been silenced during the second wave. As a black woman, Collins also recognized that black nationalists were ignoring issues that mattered to her as a woman. And further, she expressed that as a black *lesbian* woman, other black women were just as likely to oppress her based on her sexual orientation. Audre Lorde, too, recognized that one's identity could not be parceled out, and she added to this understanding the critical recognition that difference is constructed in order to justify the mistreatment of those labeled “different”:

Institutionalized rejection of difference is an absolute necessity in a profit economy which needs outsiders as surplus people. As members of such an economy, we have *all* been programmed to respond to the human difference between us with fear and loathing and to handle that difference in one of three ways: ignore it, and if that is not possible, copy it if we think it is dominant, or

destroy it if we think it is subordinate. But we have no patterns for relating across our human differences as equals. As a result, those differences have been misnamed and misused in the service of separation and confusion. (Lorde 704)

Our experience exploring the historical and sociological bases for racial segregation and economic inequality in Monroe County illustrates the power of interdisciplinary collaboration and suggests a way forward: cross-disciplinary intersectional approaches in teaching challenging subjects. This pedagogical method provides a multitude of benefits for both students and faculty. One of the greatest advantages for faculty of intersectional collaborative teaching and workshopping on issues of race and justice across disciplines is the sense of community engagement that develops in the discovery of peers who are similarly committed to issues of equality. Rather than being siloed within a particular field, which can sometimes occur on campus, working across disciplines and across schools helps increase ally-ship and diminish the potential for isolation, a particular vulnerability on a small campus. Our own collaboration grew from FRI, to shared teaching materials, to conferences, to organizing other collaborative ventures on campus and expanding to include more faculty. In the current political climate, as we are writing this paper, conflicts are erupting across the U.S. in the wake of the 2016 presidential election, and faculty from across the campus have collaborated in interdisciplinary “teach-ins” that have some of the same qualities as the FRI dialogues.

Interdisciplinarity has benefits for students, too, who see a level of engagement from faculty across a wide variety of fields, disrupting the notion that studying race is the sole purview of those in racial, ethnic, gender studies or similar disciplines. Students are also less likely to disconnect or distance themselves from issues of equity when they are integrated into the curriculum across campus, rather than simply in the courses where they might expect and thus many may seek to avoid. The interdisciplinary and intersectional approach allows students to gain insights on the topics of racism and inequity from multiple fields and

integrate knowledge across disciplines so that they have a broader conceptual framework on which to draw for their own analyses.

The Fisher Race Initiative at St. John Fisher College has become reinvigorated with student activism; we have witnessed an unprecedented level of engagement in coalition building across many categories of difference. Leadership from the Black Student Union, Feminist Alliance, and the Gay Straight Alliance met with us privately to share their concerns about race and diversity issues, and through our experiences of interdisciplinarity and intersectional pedagogy, we encouraged them to meet together to strengthen their understanding of one another and lessen their sense of isolation on campus. Ultimately, the students created a coalition called the Unity Council comprised of members from the campus's diversity clubs with the goal of promoting conversation and understanding about people from diverse backgrounds.

It is critically important that as students of color and those from diverse backgrounds come together to find strength in coalition building, members of the campus with privilege do the work it takes to understand why those coalitions are so necessary, and work to dismantle privilege and decenter whiteness as the normative experience. Moving privileged students and faculty beyond the false equality of the colorblind experience, of "I don't see color," is central in creating a more equitable campus that is responsive to the realities of the world in which we live: one where race matters, where black lives matter. "If the problem of the twentieth century was, in W. E. B. Du Bois's famous words, 'the problem of the color line,' then the problem of the twenty-first century is the problem of colorblindness, the refusal to acknowledge the causes and consequences of enduring racial stratification" (Murakawa 7). Approaching race intersectionally and across disciplines provides more opportunities for those causes and consequences to be acknowledged and makes it more difficult to deny inequality and perpetuate unaware/unintentional racism. This pedagogical approach fosters an environment where privilege is challenged, which strengthens us as teachers and as colleagues as we work with students to create a more socially just campus.

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