



Brookfield, S. & Associates (2019). Teaching race. How to help unmask and challenge racism. Jossey-Bass.

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If you can't speak out against this kind of thing, a crime that's so unjust,
Your eyes are filled with dead men's dirt, your mind is filled with dust.
Your arms and legs they must be in shackles and chains, and your blood it must refuse to flow,
For you let this human race fall down so God-awful low!
(Bob Dylan, The Death of Emmett Till, 1962)

One evening in August 1955, 14-year-old Emmett Till, while visiting his uncle in a Mississippi village, went to a grocery store to buy candy. Emmett is said – and even this is disputed – to have whistled admiringly at the sight of the attractive white storekeeper, Carolyn Bryant. This was a violation of the unwritten racial code that still prevailed in the southern states at the time. A few days later, Roy Bryant and his half-brother J.W. Milam kidnapped and tortured the black teenager, shot a bullet in his head, weighted his body with metal and barbed wire, and threw him into a river, seriously injured and still alive (Pitzke, 2018). Despite the overwhelming evidence against Bryant and Milam, the all-white male jury acquitted the accused. Bryant and Milam admitted killing Emmett Till in an interview shortly thereafter, but remained unmolested as they were protected against double jeopardy.

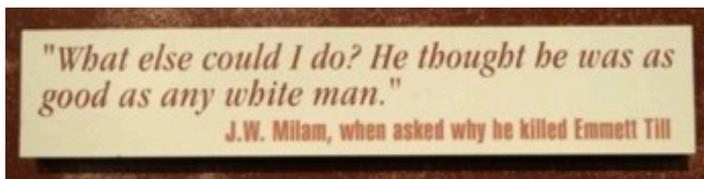


Figure 1: Part of display with racist quote from murderer of Emmett Till - National Civil Rights Museum, Downtown Memphis, Tennessee, USA. Photo taken by Adam Jones on 14 May, 2012, CC BY 4.0. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Display_with_Racist_Quote_from_Murderer_of_Emmett_Till_-_National_Civil_Rights_Museum_-_Downtown_Memphis_-_Tennessee_-_USA.jpg

The photos of Emmett Till's disfigured body and the scandalous acquittal became a symbol of resistance and an icon of the U.S. civil rights movement (Pitzke, 2018).



Figure 2: Mississippi Freedom Trail Marker in Money, Mississippi, explaining how Emmett Till's visit to Bryant's Grocery led to his murder. Photo taken by Eames Heard on 20 May, 2018. CC BY 4.0. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bryant%27s_Grocery_Mississippi_Freedom_Trail_Marker.jpg

Fast forward 65 years later after Emmett Till's gruesome, racially-motivated murder. The killing of a black man, George Floyd, by a white policeman in broad daylight in Minneapolis, invoked memories of America's long history of racial injustice. "I'm still crying for Emmett Till", read one note decorated with hearts, beside a sketch of the 14-year-old lynched in 1955 (*The Economist*, 2020a). George Floyd, in some ways, is perhaps the 21st century Emmett Till.

In the U.S., racial injustice began with the original sin of slavery, but even after its hard-fought abolition, it has endured due to white supremacist beliefs and racial

discrimination. George Floyd's death has provoked protests around the world, strengthening the global Black Lives Matter movements and providing them with widespread multiracial, multi-generation support. Global outrage was caused by Floyd's killing having been filmed in excruciating detail. Also, police brutality against minorities is rife in many countries around the world. *The Economist* magazine (2020b) drew a parallel between the #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo movements: "Just as women on every continent found common cause in the #MeToo movement, despite the range of their experiences, so protesters around the world have united around the cry that black lives matter".

Thanks to the recent Black Lives Matter protests and their creating awareness about the systemic racism and racial discrimination in the U.S. and elsewhere, the importance of Brookfield and co-authors' book under review should be glaringly obvious. Although *Teaching race* was published before the murder of George Floyd, there is an extremely helpful discussion of violence in the book (George Floyd is of course but one of the many unarmed black people killed by the police in the U.S.). Citing Galtung (in 105), the structural violence of racism manifests itself as "unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances", while the cultural violence of racism refers to cultural aspects (assigning individual characteristics such as 'inferior', 'lazy', 'stupid', or 'inherently violent') "that can be used to justify or legitimate direct or structural violence". Structural and cultural violence are then "used to justify direct violence, as housing is destroyed in gentrification, calls for justice are repressed as riots, and unarmed people of color are disproportionately killed by police" (105). Another indication of systemic racism is the mass incarceration of black people. The collective trauma of black people is invisible to other communities for whom it is not a daily reality. "Physically and emotionally, people of color find themselves drained, more marginalized, and less hopeful about the future" (235). Violence in communities of colour is a symptom, and not the cause, of poverty.

Teaching race is led by Stephen Brookfield and co-authored by 17 "associates" of the lead author and editor. It first and foremost aims to be a guidebook to teach about the emotionally-charged and contentious issues of race and racism. *Teaching race* provides numerous activities, exercises, resources, techniques and strategies to examine racism in the classroom, and some of them may also be helpful to teachers involved in adult and higher education in different contexts. The target audience is "anyone interested in antiracist practice" (xvii).

Stephen Brookfield is a world-famous educational thought leader who hardly requires an introduction, also not to the faithful readers of this journal. JALT's previous issue saw a review of the second edition of Brookfield's classic *Becoming a critically reflected teacher* (Rudolph, 2019), and he also granted us an interview in which he disclosed that his forthcoming 20th book will be on *Creating an anti-racist white identity* (Brookfield et al., 2019). While we are wishing Brookfield all the best for his impending milestone, a review of his 19th book, *Teaching race*, is in order.

Teaching race is "a work of passion intended to address one of the greatest scars on America's soul" (xv). Brookfield writes that "this is not a book of analysis (though there certainly is analysis in here) but a book of action" (xv). Such practicality as well as modesty is typical for the self-deprecating Brookfield, but the latter is quite unnecessary. While the techniques and activities described in the book are undoubtedly very useful (Brookfield and co-authors are highly reflective experts on a plethora of participatory teaching and learning methods), I appreciated the analytical aspects of the book at least as much as the practical, actionable aspects. Every chapter comes with helpful references and there is a 20-page bibliography at the end with more than 200 items as well as an eight-page index (in addition, the authors' biodata are included over eight pages at the beginning of the book).

Brookfield's introductory chapter damningly states that we "live in a time of rampant racism fuelled and legitimized by racist political leaders" (1). Racism is hugely damaging, as it excludes "large groups of people from full participation in political, social and economic life" (1). Racism is discussed largely as a structural rather than an individual problem. Racism is a system of beliefs and practices

"in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms work in various, often reinforcing ways to perpetuate racial group inequity. It identifies dimensions of our history and culture that have allowed privileges associated with 'whiteness' and disadvantages associated with 'color' to endure and adapt over time. Structural racism is not something that a few people or institutions choose to practice. Instead it has been a feature of the social, economic and political systems in which we all exist" (123).

In Higher Education (HE), "racism is glaringly evident in admission policies, disciplinary guidelines, curricula, hiring practices, attrition rates for faculty and students of color, and the composition of boards of trustees" (2-3). Apart from racism, related key terms in the book are white supremacy, racist microaggressions, and repressive tolerance. White supremacy does not refer so much to obvious examples such as the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), Aryan Nations and other extreme white nationalist terrorist groups, but rather "the idea that whites, because of their superior intellect and reasoning power, should be in control of decision-making for society as a whole" (4). The book's authors perceive white supremacy as the all-pervasive "philosophical foundation of racism" (4).

Another useful key term highlighted by the authors is microaggressions. They are at the level of everyday behaviour that enacts the ideology of white supremacy and keeps racist systems in place. Microaggressions are defined as "daily verbal, behavioural, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, sexual-orientation, and religious slights and insults to the target person or group" (Sue, cited in 54).

Brookfield also warns to watch out for repressive tolerance, a brilliant term originally coined by Herbert Marcuse. Repressive tolerance refers to institutions managing threats to their authority and legitimacy by only appearing “to be changing while keeping things as they are” and making “small, symbolic changes to institutional functioning” and presenting them “as substantial and important” (10-11).

At the end of Brookfield’s magisterial introduction to the book, he states that the rawness of teaching about race will mean that teachers may constantly feel out of their depth. Hence, approaches to address racism and white supremacy by the book’s authors can be classified into the three umbrella categories of scaffolding, modelling and community building.

In chapter 2, George Yancy, a black philosopher and leading public intellectual on race, describes “whiteness” as a site of power, privilege and hegemony. Yancy models vulnerability for white students by describing his own sexism, thus hoping to change their understanding of racism so they can begin to see themselves as racist. Labelling white students as racists does not imply that they are horrible people. This is quite an important point that is made on various occasions throughout the book. For instance, Klein in chapter 5 emphasises that the point of such a critical pedagogy is “not to assign blame or wallow in guilt, but to critically assess normative assumptions and to free ourselves from racist social constructions so we can pursue education as the practice of freedom” (89) – referring to Paolo Freire and bell hooks (whose name is intentionally in small letters). Buffy Smith also states helpfully that “white guilt is not the desired educational outcome” (187).

However, Yancy’s rather persuasive argument is that white people benefit from white systemic racism and thus contribute to the maintenance of that system. A white person in the U.S. cannot be exempt from the “relational dimensions of white privilege and power”, as they are “in socially, politically, and economically oppressive relations” (31). However, with reference to the iconic bell hooks, HE classrooms continue to be locations of possibility in which we can be radically open and “transgress and oppose all manifestations of oppressive structures” (40).

In chapter 3, Susan Hadley (a professor and director of music therapy at Slippery Rock University, Pennsylvania) discusses teaching whiteness in predominantly white classrooms. One of Hadley’s educational techniques is to provide the example of ‘handedness’ (with the world being wired for right-handed people) before moving on to a critical discussion of white privilege. The whole book provides references to excellent documentary film resources, and Hadley is the first of several authors in *Teaching race* that refers to Lee Mun Wah’s (1994) important and difficult-to-watch documentary *The Color of Fear* – a film in which eight men of different racialised backgrounds talk about the state of race relations in North America.

Lucia Pawlowski is an assistant professor at the University of St. Thomas, Minnesota, and the author of chapter 4 that is about the creation of brave space classrooms through writing assignments and social media to help students

explore racial identities. Pawlowski regards the creation of *safe spaces* as a learning and teaching environment (in which learners ‘agree to disagree’, ‘avoid personal attacks’, and ‘respect each other’) as a platitude and replaces it with *brave space*, where controversy is invited and embraced. Like other authors in *Teaching race*, Pawlowski justifies her approach by referring to bell hooks who, in *Teaching to transgress* (1994) referred to classrooms as enactments of bourgeois democracy. The “idea of classrooms as calm, reasonable, even-tempered analytical havens means that white students are never confronted with the raw anger and hostility expressed by students who have spent their lives being insulted and dismissed by racism” (69).

In chapter 5, Mike Klein (an assistant professor at the Department of Justice and Peace Studies at the University of St. Thomas, Minnesota) writes about “Teaching intersectionality through ‘I am from...’” Intersectionality refers to the interconnected nature of social categorisations such as race, class, gender and age as they apply to a given individual (or group), thus creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination and disadvantage. Identities are complex and plural, and the ‘I am from...’ exercise assists students in identifying their own constructed identities. Importantly, Klein argues against “black and white (pun intended)” categories that prevail in popular culture, as race is socially constructed and complicated by categories such as “ethnicity, nationality and hybridity” (101). Reference is made to Freire’s key concept of *conscientização* that requires “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and then taking action against oppressive elements of a society” (105).

Chapter 6 is authored by Pamela Barnett, at present the Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences at La Salle University in Philadelphia. Her chapter discusses various approaches how to build trust and negotiate conflict: the teacher as ‘the good doctor’, naming exercises, hopes-and-fears feedback, and structured questioning. To me, the most memorable part of Barnett’s contribution was her narration of the story of white supremacist Derek Black (the irony of his surname is difficult to escape), and Black’s transformation is also picked up in other pieces of *Teaching race*. In 2013, Black disavowed white nationalism, after he studied Arabic to better understand the Islamic culture of the early Middle Ages. Two chapters later, Cavalieri and co-authors state: “Stories such as that of Derek Black... illuminate how relationships and the knowledge from our professions can be powerful tools in reforming even the most avowed white supremacists” (169).

Lisa Merriweather (an associate professor of adult education at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte), Talmadge Guy (a retired professor of adult education), and Elaine Manglitz (most recently, a vice president for student affairs at Clayton State University) in chapter 7 discuss how to create the conditions for racial dialogue. This involves teachers carefully researching their students and ideally leads to the realisation of the illusion of ‘colour blindness’ as well as unrecognised racial bias and unacknowledged white privilege.

Chapter 8 is another multi-authored piece by Consuelo Cavalieri, Bryana French and Salina Renninger, who are

all associate professors of Professional Psychology at the University of St. Thomas. Their collaborative work takes students deep into uncovering systemic racism. Systemic racism is also found in universities where white teachers are usually in charge and assess students. Although students are not completely disempowered (they can be disruptive in various ways or provide negative teaching evaluations), the teachers' power is undeniable. Cavalieri and co-authors state that when "good relationships guide our teaching, good relationships become an important outcome" (169).

Buffy Smith is a sociology professor at the University of St. Thomas whose chapter 9 is entitled "Forming classroom communities to help students embrace discomfort". Smith shares her practice of building *ohana* communities before inviting her students to consider privilege and white supremacy. *Ohana* is a native Hawaiian word which means 'no one gets left behind', an approach that Smith uses with humour, patience, mercy and grace. Students are reminded "that it was healthy for family members to talk about difficult topics" (176), with care and empathy being essential building blocks in creating a strong learning community. Comfortingly, Smith proclaims that "we are all works in progress" (184). Smith – like Brookfield, Yancy and others in this volume – convincingly argues against the "myth of meritocracy", i.e. the "illusion that people have earned their privileges by their own intellect and hard work ethic". White students' realisation that their privileges are based on their skin colour more than on merit leads to an awakening of their racial consciousness, with them becoming socially responsible leaders a much-preferred outcome to mere 'white guilt'.

In chapter 10, Brookfield reviews six specific discussion protocols that can be adapted to the analysis of racial issues. He makes the excellent point that it would be a "simplistic mistake" to assume "who uses discussion is dedicated to social justice and anyone who lectures is an authoritarian demagogue", also referring to Paterson's notion of counterfeit discussion (191). Brookfield discusses six discussion techniques (that are described also in his earlier work: Brookfield & Preskill, 2016) and applies them to the topic of antiracist discussions: Today's Meet, Circle of Voices, Chalk Talk, Circular Response, Bohmian Dialogue, and Appreciative Pause.

In the 11th chapter, Wendy Yanow (an adult educator with *Adult Learning Unleashed*) teaches against a colour-blind perspective and builds on critical race theory (CRT) to explore community writing projects, documentary analysis, and the juxtaposition of story and counter-story. A 'colour-blind' ideology leads to the inability to see white privilege. Coates is cited (224): "If I have to jump six feet to get the same thing you have to jump two feet for – that's how racism works". White privilege is oftentimes unintended racism, and the impact of the 'colour-blind' ideology is negative both for the receiver and the perpetrator. CRT sounds like a most meaningful approach as, methodologically, it understands how white supremacy operates by learning from people whose everyday lived experiences are centred on dealing with racism. The CRT tenet is "that racism is pervasive and endemic in the United States, and that one of the ways that situation is secured is through the widespread acceptance of

color-blind ideology" (230).

In chapter 12, Dianne Ramdeholl (an associate professor at SUNY Empire State College in New York City) and Jaye Jones (the executive director for Literacy Studies at Lehman College – CUNY) unearth students' positionalities through learning histories, questioning, decoding media, and integrating current events into the curriculum. They evaluate the "rise of Trump and his cadre of billionaire populists" as "the most visible expression of an institutional contempt for black and brown people" (235).

In chapter 13, Mary Hess (a professor of educational leadership at Luther Seminary) uses "digital storytelling to unearth racism and galvanize action". Her chapter contains an important quote about the data – information – knowledge – wisdom (DIKW) pyramid, a key Knowledge Management concept, that reads: "It is as if the ladder of inference that once stretched upward from data to information to knowledge to wisdom has been truncated, with people rarely climbing as far as knowledge, let alone all the way up to wisdom" (260). Hess's piece is not short of other quotable quotes, for instance:

"The insidious stock narratives of neoliberal capitalism – that persons are individuals, not relational beings; that truth is best arrived at through competition; that value accrues only to what you do, not to who you are; that if you are not successful it is due to your own worthlessness, or to someone else's cheating... – these stock narratives effectively rule out of order a systemic analysis of the social construction of race" (268).

Chapter 14 is entitled "Examining mistakes to advance antiracist teaching", and authored by Bobbi Smith, a teacher and education consultant in British Columbia (Canada). Smith describes how her world exploded when she asked participants in a workshop to conduct an antiracist power analysis of her own teaching, before eventually achieving a positive outcome. Brookfield's final chapter 15 builds on Smith's previous chapter as well as Samuel Beckett's notion of failing well to review some common misperceptions that block white teachers' efforts to do antiracist work. Brookfield discusses the following eight avoidable mistakes: 'I can control what happens', 'I need to stay calm', 'I must fix racism and transform my students', 'I've finally escaped racism', 'I understand your pain', 'Please confess your racism', 'I mustn't dominate, so I'll stay silent', and 'I'm your ally'.

Teaching race is a major contribution to the analysis of race and racism as well as to the practice of teaching about racism. Even if you never had the inclination or opportunity to teach about race, I would nonetheless highly and unreservedly recommend this book. It is a powerful tool in triggering off self-examination and critical reflection of our own potential racism and our attitudes towards race and racialised others.

I would also like to disclose that I read this book, especially initially, with some resistance and little joy. Nobody likes to be called names, least of all a 'racist'. Eventually, I realised

the power of the idea that if at all a 'racist', it may not be at an individual, but at a systemic level. While I continue to think of myself as an anti-racist cosmopolitan, the book is highly persuasive on its key points, including (but not limited to) the ideas of white privilege, the fallacy of 'colour blindness' and the omnipresence of repressive tolerance. I wholeheartedly embrace the idea of cosmopolitanism that incidentally, is also discussed in this volume: One "can become, indeed should aspire to be, a citizen of the world, able to embrace local ties and commitments, but also to extend well beyond them, engaging a wider human community, even across divides of seemingly irreconcilable differences" (Avila & Pandya, cited in 270). I personally also prefer the concept of intersectionality to the sole focus on race and applaud the application of the decolonial concept of the pluriverse (a sense of multiple coexisting differences) to teaching and learning (McLeod et al., 2020).

My own sociological studies – as well as the book at hand – advise me that "race is a social construct (not a biological reality) and that our concept of white racial identity is socially constructed just as other racial identities are (e.g. Asian and black)" (185). However, it would be wrong to see racism as some sort of phantom that can be eradicated by simply deconstructing it. Racism, of course, causes real physical and mental consequences for the people affected by it.

There is no other book in recent memory that triggered off as many memories as *Teaching race*. Without wanting to take too much time from the reader in this overly long book review: It made me recall an early childhood scene on a staircase in the Bavarian village where I grew up and where I, a three-year-old boy, was frightened of the black family that I encountered for the first time in my life; white and black GI's befriending female high school students from my *Gymnasium*; my being the only white person in various 'heartland' neighbourhoods in Singapore (white people normally stay in condominiums, not in Housing and Development Board flats); my teaching of the Colgate / Darkie toothpaste case (the packaging originally showed a white man pretending to be a black man!) in an International Management module; amongst many other recollections.

With Stephen Brookfield's critical pedagogy inviting critical interrogation, he would be probably displeased by an entirely laudatory review. I do have one critical issue with the book and that is its America-centrism. The book is largely written by U.S.-Americans about their experiences in the U.S., and Bobbi Smith's Canadian contribution (in chapter 14) is the only exception. This raises the question of applicability of the book's methods and findings beyond North America.

From my own experience (having lived in Singapore for more than half of my life), it is, for instance, doubtful whether the brave space advocated by Pawlowski would work well in too many Asian cultures. It could be perceived as culturally insensitive, and the safe space concept may be preferred. Pawlowski may not even see the need for such a brave space in Asian countries, as white people do not get to racially discriminate against black people much there anyway? While I continue to ponder about the point just made, a much larger issue is the concept of racism. Racism was the central pillar of Nazi ideology during their nefarious

reign from 1933 – 1945 that caused the holocaust and the death of many millions of innocent people. The main victims of the Nazis were Jews, Roma and Slavs (and not black people), who were all to be exterminated and replaced by the German 'Master Race'.

I wonder whether Critical Race Theory (CRT) and other ideas from the book can be applied to other countries – including those where black people may be less affected. Is non-white racism a possibility? Is racism dependent on the amount of melanin of victim and perpetrator? Can racism be purely understood in terms of skin colour? Within Orientalism, the so-called 'Orientals' (whose skin colour could be as fair as that of whites) were pejoratively characterised as "backward, degenerate, uncivilized, and retarded" in order to be subjected and colonised by white supremacist, ethnocentric imperialists (Said, 2019, p. 207). Is such Orientalism not also racist? If this excellent book had any limitation, it would be the editorial decision to not discuss race and racism outside North America. Brookfield, as a leading expert on critical reflection, did perhaps not want to give us all the answers and make us think critically about issues that go beyond the gamut of this outstanding and highly commendable work. Perhaps a sequel, entitled *Teaching race* in a global context could be considered?

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