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Friday, February 8, 2019

**Assessment of a Racial Issues Course on Racial Attitudes: The Changing Racial Perceptions of Students
from the Obama Era to the Trump Administration.**

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The importance of Measuring Student Learning Outcomes

American colleges and universities (2016) are focusing more on measuring student learning outcomes. The Association of American Colleges & Universities released a report in 2016 that summarized key findings from a national survey among chief academic officers at AAC&U member institutions that explored how institutions are defining common learning outcomes, trends related to general education design and the use of emerging, evidence-based teaching and learning practices.

National accrediting bodies increasingly emphasize empirical measures of what students are (or are not) learning. (Chin, Senter, and Spalter-Roth 2011; Spalter-Roth et al. 2010). Assessment plays a critical role in evaluating and strengthening student learning in the undergraduate learning experience (Price, M., Carroll, J., O'Donovan, B., & Rust, C. (2011). In sociology departments in the USA, a growing body of literature focuses on the importance of assessment of student learning to both the student and the teacher, as the discipline of sociology relies on its own methodological strengths to explore learning outcomes (Chin, Senter, and Spalter-Roth 2011; McKinney and Naseri 2011).

Defining Race and Racism

What are students learning in courses that focus on Race and Racism? To what extent are they learning what educators attempt to teach them about race and racism in the USA? These are the central questions in this assessment report, which assesses the shifts and stability in students' beliefs, attitudes, and awareness of racial issues in the United States. The American Sociological Association (2017) conceptualize race as a bio-sociological idea that it is based on socially created assumptions rather than on genetic makeup. It asserts that the social environment shape human biological and behavioral outcomes. However, many social scientists define the concepts of race and racism in different ways that result in confusion and misunderstanding.

Mainstream social scientists tend to conceptualize racism in terms of bias attitudes, stereotypical beliefs, and personality traits (Onraet, E., Van Heil, A., De Keersmaecker, J., Fontaine, R.J. (2017). But many scholars challenge this conceptualization. In their very concise and landmark definition, Omi and Winant (2015) define race and racism as a complex concept that signifies and symbolizes sociopolitical conflicts and interests in reference to different types of human bodies.

In his critique of the conventional approach to the study of racial prejudice, Blumer (2009) conceptualizes race prejudice as existing basically in a sense of group position and structural power relationships. Steinberg (2001) makes the insightful point that race prejudice model assumes that racial prejudice arises out of a natural antipathy between groups on the basis of difference, but the [sense of group position] locates the source of the problem within the structure of society. The difference in these two approaches, he maintains, is that the sociologist of "race prejudice" is reduced to the social equivalent of a marriage counselor, exploring ways to repair fractured relationships. In contrast, the sociologist of [sense of group] is potentially an agent of social transformation. Tatum (2003) emphasizes the connections between prejudice as a preconceived judgment or opinion, white privilege, and political and cultural institutions and argues that the current social structure and attendant ideology reproduce, sustain, and rationalize white privilege. Emphasizing again the role of institutions, Squires (2009) argues that racial categories are imbued with meaning and she maintains that racial framing of stories promote particular interpretations of social issues in terms of cause and effect logic that suggest solutions and policies. She also holds

that Whites have tendencies to individualize race and individual identity while denying the work of institutions and groups in perpetuating racism.

Other cutting-edge scholars including Bonilla-Silva (2009) offers an alternative explanatory model to understand racism that is based on a social systems framework rather than individual racism. Bonilla-Silva's theory places more emphasis on the economic and political complexities that we observe and experience in social life. His theory also explains the dialectics of racism. For example, it explains racial conflict as a struggle that results from the oppositional interests of the dominant race and the subordinate race rather than as a simple consequence of racial prejudice, which is the explanation offered by some mainstream theorists. The power of a social systems framework can be observed in racialized housing. Powell (1999) found that racism is the principle driving force of urban sprawl and concentrated poverty. He persuasively presented as convincing evidence a brief history of the government's housing policies and infrastructure development projects which were explicitly and intentionally designed to perpetuate White privilege.

Empirical Studies of Student Learning

Bryan (2012) critically examined the discursive (mis) representation of race and racism in the formal curriculum and explored parallels between young people's understandings of race and racism and curricular representations of these constructs. She argued that the formal education system reinforces, rather than challenges, popular theories of racism, and endorses the ideological framework of color-blind racism by providing definitions and explanations which individualize, minimize, and naturalize racism.

Wilson and Kumar (2017) wanted to know how students conceptualized racism. They examined and analyzed the students' responses to the question, "What is racism?" at the beginning and at the end of the semester. They found that the respondents overwhelmingly conceptualized racism as residing in individuals at the beginning and end of the course and that the respondents not only situated racism within the thoughts, feelings and actions of individuals but also failed to acknowledge the institutional nature of racism. Furthermore, they found that white teachers'

misunderstandings of racism coupled with their concomitant failure to explore racial injustices results in the lack of students' through knowledge of how racism operates in USA society.

Most of the instructors in higher education are white. How effective are they in teaching race relations courses?

Haynes (2017) investigation of the literature revealed that racial consciousness and the behaviors of White faculty in the classroom appeared linked. He found that White faculty with higher levels of racial consciousness employ behaviors in their classroom reflective of an expansive view of equality in their pursuit of social justice, which they consider synonymous with excellence in teaching.

Jayakumar (2015) investigated the cumulative impact of experiences with segregation or racial diversity prior to and during college on colorblind ideological orientation among white adults. He found that white students from segregated neighborhoods and high schools tend to choose segregated white campus environments. Furthermore, they are less likely to engage across race lines while in college. Thus, challenges of addressing colorblind orientation are greater for these students. He concluded that there is a need for more direct interventions addressing colorblind ideology among white college students. His findings suggest that racial diversity and integration are potentially disruptive but insufficient conditions for unlearning harmful colorblind frames.

In an effort to identify factors that may be necessary for the provision of effective multicultural services and training, Gushue, Walker, & Brewster (2017) examined potential antecedents to color-blind racial attitudes. Overall, the results of the study indicated that helping students and practitioners discover their own internal reasons for developing a nonracist identity may facilitate the formation of a critical consciousness regarding race and racism in society today.

St. Cloud State University: Assessment of Racial Issues Courses on Students' Beliefs and Attitudes

To what extent are students learning what I attempt to teach them about race and racism in the USA? This is the central question in this assessment report. One of the stated commitments of St. Cloud State University is to build a

lasting anti-racist university and community. Through the Community Anti-Racism Education Initiative ([C.A.R.E](#)) and courses on racial issues, the aim is to enhance campus/community climate and promote equality opportunity.

In the fall semester 2000, St. Cloud State University implemented mandatory racial issues courses that were designed to help students understand and reflect on race relations in the USA. This report will describe the shifts and stability of my students' opinions, feelings, and awareness of racial issues in the United States. It is assumed that the students' attitudes, feelings, and awareness of racial issues were influenced to some extent by the racial issues course that they took. The main learning outcome was that students will be able to employ the conceptual and analytical tools used by social scientists to deepen their understanding of racial phenomena in the United States.

Purpose

In an attempt to address the problems of defining race and racism as well as assessing the effectiveness of courses designed to teach antiracism, this study examines the racial concepts, opinions, and awareness of college students at the beginning and at the end of a racial issues course taught at St. Cloud State University. This study of cohort samples of college students examines and describes their racial opinions and attitudes in 2010 and 2018.

Methodology

The assessment instrument was designed to measure the extent to which a racial issues course, Race in America, helped mostly first-year students understand the concept and meaning of race, the impact of racial categories, and the patterns of racial oppression. Pre- and post-test surveys were administered in the fall semester 2010 to 118 students (pre) and 94 students (post) and in the spring semester 2018 to 115 students (pre) and 80 students (post) to measure the change in racial opinions and attitudes. See Tables 1 and 2.

In constructing the questions for the instrument, the students' responses to assigned readings and discussion topics were considered. The same questionnaire was emailed twice (pre-test and post-test). This was done on the first day of class and the last week of class. Students were told that the survey was voluntary and that it would not affect their grades in the class. The pre-test questionnaire was emailed to students prior to the distribution of the course syllabus

or any other information pertaining to the class. By doing so, this limited the likelihood that students would respond according to their perceptions of the instructor's viewpoints or racial identity.

Table 1. The Racial Composition of the student sample in 2010	Time of Assessment	
	Pre-test	Post-test
	Aug. 2010	Dec 2010
African	(7) 6%	(7) 7%
Asian	(15) 13%	(10) 11%
White	(84) 71%	(71) 76%
Latina/o	(1) 1%	(0) 0%
Native American	(7) 6%	(0) 0%
Biracial	(4) 4%	(0) 0%
None of the above	(0) 0%	(9) 8%
Number	118	97

Table 2. The Racial Composition of the student sample in 2018	Time of Assessment	
	Pre-test	Post-test
	Jan. 2018	May 2018
White	(70) 60%	(48) 60%
Black	(17) 13%	(16) 20%
Asian	(18) 16%	(9) 11%

Latino or Indian or Biracial	(10) 8%	(7) 9%
Number	115	80

There are at least two reasons why the number of students who took the pre-test is different from the number who took the post-test. The first is that some of the students who took the pre-test may have dropped the course or were absent on the day of the post-test. The second is that some of the students who took the post-test did not take the pre-test because they were not in class or enrolled on the first day of class at the beginning of the semester. The data in Table 1 and Table 2 show that in terms of one factor, racial identity, the two pre-post samples are comparable.

Introduction.

The following is a presentation of some preliminary quantitative results from an assessment of student learning in a racial issues course. I discuss them as they relate to the teaching objectives and to the four racial issues course criteria: understanding, education, awareness, and student growth.

- **Understanding:** A course must examine the concept and meaning of race, ethnicity, and oppression.
- **Education:** A course must explore the heritage, culture, and contributions of racial minorities, the impact of racial classification, the patterns of racial oppression, racial domination, and hate crimes in the United States.
- **Awareness:** A course must explore experiences of racial minorities and how members of racial minorities maintain a sense of identity despite persistent and systematic racial oppression and hate crimes.
- **Student Growth:** A course must provide a significant arena for dialogue and/or self-reflection on understanding, education, and awareness.¹

For each criterion, descriptions of the shifts and stability of students' perceptions are presented. Then the possible implications for teaching strategies and improvements are discussed. The aim of the course is to provide the students with theoretical frameworks and analytical tools to help them understand the meaning of race as a biosocial construct shaped primarily by socio-political forces operating within a historical context.

Findings

The data in Table 3 show that there were significant shifts (from 9 percent to 35 percent in 2010 and from 19 percent to 44 percent in 2018) among the students in their conceptual understanding of race as a group defined by specific social, economic, and political relations based on perceived similar physical characteristics.

Table 3. (item 1) (U) The concept of race can be best understood as the idea of a group of people:				
Time of Assessment	Aug. 2010	Dec. 2010	Jan. 2018	May 2018
Questionnaire Items	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test
Placed in a distinct category based on skin color.	(49) 42%	(31) 32%	(53) 46%	(28) 35%
Related by common descent, blood, or heredity.	(40) 34%	(23) 24%	(35) 30%	(11) 14%
Defined by specific social, economic, and political relations based on perceived similar physical characteristics.	(11) 9%	(34) 35%	(22) 19%	(35) 44%
Connected by common interests and a unifying culture.	(18) 15%	(9) 9%	(6) 5%	(6) 8%
Number	118	97	116	80
Pearson Chi-Square:	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .000		Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .001	

Table 4. (item 2) (U) The concept of ethnicity can best be understood as the idea of a group of people placed in a distinct category based on:

The data in Table 4 show that there was a statistically significant shift among the students in their conceptual understanding of ethnicity as a social construction in 2018, but not in 2010. At the beginning of the course in 2010, about 44 percent of the students conceptualized ethnicity as socially constructed characteristics of culture and origin. But, at the end of the semester 2010, those who conceptualized ethnicity this way dropped dramatically to about 26 percent.

However, in 2018 there was a statistically significant shift among the students in their conceptual understanding of ethnicity as a social construction. At the beginning of the course in 2018, about 30 percent of the students conceptualized ethnicity as socially constructed characteristics of culture and origin as compared with 49 percent who conceptualized it that way at the end of the course.

Table 4. (item 2) (U) The concept of ethnicity can best be understood as the idea of a group of people placed in a distinct category based on:				
Time of Assessment	Aug. 2010	Dec. 2010	Jan. 2018	May 2018
Questionnaire Items	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test
Common ancestry, race, religion and/or nationality	(46) 39%	(50) 52%	(57) 49%	(25) 31%
Socially constructed characteristics of culture and historical heritage	(52) 44%	(26) 26%	(35) 30%	(39) 49%
Skin color, common descent, blood, and heredity	(12) 10%	(16) 17%	(18) 16%	(14) 18%
Language, food, music and holidays	(8) 8%	(5) 5%	(6) 5%	(2) 3%
Number	118	97	116	80
Pearson Chi-Square:	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .04		Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .03	

The data in Table 5 show a there was a significant difference between the responses of the students in the fall 2010 and those in the spring 2018. In the fall 2010, there was not a statistically significant shift among the students in their conceptual understanding of racism. At the beginning of the course about 17 percent of the students conceptualized racism as a system of advantages and disadvantages based on the idea of racial differences; however, at the end of the course, the proportion had only increased to 22 percent. However, in 2018, there was a statistically significant shift among the students in their conceptual understanding of racism. At the beginning of the course about 21 percent of the students conceptualized racism as a system of advantages and disadvantages based on the idea of racial differences; however, at the end of the course, the proportion significantly increased to 54 percent.

Table 5. (item 3) (U) The concept of racism can best be understood as:				
Time of Assessment	Aug. 2010	Dec. 2010	Jan. 2018	May 2018
Questionnaire Items	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test
A system of advantages and disadvantages based on the idea of racial differences.	(20) 17%	(21) 22%	(24) 21%	(43) 54%
An ideology that distinguishes between superior and inferior cultural groups.	(29) 25%	(30) 31%	(30) 26%	(21) 26%
Prejudicial behaviors based on negative beliefs and stereotypes.	(54) 46%	(37) 38%	(48) 41%	(11) 14%
The hatred of races other than your own	(15) 13%	(9) 17%	(14) 12%	(5) 6%
Total Number	118	97	116	80

Pearson Chi-Square:	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .44	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .00
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The data in Table 6 show that the students' conceptual understanding of institutional racial discrimination as the systematic denial of access to resources such as jobs, education, and housing based on race was stable in 2010 and 2018. Over 75 percent conceptualized racism in this way.

Table 6. (item 4: Understanding) The concept of institutional discrimination is best understood as:				
Time of Assessment	Aug. 2010	Dec. 2010	Jan. 2018	May 2018
Questionnaire Items	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test
Race-based policies such as affirmative action	(10) 9%	(5) 5%	(11) 10%	(8) 10%
The systematic denial of access to resources such as jobs, education, and housing based on race.	(89) 75%	(80) 83%	(92) 79%	(62) 76%
Voting only for people of your own race.	(1) 1%	(2) 2%	(2) 2%	(2) 3%
Racial bias in practices such as racial profiling	(18) 15%	(10) 10%	(11) 10%	(8) 10%
Total Number	118	97	115	80
Pearson Chi-Square:	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .43		Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .98	

The data in Table 7 also show that there was significant shift among the students (in 2010 and 2018) in their conceptual understanding of assimilation as the imposition of white culture on communities of color. At the beginning of each semester, about 20 percent conceptualized assimilation in this way, but at the end of the semesters, around 40 percent did.

Table 7. (item 5: Understanding) The concept of assimilation is best understood as:				
Time of Assessment	Aug. 2010	Dec. 2010	Jan. 2018	May 2018
Questionnaire Items	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test
The culture shock of moving to a new country	(9) 8%	(0) 0%	(13) 11%	(8) 9%
Retaining one's culture while acquiring the culture of another culture	(73) 62%	(45) 46%	(71) 62%	(41) 51%
The imposition of white culture on communities of color.	(22) 19%	(46) 47%	(25) 22%	(30) 38%
The creation of a new culture based on a community of color.	(14) 12%	(6) 6%	(6) 5%	(2) 3%
Total Number	118	97	115	80
Pearson Chi-Square:	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .00		Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .10	

The data in Table 8 show that there was not a significant shift among the students in their conceptual understanding of oppression as the use of power by a racial group to gain an advantage at the expense of others. At the beginning of the semesters (2010 and 2018) about 40 percent conceptualized oppression in this way, and at the end of the semester, 33 and 48 percent, respectively did.

Table 8. (item 6: Understanding) The concept of oppression is best understood as:				
Time of Assessment	Aug. 2010	Dec. 2010	Jan. 2018	May 2018
Questionnaire Items	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test

The exploitation and mistreatment by individuals or hate groups such as white supremacists	(30) 25%	(22) 23%	(19) 17%	(17) 22%
Laws that discriminate on the basis of race, such as segregation	(25) 21%	(22) 23%	(27) 24%	(12) 15%
The use of power by a racial group to gain an advantage at the expense of others	(46) 39%	(32) 33%	(50) 44%	(38) 48%
A perceived disadvantage suffered by historically suppressed groups	(17) 14%	(21) 22%	(19) 17%	(12) 15%
Total Number	118	97	115	79
Pearson Chi-Square:	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .50		Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = .47	

Discussion

The assessment of students' learning of key concepts in the study of race and racism in my course suggest that my course may have had some influence in helping them gain a better understanding of race relations in America. One of my teaching objectives was to provide the students with theoretical frameworks and analytical tools to help them understand the meaning of race and as a biosocial construct shaped primarily by political forces. The assessment data showed these results:

There was a significant shift among the students in their conceptual understanding of race as a group defined by specific social, economic, and political relations based on perceived similar physical characteristics. The goal was to teach the student that to better understand the dynamics of race relations in the United States, one must understand how social and political forces and institutions define racial groups in different ways during specific periods in history. The course emphasized that racial groups are located in hierarchical structures of society based on ascribed value or worth. The ascribed status of the racial group determines access to resources, wealth, and political power. The data indicated that there was a measurable shift in students' understanding of race as a social construct. I

attempted to teach the students that to better understand the dynamics of race relations in the United States, one must understand how social and political forces and institutions define racial groups in different ways during specific periods in history.

There was a statistically significant shift among the students in their conceptual understanding of ethnicity as a social construct in 2018, but not in 2010. My “failure” to get across the idea of ethnicity as a social construction in 2010 prompted me to revise the course to allow for more time spent on the meaning of “social construction”. After 2010, I began to show how the concept of ethnicity, like race, is socially constructed. The positive results in 2018 suggest that my increased emphasis on the concept of ethnicity as a social construction yielded positive results.

There was a very significant shift among the students in their conceptual understanding of racism as a system of advantages and disadvantages based on the idea of racial differences in 2018 but not in 2010. The “stability” of the students’ opinions in 2010 indicated that the course did not move the students in the desired direction, which was to help them understand racism as a complex concept including the central elements of social, economic and political power, oppression, and notions of racial superiority. This result indicated a need for me to revise the course to clarify the meaning of racism so that the students would be able to make a more sophisticated analysis of racial dynamics.

After the course revision, the students’ concept of racism did change measurably over the semester in 2018. The objective was to teach the students that to better understand racism in the United States, one must understand how social and political forces and institutions define and structure a racial hierarchy in which the white race is privileged and other races are oppressed in different ways during specific periods in history. The data suggested that this shift was accounted for by their shift from their conceptualizations of racism as being primarily about prejudice and stereotypes. These results indicated that the revised course was able to link more closely the ideology of racism to its fundamental material base of systematic racial advantages and disadvantages.

It not surprising that initially most students would define racism in terms of a set of negative racial beliefs and stereotypes because it is usually presented in the media and normal discourse in terms of individual and group prejudice and bigotry. However, the main teaching goal was to help students understand racism in terms of systemic unequal power relationships among racial groups that determine which group is privileged and which group is racially oppressed. Moreover, the course was designed to help them understand it as a system of advantages and disadvantages based on racial oppression.

There was a not a shift among the students in their conceptual understanding of institutional racial discrimination as the systematic denial of access to resources such as jobs, education, and housing based on race. The course attempted to teach the students that to better understand institutional racial discrimination in the United States, one must understand it as a social mechanism that is used to distribute goods, services, positions, and power on the basis of race. Most students apparently understood what institutional racial discrimination was at the beginning of the course.

There was a notable shift among the students in their conceptual understanding of assimilation as the imposition of white culture on communities of color. The course attempted to show the students through historical examples and critical analysis that the assimilation process in the United States for people of color has occurred to varying degrees to different racial groups depending on their physical features how they were perceived by white institutions and their particular history. Historically, the dominant white racial group imposed its own brand of truth on the entire society, monopolized elite positions, and required the adoption of its cultural values and styles by those who wish to gain acceptance and opportunities in the mainstream. The course was somewhat effective in getting across the point that assimilation means conforming to the political rules and culture of the elite of the dominant group.

There was not a significant shift among the students in their conceptual understanding of oppression as the use of power by a racial group to gain an advantage at the expense of others; however, a significant minority

(from 33 percent to 48 percent) conceptualized oppression this way. The course presented a series of analyses of the power relationships among racial groups in the spheres of economics, politics, and social relationships over historical periods, to help students learn how a dominant racial group uses its power to exploit other groups for its own advantage. However, it appears that the course did not influence the students' concept of oppression. Many continued to think of oppression as the exploitation and mistreatment by individuals or hate groups such as white supremacists or by laws that discriminate on the basis of race, such as segregation.

Assessment of Race Relations under Obama's Presidency

The second part of the report describes the students' perceptions and opinions of race relations from the Obama era to the Trump administration.

Perception of Racial Antagonisms in America

The students' perception of racial antagonisms in America increased significantly from the early Obama years to the early Trump years. During the Obama era in 2010, Table 9 shows that percent of students who believed that race relations were good in the United States shifted from 48 percent to 31 percent. Furthermore, a majority (71 percent on the pre-test and 78 percent on the post-test) believed that racial tensions were a major problem in America in 2010. In contrast, during the Trump administration, the percent of students who believed that race relations were good in the United States shifted from 26 percent to 11 percent. And, a very large stable majority (95 percent) believed that racial tensions were a major problem in America in 2018.

Table 9. Students' Perception of Racial Antagonisms in America from the Obama Era to the Trump Administration				
Survey Date	Aug. 2010	Dec. 2010	Jan. 2018	May 2018
Questionnaire Items	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test
I think that race relations are good in the United States.	(56) 48%	(29) 31%	(39) 26%	(56) 11%

I think racial tensions are a major problem in America.	(62) 71%	(65) 78%	(56) 95%	(56) 95%
Total Number	118	94	115	80

Students' Perceptions of Race Relations in the United States from the Obama Era to the Trump Administration

Administration

Table 10 shows that on the pre-test in 2010, eighty-six percent of the students perceived that race relations over the last 10 years for people of color in this country had gotten better in the United States as compared with only 64 percent of the students who perceived it the same way on the pre-test in 2018. The data show that on the pre-test in 2010, only 29 percent of the students perceived Barack Obama's race was a major reason why people opposed his policies, but in 2018, a significant majority, 69 percent held the same opinion. Still, a majority of the students tended to believe that Obama's presidency did improve race relations. The pre-tests indicate over one-half of the students perceived that Barack Obama's election led to better race relations (53 percent in 2010 and 60 percent in 2018).

Survey Date	Aug. 2010	Dec. 2010	Jan. 2018	May 2018
Questionnaire Items	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test
Perceived that over the last 10 years the situation for people of color in this country has gotten better	(101) 86%	(83) 86%	(73) 64%	(43) 54%
Perceived that Barack Obama's race was a major reason why people oppose his policies	(34) 29%	(35) 36%	(79) 69%	(47) 59%
Perceived that Barack Obama's election has led to better race relations	(64) 53%	(47) 48%	(70) 60%	(47) 59%
Total Number	118	94	115	80

Awareness of White Advantages

Students were aware of the advantages of white people and the disadvantages of people of color. According to the data in Table 11, on the 2010 pre-test as well as the 2018 pre-test, just a small minority 19 percent and 17 percent respectively, perceived that if people of color would only try harder, they could be just as well off as whites. Furthermore, only 39 percent of the students in 2010 and 25 percent in 2018 perceived that the quality of public schools for Black and Latinx children is the same as it is for White children. On both pre-tests, a majority (64 percent in 2010 and 80 percent in 2018) perceived that White Americans are more privileged than other Americans. The percentage of students who perceived that people of color are more likely to receive the death penalty than white people shifted from 64 percent to 76 percent in 2010 and from 80 percent to 94 percent in 2018. The percentage of students who perceived that American Indians are now reaping unfair advantages through casino money, hunting and fishing rights and non-taxation laws shifted from 53 percent to 31 percent in 2010 and from 40 percent to 30 percent in 2018.

Table 11. Students' Awareness of White Advantages from the Obama Era to the Trump Administration				
Survey Date	Aug. 2010	Dec. 2010	Jan. 2018	May 2018
Questionnaire Items	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test
Perceived that if people of color would only try harder, they could be just as well off as whites	(23) 19%	(14) 15%	(22) 19%	(13) 17%
I believe the quality of public schools for Black and Latino children is the same as it is for White children.	(46) 39%	(25) 26%	(29) 25%	(12) 15%
I believe that White Americans are more privileged than other Americans.	(75) 64%	(70) 76%	(89) 80%	(75) 94%
I think that people of color are more likely to receive the death penalty than are white people.	(24) 20%	(51) 54%	(77) 67%	(69) 86%

American Indians are now reaping unfair advantages through casino money, hunting and fishing rights and non-taxation laws	(62) 53%	(29) 31%	(46) 40%	(24) 30%
Total Number	118	94	115	80

Opinion about the Color-Blind Ideology

The pretests indicated that the colorblind ideology was stable. Table 12 shows that on both the pretests in 2010 and 2018, about 70 percent of the students maintained their opinion that color blindness will lead to racial equality; In addition, less than 27 percent believed that we should forget discrimination in the past because it has little relevance to the present. Furthermore, a mere 20 percent perceived that racism has become almost a non-issue and that the playing field has leveled off. But in 2018, the data showed that there was a significant shift (from 71 percent to 46 percent) in the students' opinion on the effectiveness of the color-blind approach to achieve racial equality.

Table 12. Students' Opinion in the Color-Blind Ideology from the Obama Era to the Trump Administration				
Survey Date	Aug. 2010	Dec. 2010	Jan. 2018	May 2018
Questionnaire Items	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test
Agreed that color blindness racial equality will lead to racial equality	(81) 69%	(56) 58%	(70) 71%	(37) 46%
Perceived that it is best if we forget discrimination in the past as it has little relevance to the present.	(29) 25%	(14) 15%	(30) 26%	(15) 19%
Perceived that in America today, racism has become almost a non-issue, and the playing field has leveled off.	(23) 20%	(13) 14%	(20) 17%	(6) 8%
Total Number	118	94	115	80

Perception of anti-Black Racism in America

The data in Table 13 show that a large minority on the pre-tests continued to hold the opinion that Black Americans experience little residential segregation (48 percent in 2010 and 39 percent in 2018) as well as their opinion that decreased emphasis on the past history of discrimination, particularly slavery, is necessary if we are to eliminate racism (45 percent in 2010 and 43 percent in 2018). However, there was a dramatic change in the perception of police brutality against Black people. On the pre-tests, in 2010, approximately 42 percent of the students felt that police brutality was a major problem for Blacks, but in 2018 the proportion had increased significantly to 79 percent.

The data showed that in 2010, the students’ opinion that “Black Americans experience little residential segregation today” shifted from 48 percent to 18 percent; their opinion that decreased emphasis on the past history of discrimination, particularly slavery, is necessary if we are to eliminate racism decreased from 46 percent to 33 percent; Similarly, based on the post-test in 2018, the data showed that the students’ opinion that Black Americans experience little residential segregation today shifted from 39 percent to 19 percent; their opinion that decreased emphasis on the past history of discrimination, particularly slavery, is necessary if we are to eliminate racism decreased from 43 percent to 25 percent;

Table 13. Students’ Perception of anti-Black Racism in America from the Obama Era to the Trump Administration				
Survey Date	Aug. 2010	Dec. 2010	Jan. 2018	May 2018
Questionnaire Items	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test
Perceived that Black Americans experience little residential segregation today	(57) 48%	(17) 18%	(45) 39%	(15) 19%

Perceived that decreased emphasis on the past history of discrimination, particularly slavery, is necessary if we are to eliminate racism	(54) 46%	(31) 33%	(49) 43%	(20) 25%
I feel that police brutality is a major problem for Blacks.	(49) 42%	(61) 65%	(91) 79%	(62) 78%
Total Number	118	94	115	80

Opinions about the Relationship between Race, Merit, and Social Stratification

Table 14 shows that a small percentage of students on the pre-tests perceived that each racial and ethnic group has an equal chance to achieve social position and receive social rewards (20 percent in 2010 and 19 percent in 2018). Likewise, a small percentage of students on the pre-tests perceived that race and ethnicity do not affect an individual’s opportunity for achievement (18 percent in 2010 and 6 percent in 2018). Regarding their pre-test opinion that social position and social rewards are granted strictly on the basis on one's abilities, talents, and efforts, their opinions were fairly stable (36 percent in 2010 and 27 percent in 2018). But there was a significant change on the pre-tests in their opinion that ascribed group characteristics such as race and ethnicity are major criteria for social opportunities and rewards (25 percent in 2010 and 55 percent in 2018). Finally, according to the post-test data in Table 14, the greatest effect of the racial issues course on these student’s opinions was the opinion that ascribed group characteristics such as race or ethnicity are major criteria for social opportunities and rewards, which shifted from 25 percent to 54 percent in 2010 and from 55 percent to 71 percent in 2018.

Table 14. Students’ Perception of the Relationship between Merit and Racial Stratification from the Obama Era to the Trump Administration				
Survey Date	Aug. 2010	Dec. 2010	Jan. 2018	May 2018
Questionnaire Item: In the United States	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test

a. Each racial and ethnic group has an equal chance to achieve social position and receive social rewards.	(24) 20%	(17) 18%	(19) 16%	(8) 10%
b. Ascribed group characteristics such as race or ethnicity are major criteria for social opportunities and rewards	(30) 25%	(51) 54%	(63) 55%	(57) 71%
c. Social position and social rewards are granted strictly on the basis of one's abilities, talents, and efforts.	(43) 36%	(20) 21%	(26) 27%	(11) 14%
• d. Race and ethnicity do not affect an individual's opportunity for achievement.	(21) 18%	(5) 5%	(7) 6%	(4) 5%
Total Number	118	94	115	80

Summary of Findings

The students' perception of racial antagonisms in America increased significantly from the early Obama years to the early Trump years.

The students perceived the racial situation of people of color as deteriorating over the transitional period from the Obama administration to the Trump administration. This change has been one in which race relations have gone from a slightly negative situation to one which was much worse. In sum, the data suggested that the racial climate became more antagonistic.

Students' Perceptions of Race Relations in the United States under Obama's Presidency

The students tended to believe that Obama's presidency did help people of color in the United States. The data indicated that while an increasing proportion of the students perceived that Barack Obama's race was a major reason

why people opposed his policies, a shrinking majority of the students still perceived that the situation of people of color improved over the most of the Obama years. The data also showed that the students' perceptions of the Obama presidency did not change from the beginning to the end of each semester. The racial issues course did not appear to have any impact on the student opinions concerning the students' perceptions of the Obama presidency in 2010 and 2018. About one-half of the students maintained that Barack Obama's election led to better race relations.

Students' Awareness of White Advantages from the Obama Era to the Trump Administration

Students were aware of the advantages of white people and the disadvantages of people of color. They perceived that White Americans were more privileged than non-white Americans. Furthermore, their perceptions of racial inequality shifted toward a perception of greater inequality. For example, an increased majority perceived that the quality of public schools for White children was better than it was for Black and Latinx children. In addition, an increased percentage of students who perceived that people of color were more likely to receive the death penalty as compared with white people. Finally, a decreased percentage perceived that Indians enjoyed unfair advantages.

Opinion about the Color-Blind Ideology

Students became much less optimistic about the effectiveness of the color-blind approach under the Trump administration. They remained highly aware of the existing racial discrimination and the need to acknowledge it; however, their confidence in the colorblind strategy to reduce it diminished significantly under Trump.

Perception of anti-Black Racism in America

An increased proportion of the students believed that Black Americans experience residential segregation today. An increased majority also believed that emphasis on the past history of discrimination, particularly slavery, is necessary if we are to eliminate racism. The data also indicated that there was a dramatic increase in the perception of police brutality against Black people.

Opinions about the Relationship between Race, Merit, and Social Stratification

The greatest effect of the racial issues course was in the students' opinions about the relationship between race, merit, and social stratification. There was a significant shift in the students' opinion toward putting increased weight on race at the loss of the weight on individual merit as a determinate of social opportunities and rewards.

Conclusion

This empirical study showed that an educational course on race and racism can enable students to be more aware of racism and its effect on people of color. This knowledge affects values and beliefs in a way that affirms or changes the students' previously held viewpoints. Most often their beliefs were affected in a way that favored a more just society. By emphasizing critical thinking their stereotypes and false beliefs are more likely to be discarded when they are not supported by empirical facts and logical reasoning.

This course on race and racism was designed to address major critical race issues in the U.S. that continue to be the source of conflict. The course seemed to have had some impact on the students' opinions. The post-tests in both 2010 and 2018 show that at the end of the course the students had come to believe that race relations were worse than they were before taking the course. Furthermore, they tended to perceive the racial situation of people of color as deteriorating over the transition from the Obama to the Trump administration.

A majority of the students maintained their opinion that color blindness will lead to racial equality; however, they also maintained that we should not forget discrimination in the past and that racism has not become a non-issue. But, in 2018 the data showed that students became much less confident in the effectiveness of the color-blind approach to achieve racial equality. The students were highly aware of the existing racial discrimination and the need to acknowledge it, but they tended to believe that racial barriers could be overcome through the practice of judging individuals on the basis of non-racial criteria. The overall impact of the racial issue course on their colorblind ideology was limited.

The racial issues course appeared to have had a significant impact on the students' opinions about anti-Black discrimination. The students' opinion that Black Americans experience little residential segregation today declined.

An increased majority also believed that emphasis on the past history of discrimination, particularly slavery, is necessary if we are to eliminate racism. The data also indicated that there was a dramatic increase in the perception of police brutality against Black people.

The students were given four alternative opinions about the relationship between race, merit, and social stratification and instructed to choose the one that best represented their opinion. The two opinions that only a small percentage of the students chose were: a) Each racial and ethnic group has an equal chance to achieve social position and receive social rewards and d) Race and ethnicity do not affect an individual's opportunity for achievement. The opinion that was the most stable was merit alternative c) Social position and social rewards are granted strictly on the basis of one's abilities, talents, and efforts. The greatest effect of the racial issues course was in the student's opinion that ascribed group characteristics such as race or ethnicity are major criteria for social opportunities and rewards. There was a shift toward greater adherence to that opinion.

The data suggest that students tend to use a color-blind ideological frame to interpret social realities. However, the data did reveal that they are highly aware of the racial bias against people of color. The analysis revealed that the course had some effect in changing the opinions of students. Two facts may help explain the effect. First, many students had a facile understanding of American culture and history. Perhaps as they became more knowledgeable about the racial character of American society they used racial frames (analytical racial concepts) more often to interpret social and political events. Second, critical content and analyses were presented that challenged the dominant colorblind ideology that permeates the culture of present-day America. Colorblindness is predicated on the negation of the importance of race. It does not accept race as a valid analytical tool and it denies that it plays a central role in determining social relations, hierarchies, and the distribution of power and resources. This ideology is deeply ingrained in the American psyche.

Nevertheless, students became more aware that American society is racially structured and operates on the principle of white supremacy. The basic premise of White supremacy is that Blacks are not fully human; therefore, they are not worthy of respect and social equality. As students learn more about racism, they apply racial frames more often

to interpret social and political events. I surmise that the course had less effect on white students' political views because they are more influenced by the colorblind ideology, which minimizes anti-black discrimination or downplays the role of race in explaining or justifying political behavior. Moreover, they tend to deny the salience of race. Research studies show that racial identity influence the way people understand and interpret American political dynamics (Flores-González, Aranda, and Vaguera, 2014; Harris-Perry, 2014; White and Allen, 2014). This implies that I need to include more content and discussion on the ideology of colorblindness.

Limitations

We should not expect a 16-week course on racial issues in America to dramatically change the deeply embedded racial attitudes and opinions of young students in such a short period, especially when students are constantly influenced by a dominant color-blind ideology and individualism. However, the assessment of their learning in a racial issues course suggest that the course may have had some influence in helping them gain a better understanding of race relations in America. One of the course objectives was to provide the students with theoretical frameworks and analytical tools to help them understand the meaning of race and ethnicity as a biosocial construct shaped primarily by political forces. The eminent scholar Lawrence Bobo (2017) acknowledges that there has been a lot of positive change in the post-civil rights era, but he maintains that U.S. notions of racism and white supremacy remain powerful elements of American culture. There are grounds for optimism, over 90 percent of both white students and students of color recognize the importance and relevance of the racial issue course to their lives. As educators, we must continue to advocate for genuine racial issues courses and develop more effective teaching methods in order to advance the struggle against racism.

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