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The challenges of teaching about organized racism are different than those found in teaching about other aspects of American race relations. On the one hand, it can be quite easy to engage students in the topic of organized racism, at least on a surface level, as the vile propaganda and violent actions of racist groups and movements are sensational and provocative. Students across racial lines, like the general public, for the most part have strong negative opinions about the Ku Klux Klan, neo-Nazis, and racist skinheads and are eager to share these (Nelson et al. 1997; Schuman et al. 1997). On the other hand, students' understandings of organized racism often are very shallow and based largely on caricatured depictions of racist activists in films and on television. The effort to move students toward deeper and more complex interpretations of organized racism can be surprisingly difficult.

Today's organized racism is a complicated mix of a number of small, competing groups and loosely connected networks that espouse virulent forms of racism and anti-Semitism and urge action (often violent) in support of white Aryan supremacy. Moreover, it is a world that rests on carefully managed illusion and deception. Dozens of Ku Klux Klan chapters, generally antagonistic to each other, appear robust because they are highly visible in the media and often seek publicity through public parades, cross burnings, distribution of propaganda, and a proliferation of websites. Despite their public presence, however, virtually all contemporary

Klan chapters are tiny and few can craft any significant actions to advance their racist agendas. In contrast, neo-Nazis are generally more active. However, as many have become highly focused on violence and terroristic goals in recent years, they have dissolved into a relatively invisible networks of small, unconnected cells to hinder government detection and prosecution (Blee and Creasap 2010; Durham 2007). In the most available sources of information, then, the Klans appear forceful, although few are, while neo-Nazis appear to have declined, even as they remain vigorous.

1 Challenges in Teaching

In this essay, we outline four common obstacles that instructors face when they teach college and university students about modern U.S. organized racism. These are the problem of the grotesque; the overshadowing of everyday racism; the slide to overly macro or micro explanations; and the paucity of good data. As a remedy, Burke then suggests two ways to create a more productive discussion of organized racism. The classroom exercise presented in Chap. 20 provides a way to use film in a discussion of the motivations of racist activists and the nature of racist groups today.

1.1 The Problem of the Grotesque

In a paper on the strategic use of war pictures by anti-abortion and anti-slavery movements, Drew Halfmann and Michael Young (2010, p. 3) observe that "the grotesque image terrifies and disorients," evoking strong negative emotions such as horror, fear, disgust, outrage, and anger. Such sentiments arise often when teaching about organized racism. Virtually any document, photo, speech, or even summary of the ideas and activities of today's racist groups and movements is shocking, repulsive, and deeply upsetting to students and instructors.

Racist imagery and words are assaultive by design, as shown in the polarity of responses it evokes. The terrorism of modern organized racism lies not only in its infrequent episodes of violence but also in the constant *threat* of violence (Hoffman 2006, pp. 3–4) conveyed in its cultural markers and bigoted ideology. Racist groups routinely pepper their written and Internet propaganda with sketches of nooses, burning crosses, and swastikas meant to elicit historical memories of racial lynchings and Nazi Germany. Their attire is similarly chosen for dramatic effect. The Klan's white

robes and pointed hoods position them in the tradition of violent night-riders who have terrorized African Americans and other racial minorities since the Civil War. Neo-Nazis often sport brown shirts and combat boots that echo the uniform of World War II European fascists, although young Nazi skinheads may have little knowledge of this historical connection (Blee 2002). Racist activists festoon their bodies with tattoos of racial hatred, including thinly coded references like "88" (referencing the 8th letter of the alphabet for "Heil Hilter").

The totems of racial hate that permeate racist literature, events, and even bodies undercut teaching and learning in a fundamental way. Such deeply disturbing images are both repellent and grotesquely titillating to some students, similar to how slasher films or car accidents simultaneously lure and repel the viewer. They seize attention, but leave students in emotional confusion and paralysis, unable to formulate an emotional stance from which they can respond. They bring on responses of rage, anger, frustration that make it difficult to explore how people come to embrace racist activism as a meaningful and (to them) reasonable way of life. At the same time, it is inappropriate, and probably impossible, to strip emotional reactions from the topic to facilitate discussion and learning.

Efforts to teach about organized racism thus must find a precarious balance, between shielding students from the reality of racist terrorism and giving voice to racism and risk exposing students to its corrosive effects. There is no perfect solution. In most cases, we find it better to minimize the amount of racist imagery and ideas that are presented in the classroom. Since the ideologies that motivate racist actors are generally quite simplistic and highly redundant, it is possible to present racist worldviews with little elaboration. This allows the class to move more quickly to issues they can analyze with more productive results, such as how organized racism has shifted from biological to cultural arguments in defense of white supremacism or how racist groups use cultural forms like white power music to create a collective racist identity (Ansell 1997; Simi and Futrell 2006).

1.2 Overshadowing Everyday Racism

Organized, extreme racism like that found in the Ku Klux Klan or neo-Nazi groups can easily make invisible more ordinary forms of racism such as white privilege or "color-blind" race talk (Bonilla-Silva 2010; Feagin 2009). The dramatic events and extreme ideas that are associated with

racist groups and movements may typify the definition of racism, leaving no conceptual room for the forms of racism that are much more widespread in society. As a result, students may leave the classroom believing that racism does not affect their lives. But as Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2010, p. 265) aptly points out, "[t]he United States does not depend on Archie Bunkers to defend white supremacy." In other words, ubiquitous and often invisible forms of white privilege do more to reinforce racial hierarchies in the U.S. than do "acts of meanness" (McIntosh 1990, p. 31) by bigoted individuals or loosely networked neo-Nazi or Klan groups. In sociology classrooms, therefore, it is important to avoid conflating organized racism as the only form of racism that counts.

A related problem of teaching about organized racism is that students easily exoticize racist activists as racial Others, who are so distant from the experiences, attitudes, and ways of being of ordinary white people that more common forms of racism are simply inapplicable. Students may distance themselves from organized racism in three ways. First, they distance themselves temporally, imagining organized racism to be only a part of the Jim Crow or Nazi Germany past, eras characterized by blatant acts of racist violence. Second, students may distance themselves spatially, believing that organized racism takes place only in the rural American South, far from the many universities located in urban and/or northern areas. Lastly, they may create psychological distance between themselves and racist activists by imagining organized racism to be located in the extreme margins of today's society, where only the pathologically disturbed join racist groups. Such acts of distancing stand in the way of a deep understanding of the many layered nature of racial antagonisms in a society.

1.3 Overly Micro- or Macro-approaches

Organized racism is a complex phenomenon, with no simple set of explanatory factors. Even in a single time period and national context, it includes a variety of strategies, agendas, forms of participation, and motivations that resist parsimonious explanation. Some racist groups, for instance, cultivate opportunities for crossgenerational interaction that socialize children into the beliefs and practices of racial extremism from a very young age (Blee 2002). Other groups have little such interaction and rely on recruiting teenagers or adults, many of whom were raised in non-racist homes and environments (Simi and Futrell 2010). In some forms of

organized racism, the major target of animosity is African Americans and other people of color. In an increasing number of such groups today, Jews are the primary enemy and racial minorities, like whites, are viewed as being manipulated by invisible Jewish overlords. No single factor can account for such diverse groups and individual experiences in organized racism.

When asked to think about why racist groups exist or why people might choose to join them, students typically take one of two modes of explanation. Some students adopt explanations that are overly micro, arguing that racism is the product of psychological problems or personality defects in its adherents. Such explanations have been repeatedly disputed by research that finds that the psychological profiles of racial extremists differ little from the rest of the population, at least when they join racist groups; over time, highly committed racists can come to adopt conspiratorial logics and levels of fear and anxiety that are out of the ordinary (Blee 2002). Simplistic psychological explanations also tend to elide the importance of socio-structural causes for racial extremism like social inequality and political power.

If not focusing on the psychological character of racist activists, students tend to move far in the other direction, relying on explanations that are overly macro. They insist that racist extremism is the obvious product of broad or vague societal factors like "economic distress" or "challenges to masculine privilege." Such overarching macro explanations, however, are unable to account for the great fluctuations in levels and types of racist movements during times in which economic or gender factors are fairly constant.

In the classroom, the challenge is to help students develop rich and multilayered explanations for organized racism that recognize its heterogeneity and its differing forms across time and space. Although both micro and macro factors are important in understanding racial extremism, neither is very useful in isolation. Robust explanations need to identify multiple factors, consider how they vary over time and in different places, and indicate how they operate together. Challenges to masculine privilege may predispose *some* men to accept racist messages, but *most* men do not. *Some* racist activists grew up in racist families, but *most* did not. A useful approach to teaching about organized racism should help students recognize the problems of overreaching explanations and develop sensitivity to the complex experiences that lead people into racist groups.

1.4 Lack of Quality Data

The Internet contains a vast amount of information about organized racism, available on the websites of racist groups and anti-racist organizations. However, the quality of these data is generally very poor and often misleading if not used properly. This presents a fourth challenge when teaching about organized racism. For example, students doing research on organized racism in the U.S. often find references to the map of racist groups published and frequently updated by the reputable anti-racist organization, the Southern Poverty Law Center (2013). A cursory look at this map suggests that the landscape of organized racism in the U.S. today is quite vast, as over 900 groups are found across the country in virtually every state and region. Moreover, the map locates racist groups in somewhat surprising places. Pennsylvania and Ohio, for example, have more groups than Mississippi. It takes some understanding of the organization of modern racism to realize the implication of plotting groups, rather than members. In recent years, racist groups have tended to shrink in size, but not in number. Put more simply, there are a lot of groups but most groups are small and declining in size. Yet this distinction is easily overlooked.

The problem for teaching is that there are very few solid sources of data on organized racism today. Data from law enforcement is thin and largely inaccessible. Few scholarly works have penetrated the wall of secrecy and deception that surrounds organized racism and those that have (e.g., Blee 2002; Simi and Futrell 2010) have small and unrepresentative samples of cases and groups. Moreover, it is not possible to have students collect better data on their own. Racist groups are extremely suspicious of outsiders who might prove to be police informants or infiltrators so it is extremely dangerous for students to approach members of these groups, even in a public space. Those racist members who are willing to talk to students are likely either to provide misleading or false data, or they have little actual connection to racist groups or networks. A safer alternative is to encourage students to study racist groups through their websites or published literature, but these sources only reveal what racist groups want outsiders to see and this can bear little resemblance to the reality of these groups.

2 More Productive Approaches

In addition to facing the challenges outlined above, instructors who are teaching about organized racism can move a classroom discussion in a productive direction with two small shifts in focus. First, it is useful to direct attention away from the question of what racists believe to more sociological and analytic questions. Some of the most useful in our experience are: How do racist groups recruit new members? Why do some people join these groups? Why do some racist movements become strong and others weaken? What do racist groups (or activists) do, beyond their episodic moments of spectacular violence? In what ways do racist groups differ from each other? How do modern groups differ from those in the past? Such questions open discussion to the properties of racist groups and the mobilization dynamics of racist activism. These help counter the tendency of students to see organized racism as fully Other and beyond explanation and open these groups to the analytic tools of social research.

Second, it can be helpful to focus trans-nationally. Incorporating research and examples of racist groups outside the U.S. makes it possible for students to better contextualize the breadth, depth, and transnational flow of organized racism and racist activities in the twenty-first century. A particularly apt comparative focus might be Europe, where the structure of organized racism is similar to that in the U.S., with a second comparative focus on a region outside the global North/West to introduce differences in the definition of racism, race, and organized racism (see, for example, Berezin 2007; Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007; Sehgal 2007).

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