Antiracism Basics: Class-level (Part One)

Emily S. Kahm, *College of Saint Mary, Omaha*

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As I said in my earlier blog in this series, it can be a relief for teachers to know that making a course more antiracist isn't only about introducing fraught topics and crossing one's fingers that students have the self-awareness to handle them; antiracism can be present structurally, in much the same way that racism can be present structurally. In this blog, I will explore two practices I use in my own teaching to help promote a more antiracist learning environment, neither of which involve staging contentious debates or calling out individuals to speak on their experiences. While neither practice can suddenly create a perfectly antiracist classroom, they can help move one's overall teaching farther along that spectrum.

The first place to start is examining imagery usage in one's class. I personally came late to PowerPoints in my teaching (only really becoming proficient in slides during remote-synchronous learning in the pandemic when writing things on the board was no longer an option), so imagery for me was initially confined to my online course structure in my LMS. I dislike "plain" pages with nothing but text, so I was habitually using stock images on assignments and pages to offer some visual breaks – close-ups of water, forest photos, and so on. This continued until I was slotted to teach Women in the Bible and started exploring imagery for the Biblical figures I planned to focus on. Initial Google Image searching yielded everything from cartoons to Renaissance oil paintings and everything in between – but the enduring theme was that most representations depicted Bible characters as white, white,

white!

This was irritating on multiple levels. Historical accuracy was certainly a factor, but even if we could all agree that nobody *really* knows what Ruth and Naomi looked like, why do so many artists seem to assume they were pale-skinned and fair-haired? (The answer, in short, is white supremacy and Eurocentric Christian bias, but if you're reading a blog like this one, you probably already knew that). I was saved in that course by discovering James C. Lewis's *Icons of the Bible* artistic photography series, a project that depicts Bible figures more accurately with models who are exclusively people of color. Sweet relief!

Once slide decks became a more typical staple of my teaching techniques, then, I already had some experience realizing that the way I depicted people and communities on these slides would affect my students' imagination. I teach at a women's college, so I started by ensuring that my stock images included far fewer men than women, and then aimed to depict a wide range of racial diversity in each slide series. In teaching my class on Bodies in Christian Theology, I also learned to emphasize size diversity, visible disability, and visible queerness to continually enforce the implicit curriculum that Theology is for everyone and is done *by* everyone. For those who mostly use slides for text, I encourage you to experiment with the color and liveliness that comes with human images – and to use two or three stock photos rather than just one at a time. PowerPoint's Design function can help you work them in tidily, and you have another subtle antiracist practice in your toolkit.

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