

## News and Noteworthy

- ***The calling of Covid***...Although these past two years we've all felt a strong desire to "return to normal," we should focus on the tremendous opportunity in front of us rather than long for what was. Covid, indeed, has given educators a new raison d'être. We're called upon to dial up the compassion we express toward our students and their many pandemic-related needs, particularly our students from socially marginalized groups. See Daniel Bartholomay, "A Time to Adapt, Not 'Return to Normal:' Lessons in Compassion and Accessibility from Teaching During COVID-19." *Teaching Sociology*, First Published October 27, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0092055X211053376>
- ***Support for the sick***...Covid has highlighted competing demands within the healthcare system – between individual responsibility and social justice. Whereas the former focuses on individuals' capacity to pay for tests, treatments, and prescriptions, the latter emphasizes improvements in living and working conditions to forestall the onset of disease in the first place. A. Henry Eliassen investigates the impacts of these competing demands: "Toward a Sustainable US Health Care System: Policy Implications of Market Justice and Social Justice." *Journal of Community Positive Practices* 2021 21(3):17–30. <http://jppc.ro/index.php/jppc/article/view/423/354>
- ***Confronting the climate crisis***...Do you teach about climate change yet struggle to find resources that get to the heart of the matter? Does this topic simply feel too big to cover in a survey course? Andrew Szasz has developed a terrific website with resources for instructors and students alike. If you only spend a day teaching about climate change, no problem. If you want to devote more time, there are additional modules for doing so. The site contains easily explainable discussion of the science of climate change as well as tips for how to address challenges in teaching about this topic – including making climate change feel real; how to confront difficult feelings that may arise in students; and ways to respond to climate deniers. <https://climate-as-a-social-problem.sites.ucsc.edu/for-professors-and-instructors/>
- ***Reaching the TikTok generation***...Have you found your students don't always want to read what you assign? Since good teachers tap into their students' strengths, videos are often the way to go. Jerry Krase puts videos at the forefront of all his courses. He assigns popular films and asks students to write sociological movie reviews where their aim is to highlight how the film depicts race, class, gender, inequality, and other sociological concepts.

## A Free Virtual SSSP Global Outreach Conference, May 18 to 21, 2022

The Covid-19 pandemic has made more evident persistent, systemic inequalities that are rooted in and shaped by ideological, economic, political, social, and cultural structures. However, there are other transnational concerns that exacerbate these inequalities, including dwindling natural resources, expanding conflicts, increasing authoritarianism, and widening wealth gaps. Amid all these, a deeper awareness of the

damage of colonial and imperialistic histories are emerging, making obvious that Western/Euro/American-centric solutions are no longer viable, and are, in fact, sources of social problems.

In response to the challenges these inequalities pose, the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP) is hosting a free virtual international conference. It aims to provide a platform for scholars, activists, practitioners, students, professionals, governmental entities, non-profit organizations, and civil society from all over the world to network, share experiences and learn from each other across boundaries---as we reimagine forms of resistance, movements, and solutions to the unconscionable historic and existential challenges we face on our planet. We heartily invite you to join the conversation. Participation from the Global South is especially encouraged.

More information and the call for papers will be available February 7, 2022 on our conference website: <https://ejcj.orfaleacenter.ucsb.edu/cfp-transnational-conversations/>

Organized by the SSSP Transnational Initiatives Committee & Transnational Virtual Initiatives Committee Co-hosted by the Orfeala Center for Global and International Studies at the University of California at Santa Barbara. Contact: [transnationalconversations@gmail.com](mailto:transnationalconversations@gmail.com) Point persons: Diana Therese M. Veloso & Pattie Thomas

### **Feature Essay**

“Why We Need to Decolonize the Academy”

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Longstanding calls to uproot structural racism across the world—including in academia—have gained impetus in the wake of dozens of killings to include the murder of Breanna Taylor and George Floyd. Along with police reforms and the end of all racially motivated violence. One can also hear calls to decolonize institutions. Universities, as one of the principal sites of European dominance, are central to any decolonizing efforts. But what does it mean to decolonize the university? And how can professors, faculty, students, and academics work to create this change?

As Europe colonized much of the world it installed its major institutions -such as politics, family, economic systems, religion, and education. These institutions, found in the United States and Americas, throughout India, Africa, and the Caribbean’s primarily purposes were to guarantee Western ideas and knowledge systems, racial hierarchies and identities would prevail. As former colonies have struggled to remove the imperial colors, their efforts have been stifled in many ways by the institutions that are central to their existence.

The University is no different. Within the University, as with all other European imported institutions, white privilege, space, and identity have been not only preserved but continually reified. Consequently, history in the Americas start with colonization and much of what we know and teach with reference to the various colonized peoples start at this point in history. Most indigenous cultural systems, systems of knowledge, and world views were not only denigrated but also ridiculed as being backward, unsophisticated, and disregarded. The colonized and the slave were treated as a people without history, without substance or essence. They had no agency and only existed in juxtaposition and as a reaction to Western Imperialism. Even when forced to take these various groups into consideration, reluctantly it did so by creating identity programs such as Native American, African American, Asian and Latino American Studies programs. This left intact, much of the foundations of European history, white identity, and privilege. Ironically, even these programs continue to be marginalized, while areas such as Global and American studies, which primarily concentrates on the Western experiences, are again the dominant voices even among identity programs. Decolonizing the University means recentering the various voices of peoples of color, taking them from the margins to the core of what the academy is about.

Decolonial processes within the University refer to curriculum, pedagogies and methodologies that delink, deconstruct, and unhinge Eurocentric stereotypes while simultaneously challenging the canon and dominant ideologies of Western based systems of knowing, theories, and information. These have become contested sites for decolonial activists, scholars, theorists, researchers, and artists. It is an ongoing process directly related to the anti-, post- and decolonial struggles developed in China, India, Asia, Africa, and the Americas that challenge the Eurocentric control of knowledge, theory, and praxis.

Indigenous counter-narratives are being produced that both challenge the centrality of European established knowledge systems, while simultaneously recognizing that counter-narratives will be generated by canon proponents that challenge both the legitimacy and authority of these indigenous counter-narratives. If the canon proponents are successful, they will not only deflect criticism but also perpetuate the colonial based orientation that marginalizes formerly colonized and subjugated peoples. How we interpret social reality reflects our biases. Preconceived notions of racial inferiority have long since been a part of academia. If we look across time, over the past few centuries we see these same racist structures being reified throughout academia.

1. Universities across the Western World glorified, embraced, and celebrated colonization, genocide, slavery, rape, pillage, and theft of indigenous lands.

2. Academia was silent as racism, sexism, and ethnocentrism were enshrined into both law and public policy after the so-called end of slavery.

3. With the end of slavery, the Western academy was silent or turned a deaf ear to the cries of the newly enslaved under European colonialism that invaded India, the Middle East and Africa.

4. Universities across the Western World, during the first 40 years of the 19th century, were silent as thousands of African Americans were lynched, millions of Indians were slaughtered under British rule, Jews were systematically exterminated and Darwinism came into being under Hitler.

5. Academia was virtually silent as eugenics and the Mississippi appendectomy targeted blacks, Native Americans, and the urban poor.

6. Academia discovered the civil rights movement late in the game. And did not really embrace the social movement until long after the riots, long hot summers, and the assassination took the lives of King, Malcolm X and Kennedy's.

7. Academia was virtually silent as retrograde and conservatives, upset with the presumed progress of the civil rights movement began to systematically dismantle the structures reluctantly put into place, and to purposefully create the cradle to prison pipeline.

8. Academia was silent or blind to the killing of black, Hispanic, and Native American youth until three brave black mothers began the Black Lives movement.

9. Academia continues to discover blacks, Hispanic, and Native Americans as problems, as victims, but rarely as conquerors and overcomers. In ways that DuBois queried "what is it like to be a problem". Hence the continual problematization of these lives by academia and rarely can one find any significant attempt to empower, address their concerns, or repair the damage caused by white fragility.

Universities have become the site of contested spaces not only in this country but worldwide as symbols of our colonial, confederate and imperial past have been challenged and, in many cases, removed. While it is great that the symbols of our racist past such as Confederate flags, statues of Edward Colston (director of the Royal African Company that dominated the African slave trade), or King Leopold and other monuments are being retired, we must do way more. We must dismantle the colonial, imperialist, and racist structures that continue to deny identity and agency, history and cultural realities of the those that were subjugated, whose liberties were denied, and who even now call for justice. If indeed we are to move forward, we must commit to more than symbolic gestures and dedicate our efforts to making substantive changes. And this means being willing to have some difficult conversations and put our resources where our values are.

**See You in Los Angeles**

Please join us at the in-person 2022 SSSP annual meeting from August 5-7, 2022 at the Omni Los Angeles Hotel at California Plaza.

**These are the sessions sponsored by Teaching Social Problems:**

1. *How to be More Solutions-oriented in the Classroom* (Critical Dialogue, aligns with program theme, “The Sociological Re-imagination: From Moments to Momentum). Organizers: hephzibah v. strmic-pawl, [hvsp@mville.edu](mailto:hvsp@mville.edu) and Abby Templer Rodriguez, [ATemplerRodrigues@MissouriState.edu](mailto:ATemplerRodrigues@MissouriState.edu)
2. *The Power of Storytelling about Social Problems*. (Critical Dialogue) Organizers: Diane McMahon, [Dmcmahon@allegany.EDU](mailto:Dmcmahon@allegany.EDU) and Morena Tartari, [Morena.Tartari@uantwerpen.be](mailto:Morena.Tartari@uantwerpen.be)
3. *Drawing Upon Open Educational Resources*. (Critical Dialogue) Organizers: Sydney Hart, [shart9@ccc.edu](mailto:shart9@ccc.edu) and Pattie Thomas, [Pattie.Thomas@CSN.EDU](mailto:Pattie.Thomas@CSN.EDU)

**These are co-sponsored sessions:**

1. *Sports as a Lens for Teaching About Social Problems* (Critical Dialogue, Co-sponsored With Sport, Leisure, and the Body) Organizer: Kaitlin Pericak, [kait.pericak@miami.edu](mailto:kait.pericak@miami.edu)
2. *Teaching CJ: Illustrating Gendered Experiences of Criminal Justice Entanglement* (Critical Dialogue, Co-sponsored with Crime & Juvenile Delinquency and Gender) Organizer: Cynthia Zhang, [baiqing.zhang@cwu.edu](mailto:baiqing.zhang@cwu.edu)
3. *Teaching About Social Inequality in an Increasingly Polarized Era* (Critical Dialogue, Co-sponsored with Educational Problems) Organizers: Perri Leviss, [pleviss@uri.edu](mailto:pleviss@uri.edu) and Laurie Linhart, [lclinhart@dmacc.edu](mailto:lclinhart@dmacc.edu)
4. *COVID-19 and the Complicated Classroom* (Critical Dialogue, Co-sponsored with Social Problems Theory) Organizer: David Lane, [dclane1@ilstu.edu](mailto:dclane1@ilstu.edu)
5. *Teaching Sexualities* (Critical Dialogue, Co-sponsored with Sexual Behavior, Politics and Community) Organizers: Hannah Liebreich, [hannahli@hawaii.edu](mailto:hannahli@hawaii.edu) and Andrea Miller, [andreamiller31@webster.edu](mailto:andreamiller31@webster.edu)
6. *Best Practices for Showing Students That Mental Health Goes Beyond Personal Experience* (Critical Dialogue, Co-sponsored with Society and Mental Health) Organizer: Monnica Gavin, [gavinm@clarkstate.edu](mailto:gavinm@clarkstate.edu)
7. *Academic Freedom and Teaching CRT* (Critical Dialogue, Co-sponsored with Crime & Juvenile Delinquency and Law & Society) Organizer: Sarah Jane Brubaker, [sbrubaker@vcu.edu](mailto:sbrubaker@vcu.edu)

**Upcoming Newsletters**

I need your help! Please share with me topics you think would interest your colleagues.

- Do you have anything useful to publicize? Are you using innovative methods to teach about social problems? Have you come across timely research that would be helpful in the classroom? Have you recently published something of note?

- Is there a technique you use to teach about social problems that's been particularly effective? Would you be interested in sharing this technique so that other TSP members may learn from you? Please let me know if you are open to having a conversation about this technique.

I look forward to hearing from you!

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