CROSSING THE NEW JIM CROW COLOR LINE

Confronting Race in Community Service Learning Behind Bars

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Abstract

A growing number of service learning classes bring students into jails and prisons, stepping across what Alexander (2010) might call the new Jim Crow color line created by mass incarceration. Many of these courses are part of the innovative Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program, which brings inside and outside students together in a shared college class. Drawing on ethnographic observations, interviews, and 8 years of experience teaching Inside-Out courses, this article explores the ways students construct racial identities and understand racial hierarchies as they work together behind bars. Race is the elephant in the room in America's prisons, so faculty need to develop new strategies to support our students in the complex emotional and intellectual work of making sense of race. This requires understanding the diversity of our students' racialized experiences, pushing back against the temptations of colorblindness, and developing new ways to practice relationship building and social solidarity.

One day, 15 college students were walking into a Southern California juvenile hall to take part in a shared Inside-Out class with 15 incarcerated students when two guards approached the group and singled out Anthony, one of only two Black male college students in our class. He had left his ID at home, as had a White woman, Joan. The guards ignored her completely but asked Anthony a series of probing questions. Once they were convinced that he was a student, they asked him to dress differently so he would be easier to distinguish from the incarcerated minors. This moment made visible unconscious racial and gendered stereotypes that pervade (and shape) America's prison system and that have seeped deeply into our schools and communities in ways that fundamentally shape life chances for young people (Eberhardt et al., 2004; NAACP Legal Defense Fund, 2006). The probation staff apparently assumed that a White woman was a legitimate college volunteer but that a Black male college student, dressed that day in a clean white tee shirt and jeans, looked disconcertingly like an incarcerated youth. As we left, Anthony commented wryly, "the darkest skinned one in the class. It's just what we are learning about."

College students, like Anthony and Joan, were stepping across what Alexander (2010) might call the new Jim Crow color line created by mass incarceration. In a deeply embodied way, they were forced to confront clear evidence that we do not live in a post-racial society through our Inside-Out class. Every class, the outside students left our majority White campus to join our incarcerated classmates, who were almost all Black and Latino young men. But Joan and Anthony (and the rest of their classmates) did not experience the racial contours of our Inside-Out classrooms in the same way. They came face-to-face with very different racial, class, and gendered stereotypes as they worked together inside; they noticed different things; and they struggled over how to understand the ways race and racism mattered in the criminal justice system and in their own lives.

A growing number of community service learning classes bring students into jails and prisons, crossing some of the starkest racial and class divides in the United States.[1] Many of these courses, like my own, are part of the innovative Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program, founded by Lori Pompa at Temple University, in which inside students and outside students come together as equals in a shared college class. There are now over 150 universities that offer Inside-Out classes as well as a growing number of other community service learning opportunities behind bars. As these classes grow, we need to look more carefully at how our students experience and think about race from inside the criminal justice system. Race is not the only social identity or form of structural inequality students confront as they work together inside. Race operates in complex intersections with gender, class, sexuality, and disability to shape our criminal justice system. But race is so deeply intertwined with our criminal justice system and our ideas about crime and punishment that it is often the elephant in the room and thus deserves special attention.

Scholars such as Wacquant (2010) and Alexander (2010) have argued that the criminal justice system is one of the central race-making institutions in the post–civil rights era, shaping the boundaries and meanings of racial categories. The racializing power of the criminal justice system means that faculty and students come to community service learning behind bars with stereotypes, expectations, and emotions that are deeply shaped by prior racialized experiences. It also means that we are actively constructing our own racial identities in and through our Inside-Out classrooms. These classes become a vital space where inside and outside students explore the significance of race in America. Indeed, I will argue that many outside students come to these Inside-Out classrooms exactly because they are seeking to confront, understand, and sometimes even transcend the ways that race structures American society and constrains our lives. It is thus imperative that we think clearly about how we can support all our students (inside and out) through the complex intellectual, political, emotional, and personal work of making sense of race.

1. America's prisons and juvenile justice facilities are disproportionately filled with Black and brown bodies (Nellis, 2016). In contrast, although US colleges are becoming more racially diverse, White students are still overrepresented on most 4-year selective campuses (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013).

Studying the Jim Crow Color Line in Southern California

This article is based on my own work teaching Inside-Out classes and organizing tutoring and writing workshops for 11 years in a juvenile facility in Southern California. In this time, I have taught nine Inside-Out classes and conducted research on this larger community service learning project from 2012 to 2018. This article draws on more focused participant observation in two Inside-Out classes in 2012 and 2013 and the analysis of the written reflections of 30 outside and 28 inside students from classes taught in 2012, 2013, and 2016. I also draw on 17 interviews conducted with outside students from those same classes, who were recruited for interviews after completing the Inside-Out class. Unfortunately, I did not have institutional review board permission to interview inside students, so their perspectives are less fully represented here (see Tilton, 2020).

The racial demographics of outside student participants in this research mirror my Inside-Out classes: White outside students are the majority, about 10% of students are African American, and 30% are Latino, with occasional students who identify as Asian or biracial.[2] Inside students are overwhelmingly Latino and Black, with usually one White inside student in a class. I conducted interviews with seven White, six Latino, and four Black outside students, oversampling Black and Latino students so that I was able to explore the complexity of their experiences inside. In interviews, I asked students to reflect broadly on what they expected and learned from our shared classroom as well as more focused questions about how the class made them reflect on race and class in America, how it felt to move between our predominantly White campus and the locked facility, and how they experienced their complex intersectional identities in the Inside-Out classroom. I did open coding, refining key themes and patterns in interview transcripts and response papers, and then chose representative quotes to highlight the major themes.

Most of my inside and outside students have grown up with the "colorblind" and "post-racial" messages of Obama-era California, in a region where racial boundaries have never been Black and White and where Latino youth are becoming a clear majority. Race and class remain stubbornly built into both geography and criminal system, but the boundaries are more porous and flexible than in earlier eras and thus sometimes harder for students to see. The juvenile facility where I teach is 47% Latino, 35% Black, and just 17% White. Latino youth are only slightly overrepresented. However, like national patterns, African Americans are massively overrepresented, roughly four times more likely to be detained than White youth (Haywood Burns Institute, 2015). My private residential liberal arts college presents a stark contrast: in 2015, it was only 3% Black, 22% (and growing) Latino, and 53% White.

The racial contours of the criminal justice system vary significantly across the United States, as do the demographics of our colleges. Thus, the racial boundaries we see and struggle to understand in our community service learning behind bars will look different in Boston or Indiana or Mississippi. Wherever we work and teach, we

2. The demographics of my outside students have become more Latino over time as the population of our school has changed, but these statistics come from the period of most intense data collection from 2012 to 2016.

need to think hard about how the racial contours of our Inside-Out classrooms shape our students' understandings of race, class, and inequality in America.[3]

Bringing Race to the Center of Inside-Out's Transformative Pedagogy

A growing literature documents the distinctive Inside-Out pedagogy and why so many people describe these courses as "transformational" (Butin, 2007; Davis, 2013; Pompa, 2002). The structure of an Inside-Out classroom challenges the implicit hierarchies of helper/helped embedded in many service learning models (Pompa, 2002). Outside students come to learn with, and not "do for," inside students, sitting in a circle in which "everyone is equal, with an equal voice and an equal stake in the learning process" (Pompa, 2013, p. 129). This experience becomes a "gift of disturbance," shaking up assumptions and stereotypes (Pompa, 2004, p. 25). A model of critical service learning, Inside-Out classes encourage students to become "conscientious of and able to critique social systems" and to see themselves as "agents of change" (Mitchell, 2010; Pompa, 2002, p. 75, 2013, p. 132; Tilton, 2013).

Some literature has begun to measure exactly what students learn and how they are changed through the Inside-Out experience. Several studies clearly demonstrate the ways Inside-Out courses challenge the stigma of incarceration and reduce attitudes of punitiveness while humanizing and increasing empathy for inside students (Hilinski-Rosick & Blackmer, 2014). These studies find that outside students come to question several core stereotypes of incarcerated people, including their intelligence, dangerousness, and trustworthiness (Pompa, 2002, p. 69; Hilinksi-Rosick & Blackmer, 2014, p. 390).

Race is underexamined in this emerging literature on what students learn through Inside-Out, barely mentioned in several key studies (Allred, 2009; Hilinski-Rosick & Blackmer, 2014; Pompa, 2002).[4] Some of this may come from Inside-Out's philosophical commitments to transcending borders. As founder Pompa (2004) explains, "When students attend class together as equals, borders disintegrate, and barriers recede" (p. 27). There is an implicit tension between the humanizing impulse of Inside-Out, which encourages a focus on the irreducible individuality of every student, and the impulse to confront the structural racism that shapes who is locked up and who is not.

Inside-Out instructors certainly hope that our classes challenge stereotypes and equip our students to confront and dismantle racial hierarchies. But extensive research on community service learning finds that dominant racist ideologies are persistent, and too often service learning pedagogy leaves students without a clear understanding of the political and social processes that produce racial inequalities and unequal life chances (Dunlap et al., 2007; Mitchell et al., 2012; Simons et al., 2011). Many scholars have found community service has an inconsistent effect

3. My Inside-Out classes are distinctive from others in the Inside-Out network in some ways that may shape the findings in this article. I teach in a juvenile facility, where it may be harder to construct a fully egalitarian circle, as it is easier for outside students to imagine themselves as mentors to inside students. My Inside-Out classes are taught in a race and ethnic studies department, so outside students probably come to my class unusually willing to discuss race, when compared with students taking courses in a criminal justice or sociology department.

4. Important exceptions include Atiya et al. (2013), Conti et al. (2013), Follett & Rodger (2013), and Turenne (2013).

(Myers-Lipton, 1996) or no substantive positive change on White students' awareness of racism, race, or class privilege; desire for egalitarianism; or motivation to confront their racism (Wetzel et al., 2011, p. 134). Chesler and Vasques Scalera (2000) found that many White students in community service programs "adopt a color-blind ideology regarding race relations" (p. 22). Wetzel et al. (2011) found little discussion about race in the service learning programs they studied because students were uncomfortably aware of the racial divides and did not want to seem racist and because the curriculum didn't provide the space for more structured conversations about race. Some White students may exhibit a "passion for ignorance" and a deep emotional resistance when they are confronted by racial and class inequity (Jones et al 2001, Butin 2005).[5]

There are some good reasons to think Inside-Out could be more effective in challenging racial stereotypes than many service learning courses because its distinctive pedagogy meets many of the criteria identified as important to reduce prejudice. Inside-Out pedagogy constructs equal relationships among inside and outside students, forges a community of "cooperative-interdependence," and creates "interactions that disconfirm stereotypes" (Wetzel et al., 2011, pp. 122–123; Wittig & Grant-Thompson, 1998). But there is also an obvious danger that we can reaffirm racial stereotypes linking blackness or brownness and criminality, especially if White students' primary engagements with communities of color take place behind bars. Inside-Out courses may only have significant positive impacts on students' racial attitudes and commitments to challenging racism when there are spaces for deep, guided reflection on race and racism both in class and in written reflections (Green, 2001; Mitchell et al., 2012). We fundamentally do not yet know what our students learn about race and how much they develop a political consciousness about structural racism through the Inside-Out pedagogy. Nor do we fully understand how students' experiences and analyses are shaped by their complex social identities and by what we do in our classrooms.

This article builds on calls by some Inside-Out teachers and Think Tank members (composed of Inside-Out alumni and faculty) to bring questions of race and diversity to the center of our pedagogy and our research on student learning (Atiya et al., 2013; Follett & Rodger, 2013). Turenne (2013), an Inside-Out facilitator and trainer, acknowledges the complex racial and gendered dynamics of the Inside-Out classroom, in which most outside students and teachers are White women and most inside students are men of color. The goal of Inside-Out is not to "sweep these dynamics under the rug, but to work through these issues as collectively and authentically as possible" (pp. 124). She argues that we need to create a space to explore "all the isms"—the ways race intersects with gender, class, and ability—so we avoid "oppressive oversimplifications" and think about oppression in "richer and more complex ways" (pp. 124–126). This article is one contribution to that effort, making visible the ways our students struggle to think about race, and its complex intersections, and to forge their own racial identities in the highly racially charged spaces of America's prisons.

This article draws on critical race theory to explore how racial identities are constructed and performed inside our Inside-Out classrooms. Instead of treating race a stable variable or racial identity as an individual process of psychological development (Dunlap et al., 2007; Simons et al., 2011), this literature considers how people engage with, perform, and remake racial identities through contested interactions in specific social and political

5. Jones et al. (2005) argues that we need to think about student resistance as "a site of transformative potential" and call on teachers to support the tough emotional work in the struggle to confront structural inequalities that pervade our service learning sites (pp. 4, 20).

contexts (Butin, 2006; Hicks Peterson, 2018; HoSang et al., 2012). The criminal justice system is a key "race-making institution" (Wacquant, 2010), so we need to explore how race is "made" in community service learning programs within prisons and jails. How do students' previous racialized experiences shape their expectations and experiences in Inside-Out classrooms? How do crossing prison walls and the distinctive Inside-Out pedagogy shape the process of reconstructing racial identities and solidarities for our students? What do our students learn about race and racism as they work together in an Inside-Out classroom?

Forging Racial Identities Through Community Service Learning in Prisons

To understand how students come to think about race in an Inside-Out classroom, it is valuable to begin with a discussion of why outside students are attracted to Inside-Out courses in the first place. Outside students choose to take Inside-Out classes for a wide variety of reasons, but there are some clear racial patterns in students' initial desires and expectations. For my courses, I try hard to build a racially diverse group of outside students, which means I turn away a lot of White students (particularly White women) and actively recruit men of color on my college campus. Informal conversations with other Inside-Out instructors suggest that this is a common experience. I do this extra recruiting of students of color as one way to break down some of the walls that divide inside and outside and to challenge (or at least avoid reifying) stereotypes that associate criminality with men of color and college access with whiteness. But it is important to ask why so many White students (and faculty) are attracted to this kind of class and how race shapes students' emotional experiences of Inside-Out classrooms and their learning behind bars.

Leaving "the Bubble" of Whiteness and Becoming a Good White Person

White students are often initially excited to take Inside-Out classes because people in the criminal justice system represent the epitome of racial and cultural difference in their imagination. Some described the Inside-Out class as a chance to leave the isolated "bubble" of college and their predominantly White middle-class hometowns. As one White outside student said, "It's like I would never normally get to meet anyone in that group. So I guess like the unknowing, the adventure of it." There is an inescapable element of cultural tourism or "penal spectatorship" when White students describe their Inside-Out experience as like studying abroad (Pollack & Eldridge, 2015) or when it's clear that they are seeking a kind of "ghetto authenticity" that has long been defined as "cool" in popular culture (hooks, 1992; Kelley, 1998).[6]

6. Thanks to Steele (2020) for pointing out that this may be especially influenced by our work in a youth facility, as these are ideas of "cool" that are attached particularly to "urban" youth. I explore this theme more in an upcoming paper that focuses more in depth on the construction of whiteness inside.

Entering an Inside-Out classroom often made White outside students uncomfortably conscious of their whiteness. Most described real feelings of guilt and shame as we discussed readings and personal experiences that showed the significance of race and class in shaping opportunities in the United States. Their biggest fear was that they would be seen "as racist," be stereotyped as "just a rich White girl," and thus be unable to overcome the racial and class divides to forge real relationships with their inside classmates.

These racial anxieties led many White outside students to express a real desire to escape or camouflage their whiteness and to feel a deep pleasure when they felt those racial boundaries disappear.[7] Joan, for example, realized that she had "gone through life trying to make it seem like race doesn't matter and just trying to connect with people." In the Inside-Out class, she had sometimes tried "to hide the fact that I'm White and privileged and try to relate to them" by highlighting the ways "I'm maybe different from every other White person." But the class made her realize "that race is more important than I had originally wanted to feel it was. That was hard to grapple with."

These narratives suggest that White people may be attracted to Inside-Out classes (as teachers and students) because we are struggling to construct a viable White identity and to "make our whiteness okay" at a moment when the links between whiteness and white supremacy have become all too obvious. Doing community service in communities of color offers an important way for White people, maybe especially White women, to construct a sense of ourselves as "good White people" who are not racist and are committed to helping others (Sullivan, 2014; Tochluk, 2010). This desire may help us understand why so many White women teach and take Inside-Out classes and participate in service learning more broadly. Gendered ideologies of caretaking play a role but so does the desire among many White women to find a way to reconcile a sense of ourselves as being "good caring people" with the implicit awareness that we are beneficiaries of a radically unjust racial hierarchy.

There is certainly a positive side to this desire to forge a community in which we can transcend race, class, and the many other labels that confine us, and for some, the Inside-Out class creates a space to construct an anti-racist White identity. But the desire to be a good White person, and to be innocent of the moral stain of racism, may also get in the way of students facing their own structural privilege.

Feeling at Home in a Locked Facility: Crafting Black and Latino Identities in an Era of Racialized Hyper-Incarceration

Students of color describe choosing to take Inside-Out classes for a somewhat different set of reasons.[8] Many outside students of color chose to take my class because they were trying to understand the experience of family

7. Pollack and Eldridge (2015) make a similar argument about how the desire for dialogue can be part of "a listener's desire for a redemptive experience," and they quote Jones (1999), "We seek liberation, through hearing you, through 'your' dialogue with us . . . and [are] therefore cleaned from the taint of colonization and the power that excludes" (pp. 134). The power of this desire among faculty is also evident in the beautiful, self-reflective analysis of faculty experiences in the Inside-Out training (Conti et al., 2013).
8. I more fully develop and illustrate these arguments in Tilton (2016).

members and close friends who they had seen get swept up in the justice system. Not surprisingly, given the racial contours of mass incarceration, this was true for about 75% of the outside students of color compared with 20% of White outside students.

Many outside students of color also described Inside-Out classes as an important space for them to forge a relationship with a broader community of color and to construct their own racial identity in a deeper way while they attended a predominantly White college. We are living in a moment when contact with the criminal justice system has become a paradigmatic racialized experience, but many middle-class Black and Latino outside students (especially women) described themselves as having been largely insulated from experiences of racial profiling. They saw the Inside-Out class as a way they could learn about, and connect to, the reality of racism and to their own Black or Latino identities. For some, it also became a space where they could resolve tensions between their racial and class identities.

Many outside students of color regularly described feeling more at home in juvenile hall than on our predominantly White campus (see also Green, 2001; Mitchell & Donahue, 2009). They described the pleasure of code-switching back into a home language, whether African American Vernacular English or Spanish or the simple pleasure of not standing out as one of the only Black or Latino students in their class. But this disconcerting experience of feeling at home inside a correctional facility sometimes heightened the sense of alienation students of color felt on our historically White campus.

As the opening vignette for this article illustrated, Black and Latino men faced the additional emotional burden of coming face-to-face with the pernicious racist stereotypes of criminality that they have had to confront in their everyday lives. This can lead to an intensified form of "double consciousness," when men of color are forced to see themselves through the eyes of the criminal justice system (Du Bois, 1903).[9] Some, like Anthony, took this stereotyping in stride, explaining later that he "had experienced it many other times in life" and "was used to it." He added, "I don't take offense to it," and it wasn't worth getting mad "because it's like, it's not going to change." But for others, this personal identification made the quotidian types of disrespect and stereotyping we see in the criminal justice system more painful, and this discouraged many men of color from taking Inside-Out classes or continuing to work as volunteers inside. One Black student said many of his friends saw taking a class or volunteering in juvenile hall a threat to their own successful college path. "They say wait a minute, so you want me to take a step backwards?"

Seeing Race and Navigating the Temptations of Colorblindness in Our Classrooms

The curriculum of my Inside-Out class, focused on inequalities in American childhoods, explicitly encourages students to think both personally and academically about how race shapes young people's lives and opportu-

9. Men of color were sometimes forced to experience this same stereotyping from their college classmates. One Black outside student experienced this poignantly when we hosted some of the inside students on a visit to our college campus, and another white student, who volunteered in juvenile hall and joined us on the tour, assumed he was an inside student. He had already decided to transfer to another college, but this experience certainly did not make him feel more welcome on our campus.

nities. Assignments ask students to compare school discipline practices in their schools or to reflect on how our neighborhoods impacted inside and outside students. I try to model talking openly about my whiteness and exploring how the communities I grew up in were shaped by race and class. But we need to explore more carefully whether students themselves developed a broader political consciousness about structural racism and what shaped their learning and their resistance. Confronting racial divides embedded in juvenile hall elicited a complex set of emotional responses from students: for some, encouraging a deep exploration of race in their own lives but, for others, producing a retreat to colorblind ideologies.

Many inside and outside students across racial lines used their experience in this class to dig in deeply to understand exactly how racial inequalities are produced in schools, neighborhoods, and criminal justice institutions. But this willingness to embrace this emotionally uncomfortable work was shaped by students' previous coursework and by their own personal experiences. White students were much more likely to explore racism in their own lives and across social institutions if they had taken other ethnic studies courses or had participated in student groups that openly discussed racism. Many students of color, especially first-generation college students, developed sophisticated understandings of how race intersected with gender, class, place, and ability to push them on a path to college when too many others in their neighborhoods or families ended up in jail. Because many came to the class with urgent questions about why they were not incarcerated, unlike some of their friends or relatives, they were able to develop complex intersectional and personal analyses of their own lives. They described how their parents had moved or got them into better schools outside of their neighborhoods. Women of color analyzed the ways gender ideologies insulated them from criminalization while leaving their brothers and cousins vulnerable. Many developed nuanced understandings of the ways teachers had helped to produce the categories of "good kids" and "bad kids," categories that were shaped by race, class, and gender but that enabled some kids of color to attain social mobility through education while many others remained trapped behind.[10]

Sometimes, however, my students and I hesitated to talk openly about race even when it was staring at us in the face. For example, in the beginning of one class, I did an exercise to explore differences in our school experiences. I asked students to put their thumbs up or down in response to a series of questions, such as, "Did you have teachers who cared about you in high school? Did you have metal detectors in your school? Were there frequent fights in your school? Were you ever suspended?" In our discussion, both inside and outside students identified some clear patterns in their answers, such as that inside students were much more likely to have gone to schools with metal detectors and uncaring teachers. Many mentioned that every inside student had been suspended, but "most college students had their thumbs down." A few students also identified a gender disparity, with only boys and not girls having been suspended. But there was a clear pattern to what many students did not see (or at least mention) as well. When I asked the question about suspensions, only two outside students raised their hands, the only two African American men from the university.

I hesitated in that moment to highlight the racial pattern that was visible, perhaps worried about making these two men uncomfortable and hyper-visible (as I knew they already often were at the university), and no one else named it either. My own hesitation may also have been influenced by my knowledge that correctional staff

10. I develop this argument further in Tilton (2016).

occasionally complained when I talked too much about racism (which they saw as undercutting their message that young people should take individual responsibility for their crimes). But this failure to see and name race, specifically to discuss distinctive patterns of anti-blackness in school discipline, left students to their own devices to see, analyze, or ignore the pattern. And in their reflections, only a few took notice. One of the African American inside students wrote about this in his reflection: "The thing that mostly stood out to me is that out of the whole class [among outside students] only the two Black outside students were suspended. That was crazy to me . . . [and] shows us how schools target color people to be a problem in their school." Some other students wrote that week about the racial contours of school discipline. Others did not see the racial pattern in the room, and my open-ended prompt that week did not push them beyond the comfort of more colorblind explanations for the inequalities they saw in our class.

White Desires for Racial Innocence and the Pull of Colorblind Ideals

There was a common pattern among many White students to acknowledge race or class privilege occasionally in their response papers (usually in response to a specific course reading or question) but then to avoid exploring the significance of racism and White supremacy in structuring their own lives and opportunities. The pull of colorblindness was particularly evident in final response papers, in which most White students (and several students who identified as mixed race) explored their privilege only in terms of geography, focusing on the difference between "good" and "bad" neighborhoods or between "suburbs" and "ghettos" but ignoring the significance of racism in shaping these places and our perceptions of them.

White outside students often talked about their "luck," how they "had no choice," or how "it just so happened" that their parents had money or that they "grew up in a nice neighborhood with nice people." They sometimes equated the prejudice experienced by White people with those experienced by people of color, as Samantha did when she said, "I definitely don't want anyone in the class to look at me differently because I live in a White suburb, and I definitely won't look down upon someone based on where they live." Each of these strategies helped White people avoid feeling guilt or being implicated in the long (and recent) history of White supremacist housing policy that has created unequal access to opportunities, education, and wealth based on race. Since ultimately no one is responsible for luck or nice neighbors, White students could avoid facing the ways whiteness gave them advantages in their own lives.[11] Steele (2020) argues that the guilt and fears of being seen as racist can discourage students from a fuller exploration of their ideas and experiences of race in prison contexts. If students have not taken courses that explore structural racism outside of criminal justice systems, they also may lack the historical knowledge to analyze existing inequalities.

The growing diversity of our college population (and of the outside students I recruit for my class) ironically encouraged some White students' colorblind commitments. In an interview, as Samantha talked about her feel-

11. These strategies directly mirror those found by Bonilla-Silva (2003).

ings of guilt seeing the differences between her life and inside students, she repeatedly hesitated to talk about race and talked about her luck in moving to a better neighborhood and going to private school where her grandparents lived. She said, "I don't think whiteness explains it. . . . We have tons of Latino students here . . . [at the university]. I truly believe that it's possible for anyone to go to college, but it's the want, their support system, and if it's possible." White outside students often returned to this kind of convoluted refrain that recognized barriers but simultaneously discounted them, insisting that what really determines success or failure was individual effort, whether someone "wants it" badly enough. We see here how a White desire for innocence can encourage a retreat to dominant ideologies of colorblindness and meritocracy, ideologies that work to naturalize and justify existing racial inequalities (Bonilla-Silva, 2003).

White students like Samantha are struggling to understand the fluidity of racial boundaries in a moment when racism does not quite work the way it did during Jim Crow, as there are growing numbers of Latino and Black college students in historically White schools and as suburban neighborhoods and schools are increasingly racially mixed. But we also see how this fluidity, and the social mobility of some people of color, enables some White students to deny the significance of race. I want to highlight the contrast between Samantha's statement that "whiteness" or race "doesn't explain it" and the ways most students of color explored the intersection of race with class and place to shape opportunities. As one Latina student who grew up in a barrio in Northern California said, "It can't just be racism, although racism is at the root core. Racism is the cause, but in a way, it's hidden. We say schools in 'poor' areas are bad instead of schools where the dominant race is Black or Latino are bad."

White students' investments in these colorblind narratives (and the pleasure they experienced forging personal relationships in the Inside-Out classroom) encouraged some to embrace a narrow view of social change, one that focused on helping to change individual lives. As one student wrote in her final paper:

> I believe the best way a single person can make change is to just be there for someone else, to support them and show you care. We don't need to radically change schools and the justice system all the time. . . . If you can be just one person, one caring and supportive influence in the life of a boy who is otherwise on the pipeline towards prison, then the chances of success for that boy get larger.

Inside Students Shifting Perspectives

Inside students also struggled to make sense of race and structural racism within our Inside-Out classrooms. Many inside students—Latino, Black, and occasionally White—bring sophisticated critiques of racism in the criminal justice system into these classes. And some developed wonderful new ways of thinking about race, class, and inequality in the shifting suburban landscapes. But inside students also sometimes strongly resisted exploring the ways institutionalized racism had affected their own lives. Some White and Latino inside students held on to anti-black racism and a logic of racial competition that pervades California prisons (Goodman, 2014; Tilton, 2020). And many shifted perspectives repeatedly, at one moment expressing rage at structural racism

in the criminal justice system and, at the next, insisting that people of color just needed to take more personal responsibility for changing their own lives and communities.

Joseph, an African American inside student, consistently reflected on complex ways racism shaped young people's lives. In reflection papers, he wrote:

> I think our country does provide equal opportunities for us all, but to a certain extent. . . . What makes me want to holler is, that more than likely if you're a Black/Latino kid coming out of the ghetto your chances of getting employed are sliced down the middle. The feeling is like being a prisoner with limited opportunities and benefits. Coming up in a gang infested neighborhood, kids see and hear things that no child should experience. And then people go and blame it on our parents, when in reality our parents do the best they could to raise us.

In a later response, he summarized his thinking: "Being born into poverty, your race, and your family's history, they all affect your future."

Terrance, another inside student, explained his own shifting perspective on whether there are equal opportunities across America:

> African Americans or any other race that grew up in a tough area have it so much harder than the average White man that lives in a safer environment. I also think we do have equal rights because its free education and wanting to achieve is right in front of anyone you just have to want it. The thing that has me going both ways is that some people have been doing wrong for so long that that's all they know and they are afraid to do right and succeed.

Later Terrance added, "Even though kids in the ghetto aren't given books served on a silver platter with their name on it, it doesn't mean that they have the right to give up." These shifting and competing perspectives represent inside students' struggles to make sense of the complex racial and class inequalities that surround them while holding on to the possibility that their own futures remain unencumbered by structural barriers. Indeed, holding on to faith in the power of individual choice is an important way incarcerated youth can claim autonomy and control within a system that radically constrains their freedom.

My efforts to diversify the outside students in my classes encouraged some inside students to embrace dominant ideologies of colorblindness and meritocracy, much like White students, though I think for different reasons. Most inside students begin the class thinking that all college students will be rich White kids, and many are. But when they get to know the outside students of color and hear the stories of the rare outside student who grew up poor in a tough neighborhood, many begin to overestimate the similarities between inside and outside student experiences. Many inside students saw the social mobility of individual outside students as evidence that equal opportunity was a reality and that there were not any significant structural barriers to success. As one Latino inside student wrote, "Outside students are just like us, they just made different choices." Another

explained in more detail, "There were so many people from different backgrounds, race, and life struggles, maybe even similar to my peers and I, but they made better decisions and amount to something better."

This analysis can serve as a reminder that both inside and outside students are making sense of race and structural inequalities from the world they see in an Inside-Out classroom. We need to be brave enough to explicitly discuss the racial dynamics and composition of our classrooms and how they compare with the institutions and regions we come from. For example, if an institution is disproportionately choosing White inside students to participate and there is no explicit discussion in the classroom about what might go into the selection process, our students may think that racial disparities in prison aren't as bad as generally reported or that White inside students are in fact "better behaved" or more "college ready," assumptions that leave racist structures of the criminal justice system and American society unchallenged. Similarly, if we do not explore whether our college students reflect the racial diversity of young people in our region, inside and outside students can see a little diversity as evidence that race no longer matters.

Creating Brave Spaces to Talk About Race

This research reaffirms the call to create brave spaces where students and faculty can explore their own identities and issues of power and privilege in our Inside-Out classrooms (Atiya et al., 2013). Inside-Out has increased training around diversity, privilege, and power over the last decade as it has expanded (Turenne, 2013). But there remains more work to be done. As Davis (2013) argued, we need to create "space where people can enter discomfort and still feel safe enough to stay there" because "it is impossible for certain kinds of productive work to happen without discomfort, even acute discomfort" (p. 108). This article makes clear that our students (inside and out) face different challenges as they struggle to understand race and construct complex intersectional identities inside prisons (see also Mitchell & Donahue, 2009). So how can we best support all our students in the intellectual, political, emotional, and personal work of making sense of race and class? And can we do this in a way that challenges and empowers all our students?[12]

I know at this point in the article, readers want me to provide a clear roadmap and set of answers to these important questions. In this section, I will share some strategies from my own teaching, the Inside-Out network, and the broader community service learning literature. But I also want to push back against the deep desire for transcendence or redemption implicit in the quest for solutions. As this article shows, the desire to transcend racism, to show that we are good White people innocent of that moral stain, can stand in the way of us doing the messy, hard work required to confront the realities of the racial structures we live in. There is no perfectly scaffolded curriculum that will support our students (or ourselves) in developing the racial identities or structural analysis that can transcend the deep ways structural racism devalues Black, Latino, and Native lives. The reality is that some of us (especially White middle-class people) can choose to engage or walk away from the fight for racial justice and the fight to fundamentally transform the criminal justice system, while others in our Inside-

12. Special thanks to Ella Turenne, Tyee Griffith, Shoshana Pollack, Sue Castagnetto, and the anonymous reviewers for pushing me to think through this section in new ways.

Out classrooms do not have that same choice. We need to practice sitting in that deep discomfort. We also need to show our students that we are willing to take risks, to struggle, to fail, and to try again, as we experiment with building the critical consciousness and networks of solidarity that can more deeply transform the unjust systems that we live in. So, what shall we try given the findings of this article?

Some scholars have called for the Inside-Out program to launch a more concerted effort to diversify both the teachers and outside students as part of an effort to explore the racial and gendered dynamics of our classes (Van Gundy et al., 2013). This certainly might help destabilize a "pedagogy of whiteness" that centers the needs of White students (Mitchell et al., 2012). More faculty of color could help create spaces that better support students of color (inside and outside) in the emotionally challenging work of confronting and challenging the deep racial stereotypes of criminality embodied in the criminal justice system while also meeting the fundamental desire to see more people who look like them in positions of power. To achieve these goals, Inside-Out programs need to actively reach out and recruit within Black and Latino student and faculty networks and take care that they do not reproduce White-dominated pedagogical and social spaces that can discourage students and faculty of color from participating.

But this research also points to the limitations of this strategy. Better recruitment does not itself help students confront or understand the racial divides that fundamentally structure our colleges and our prisons. Indeed, as this article shows, diversifying our classes can encourage some students to embrace colorblind ideologies and to ignore the complex ways race continues to structure opportunity in America. Furthermore, there are good reasons some students and faculty of color, especially Black men, choose not to participate in service learning behind bars. As we saw in the opening of this article, it can prompt painful confrontations with dominant racial and gendered stereotypes of criminality that many reasonably do their best to avoid (Tilton, 2016).

The major recommendation coming out of this research is that Inside-Out instructors need to consciously create the time and space for deeper, guided reflections about racial identity and racism in our courses (Tyrone Werts in Atiya et al., 2013, p. 112). The elephant is in the room, and our students need more structured support to explore how to make sense of it. Here my recommendations echo those of many other scholars exploring the importance of explicitly addressing race in critical community service learning courses (Green, 2001; Hicks Peterson, 2018; Mitchell et al., 2012). This will necessarily take different forms in different Inside-Out courses, but we should embed readings and activities that confront the complexity of racial identities and hierarchies into our courses no matter what their topic. Most importantly, we must become brave enough to bring the possibly painful racial dynamics that emerge into the circle for collective analysis. This means pointing out the racial patterns in the room (who was and was not suspended or who was not asked for their ID as we entered class) and being willing to push people to look clearly at implicit biases when they emerge.

Inside-Out has a national network of Think Tanks and Training Institutes that can and should mobilize to better prepare faculty to facilitate difficult conversations about race. Faculty (like students) come to these courses with different personal perspectives and levels of experience facilitating these conversations. We know that many White people (who remain the majority of Inside-Out faculty) have little practice, and are often deeply uncomfortable, talking about racism (DiAngelo, 2018). The Inside-Out website has already built a list of readings about

racism and recently added a piece on implicit bias into their facilitator trainings. The national office should work with the regional Think Tanks to create a new set of interactive exercises for the Inside-Out curriculum that help students explore dynamics of implicit bias, privilege, intersectionality, internalized racism, and structural racism in prisons or in the schools, historically redlined neighborhoods and other institutions that feed into it. Engaging the Think Tanks would ensure that these exercises are attentive to the complex racial dynamics within prisons as well as on college campuses and could generate a set of flexible strategies for faculty to incorporate into different courses as they best fit. Inside-Out reflections should also be revised with explicit prompts to encourage teachers and students to reflect personally, emotionally, and analytically about the racial dynamics inside the criminal justice system and in our Inside-Out classrooms. This would subtly push students away from the temptation of colorblindness and encourage deeper personal reflections about racial identity and structural racism.

We also need to experiment with new ways for students to process their emotional responses, as we support them in the process exploring and constructing their own complex and intersecting racial identities because engaging emotions is "in fact integral to the development of critical consciousness" (Langstraat & Bowdon, 2011, p. 9). In an Inside-Out classroom, some middle-class (often White) students are looking at the suffering in the prison system from a distance, but others are seeing the lives of their brothers or cousins, and inside students are living inside the prison system itself. Creative writing and autobiographical reflections are one powerful way for many students to work through the contradictory and complex emotions that surface for all our students in our classroom and to begin to cultivate the kind of self-awareness that is important to building authentic relationships (Mitchell, 2008, p. 61). The Bridges Not Walls project in Canada recommends using techniques drawn from Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, like tableaus, because they enable embodied explorations of identity, oppression, and solidarity that can be sometimes more powerful than words (Shoshanna Pollack, personal communication Jan 25, 2020).

One risky, but productive, strategy I have used to support student exploration of racial identity is to split the class into racial groups (Black, White, and Latino) to discuss their experiences with racial stereotypes, how we learned them, and how they have affected us. I invited students to choose which group to join and openly discussed the problems with the categories since many students did not fit clearly into one category. Inside and outside students of color loved this exercise, but it made many White students particularly uncomfortable since it pushed directly against their desires for colorblindness. As Emily explained, "It just didn't feel right. . . . I want to be intertwined with everyone else. . . . It's like you're looking around the room and the first thing you think is the different racial groups. It's like that's not the first thing I want to come up in my mind." Some White students such as Joan, however, ultimately came to find this discomfort helpful since it pushed her to "reflect upon the importance of race" in "an open and free way." Creating more opportunities for students to meet in different affinity groups, perhaps even shifting ones, might encourage students of color and White students to explore their own complex racial identities and intersectional experiences with more confidence.

Breaking up into racial groups enabled conversations about racism that would not have happened in a larger group because both prisons and colleges have their own complex racial politics and all our students must go back to these communities after our Inside-Out classes (see also Atiya et al., 2013). As Victor, a Mexican American

inside student explained, "It felt right because I could discuss my stereotypes on what people think about Latinos and Mexicans, only because I didn't have to worry about no Black or White person repeating what I had to say. That would cause problems and issues." In separate groups, students were able to have more open discussions of racism, enabling Latino students to confront anti-Black sentiment in their homes and communities and exposing some of the implicit and explicit investments in White supremacy among White students and some of the vulnerability White inside students felt as minorities in the institution. But the groups also made visible the diversity of experiences within groups. For example, Brianna, a Latina outside student who grew up in a middle-class, predominantly White neighborhood was "blown away by how different my perception of 'being Latin' was from many inside students' experiences of 'being brown.'" She was struck by the group's discussion of the derogatory labels so many of her peers had faced and recognized that "being that I look White, I've never been called any of those hurtful names."

Inside-Out teachers need to engage in a complex balancing act, pushing our students to recognize these difficult dynamics of difference and privilege while crafting a circle that enables us to transcend the confines of the categories that we live in (Hicks Peterson, 2018). Inside-Out classes can become a space where we can briefly experience the world we want to live in, a world that recognizes we are not whole unless we can come together in a circle, unless we can create a space where all our knowledge, perspectives, and lives are valued.[13] Many of us look to Inside-Out classes as a space of healing, where perhaps, at least in moments, we can transcend racial and class divisions, where students can define their own identities, write for themselves what it means to be Black or Latina/o or White, as they push against the stereotypes they face in college and in juvenile hall. But there is also a temptation that, in the search for this beloved community, we push more disruptive social divides to the side or that we mistake the solidarity constructed in the circle itself for anti-racist politics. We must actively resist these temptations because we cannot build the world that we want to live in without working to actively dismantle the racial and class structures that currently divide us.

Inside-Out classrooms are spaces where we can practice relationship building, but if we want to create "authentic relationships" (Mitchell, 2008, p. 58), we also need to provide our students with opportunities to practice solidarity that extend beyond the classroom. The two dozen Inside-Out Think Tanks are one important model, engaging inside and outside alumni in long-term regional collaborations that are models of how to build community-university partnerships that are co-created and equally benefit community and university constituents. Another way to cultivate the kernels of critical consciousness and to practice more politically engaged forms of solidarity is to build pathways for alumni of Inside-Out classes to collaborate with the vibrant community-based networks fighting to transform criminal justice systems. Even though we must be careful about engaging in activism from inside the criminal justice system, we can introduce students to these networks in our courses through course readings or class visits. Faculty and alumni networks can also facilitate these connections for our students when Inside-Out classes are over. This has become an important part of my own teaching practice, as I have engaged students in a long-term collaboration with a network of advocates and reentry service providers

13. I am inspired here by Davis (2013), who argues that Inside-Out circles "leave us with a new map of where we live, new means to traverse social distance, and a new capacity to act collectively" (p. 173).

in California fighting for the rights of people with criminal records. These networks center the leadership of people of color most impacted by the criminal justice system, an important counterweight to the White middle-class leadership that dominates most university settings. These collaborations provide students with models of how we can work over the long haul to build power and fight for racial justice, how we can fight for small policy changes while staying focused on deeper transformations. These forms of collective action also act as an important counterpoint to the powerlessness many students feel when they confront the institutionalized racism embedded in our prisons.

Inside-Out Think Tanks and alumni networks can develop other opportunities to extend the relationships built inside into a deeper form of social solidarity that transcend prison walls especially as more inside students are released back home. Pitzer College's new expanded 4-year Inside-Out bachelor's degree program offers one exciting model, a new way that Inside-Out is participating in the growing effort to rebuild college education inside prisons and create pathways to college post-release. As some former inside students from the new BA program are released, they can transfer directly into Pitzer College to complete their degrees. By creating new pathways from classrooms in prison to classrooms on our college campuses, these initiatives begin to challenge the very divide between inside and outside. They provide a model for thinking about what it looks like to welcome our classmates, friends, colleagues, and family members home so we truly begin to take down the walls that divide us.

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