

“Questions Engaging Racism,”
All College Meeting
John M. Greene Hall
Tuesday, January 29, 2008

Engaging with racism at Smith

1. I taught from RACISM WITHOUT RACISTS, and one of my students was concerned that the frames of new racism may cast such a wide net that people feel anything can be racist and the word loses its power. I did not know how to respond – What would you have said?
2. I feel as if the proposed course American Studies 102 will only interest people that do not necessarily need to think through race. How do you feel about the implication of a mandatory course so that everyone can be racially aware?
3. What does social justice “look like” at an institution (like Smith) that has power rooted in exclusion and limited access?
4. As students, we are limited by bureaucracy. Decisions at the college are made for us and not by us. What is the tactic that we can use to circumvent this system that breaks our progress? How can we empower ourselves as a diverse body of students?
5. After the Black face incident I was disappointed that there were few white students who came out and protested. Can you speak to why it is important that whites be at the forefront of this cause?
6. How can Smith College reach the students who do not see the racism in the past incidents and who still believe minorities on campus are being “hyper-sensitive”?
7. How do we bring attention to color-blind racist comments & questions when in an academic context within the classroom?
8. Smith has preorientation just for minorities. As an Asian American who chose not to participate, I believe the Bridge preorientation program is more harmful than helpful to building better relations. Do you agree?
9. About Alumnae: How do you think we can stimulate the alumnae to join in conversations about race? We know that Smith depends on donations from our alums.

Engaging with racism on college campuses

1. As an administrator at a near by campus, I am concerned about who it is that needs to continue the struggle, and how we move away from exhausting the same good souls that always pick the struggle up. How do we move past that? Can we move past that?
2. What are concrete ways to assess that progress has been made?
3. Do you think rhetoric that emphasizes “diversity” & “multiculturalism” is useful/honest/recognizes inequality?
4. Do you view affirmative action as a positive step towards equality in the collegiate setting?
5. What is your opinion on programs that give opportunities (such as internships) to only one race?
6. I was wondering if you could speak about racism & bias in the SATs, GREs, and other standardized test. How strong is it and what should we do about it?
7. Do you see differences between Smith and Duke in terms of racial climate, issues and community responses to racism and awareness? What are some of the causes of these differences and how can Smith do something to affect change on campus and in the larger community?
8. When working under racist institutions, how liable should bureaucrats (both minorities-especially & non-minorities), be for isolated racist & unequal incidents? Or who is held accountable? The institution? Who is the institution?

Engaging with racism in society

1. How can individuals move past both the abhorrent and passive stages of racism in America? Is there a way?
2. How do you propose we implement a “race conscious social policy” without creating a racially divisive system?
3. What type of environment will create a call for social justice and affirmative action? Color blind racism in our society is so pervasive that social justice is not a priority the way it was briefly in the 60’s.
4. The excitement that Obama is generating, across color boundaries, especially among the young, is this excitement - generated by Obama’s postracial vocabulary - is this excitement itself based on color blind racism? Or is it an excitement that is bubbling up from some place else?
5. Do you see the kind of racism in your talk in other countries?
6. How have white Americans been hurt by racism?
7. I am puzzled as to why and how white people became “the racist”? Does this necessarily correlate to the education/development of the white community being more advanced?
8. Please speak to the ways in which whites are sanctioning other whites to coerce or herd them into maintaining the status quo: loss of privilege, such as the belief that a person won’t get a promotion at work if they do not agree to not challenge the cultural climate that is racist; denied group membership.
9. In your talk you seem to suggest that by having a girlfriend of color, a white man has interrupted his own racism. Could you please comment?
10. I know a lot of your observations on discrimination towards Blacks and Latinos; can I now hear some regarding Asians?
11. How do you think the fact that soon in the future whites will be a minority in America affects our race consciousness?
12. The Latino population in the United States is rapidly growing; do you think that once a minority becomes the majority, things like people following you in the store and other racist events will decline?

13. Your examples of rhetorical moves demonstrate very little subtlety and pick on speakers with weak rhetorical skills. I would like you to address some less transparent statements and structures. I think picking on poor rhetoric reflects an attack on the poorly educated, and suggests the “sneaking-in-the-backdoor” of classism into your argument.
14. A lot of people react to minorities the way they do because of stereotypes that most of them enforce. In the neighborhood I live in, when I see a black/latino youth that looks like a cholo I cross the street not because of racism, more like self-preservation. Statistically aren't minorities more likely to commit a crime?
15. Do you believe that the line of irony that your advertisements toe is effective as a critique of consumerism or if it plays into consumerist/capitalist ideology? I especially ask this because of the deep ties between consumerist & racist ideologies through the common bond of literalism. Re-phrased, as you concentrate on rhetorical move, I'm interested in the implications of your own rhetoric.
16. What do you think about the relationship between minorities, like Jews who have been able to assimilate and are now considered “white” but still feel discrimination, and those who feel discrimination & have not been able to assimilate?
17. How should one best address those who profess to be “color-blind”?
18. But whites can't be the only racists. People of color can be just as racist, right?
19. It would be good if American Indians were remembered from this stage.
20. Are you familiar w/ Ahmed's “The Non-performativity of Anti-racism”? How can you ensure the true commitment and enforcement of written anti-racist policy without putting an unfair burden on the victims of racism?
21. Are people (like Chris Rock) who make fun of race (or even their own race) helping or hurting the problem?
22. Are minorities who act differently from their race's popular or stereotypically perceived behavior (i.e. language, gestures, interests, etc.) in a traditionally “white” setting also acting in a colorblind manner? Are those people conscious of “white behaviors” or are they being racist towards the individual? Can people of a determined race decide who is black enough or white enough, and is this questioning in itself racist?
23. Whether someone finds someone sexy, what kind of person someone could fall in love with, be friends with, or feel a sense of release with—these are supposed to be an individual's personal preferences. For this to change wouldn't it be an individual choice? This form of racism is so personal—what kinds of social forces could touch this? Also, how could an individual challenge this kind of racism, in him/herself?

24. While you talk about attacking racism through policy, the practice of racism is not so heavily influenced by policy. The media, I believe, is an institution that heavily controls the way that we perceive other races and our own. This shift in institutional racism has motivated me to look at the way that racism is infused in our culture and acknowledged stereotypes about black America, white America, Latino America, etc., exist on a global scale. How do we attack vehicles that encourage racism like the media, advertising, T.V., etc since they are so powerful & encourage us all to participate in racism?
25. Race doesn't matter to me—people wish to be recognized and are proud, do I “react” to this—how do I recognize a person's race but let them know that I do not hold racist opinions?
26. If diversity is what happens when one person interacts with another, and social justice is what happens when two people care about each other, how can we make social justice in our daily lives social policy?

Questions from “Philosophy & Race: An Exchange of Views”
Philosophy Department Colloquium
February 8, 2008

1. Can we learn without recognizing our own ignorance? Ought this be something that is commonly addressed in classrooms, particularly when there may be dissent between individuals that disagree on the authority of various perspectives presented in the classroom?
2. Is it possible to truly resolve racial/ethnic/cultural tensions without addressing and having mutual recognition of ignorance by all?
3. At lectures such as the Bonilla-Silva presentation, color-blind racism and white privilege were addressed. White privilege may be recognized in conjunction with white ignorance, but might focusing on specific examples of ignorance such as this comprise the acknowledgment of other forms of ignorance?
4. Here at Smith the term “diversity” is used often, yet definition of this seems to be both confused and controversial. Diversity as it is currently defined seems to vary, based on individual and group knowledge and/or ignorance. Is it possible to have only one definition of this, or is the definition relative to our individual and/or group position, knowledge and ignorance?
5. Would you say “diversity”/ “multiculturalism” is more of a catalyst or diversion in recognizing ignorance and resolving conflict?