

tion and brutality suffered by people of color. Heterosexism remains largely invisible because we take gender hierarchy and its rigid dichotomy of masculine versus feminine for granted. Gay/lesbian oppression is also trivialized when people believe sexual orientation is a matter of choice: homosexuals “don’t have to be that way” and therefore “deserve what they get.” The virulence of anti-Semitism is discounted by stereotyping Jews as well off. Ageism is the best example of our irrationality: we are all subject to aging but we reproduce this system of domination in countless ways. Finally, structural violence is rendered invisible by mainstream critiques that focus only on direct violence, leaving in place the degradations wrought by instrumental reason, economic injustice, masculinism, and exclusionary politics.

Exploring patterns of power in-

variably raises the inter-related and definitively political questions of how to assign responsibility and identify transformational strategies. Blaming contemporary individuals for historical systems of domination invites defensive and unconstructive responses. Yet all systems of power are ultimately reproduced or transformed by individuals acting in concert. Members of privileged groups have more power to change the status quo and more responsibility for doing so because they in fact benefit from systemic hierarchies whether or not they intend to: men who do not rape still benefit from patriarchy, and White women who promote feminism still benefit from racism. Because we are all implicated in systems of power, neutrality is not an option: whatever we do or don’t do has effects. We must present this recognition not as paralyzing but politicizing. We are empowered to do

so by examining the connections among systems of power, thereby enriching our knowledge of politics and enabling more effective transformational strategies.

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The Case of African American Women and Politics

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The effort to mainstream gender and race in political science courses over the past three decades has met with varying degrees of success depending on the nature of the courses, who teaches the courses, and the availability of relevant information, published and unpublished. The observations that follow are offered on the basis of my experiences with initiatives directed toward mainstreaming “race” and “gender,” separately and collectively, for nearly four decades. During my tenure in the profession, my teaching responsibilities have included the introductory American Government courses and other traditional listings such as Political Parties, Comparative Government, and The Presidency as well as, more recently, Women in Politics, Black Politics, Public Policy, Introduction to Political Science, Political Socialization, and honors colloquia. On rare occa-

sions, special topics seminars permit the maximum flexibility in choice of topics and emphasis.

One major problem, which became obvious early, is that the experiences of women and racial minorities did not fit easily into the major frames of reference or organizational schemes of the standard textbooks used in American Government courses. Marked by emphasis on voting and officeholding, Supreme Court decisions, and political parties, these textbooks left women and minorities out of the political mainstream as activists. Inclusion of information on gender and race required not only supplementing the textbook information, but reinterpreting essential concepts and offering new frames of reference, sometimes diametrically opposed to that of the textbook.

It was necessary to establish “women” as a special category when “race” was the focus and

“race” as a relevant category in the focus on “women.” Ensuring that students read materials on both race and gender was accomplished by a list of “required” readings. However, there was very little available information or research by political scientists on either race or women in the 1960s and early 1970s. Thus, the creation of an information base was a major agenda item, even as courses on Black Politics and Women in Politics were added to the curricula.

In the case of information about African American women, most of what was available did not come from political scientists, but rather from publications such as those by an African American women’s sorority, an African American journalist, and popular magazines directed to African American readers. This dearth of information might be traced to two factors: the limited participation of women and

African Americans in those political activities on which researchers focused and the absence of African Americans and women in the political science profession. In the late 1960s, the profession was estimated to be 97% non-Black and 90% male.

The task of creating a body of political science literature on “both race and gender” has been assumed in large measure by women and African Americans. Increased voting and officeholding by women and African Americans served as a basis for descriptive, empirical studies, which were followed by more theoretically oriented work. Expanding the focus of political science research to include these new areas was costly in terms of negative tenure and promotion decisions and rejection of requests for research funding. In spite of the problems encountered, it is imperative that basic, exploratory research continue as the database on women’s political activity is still exceedingly limited. The situation is even more critical in regard to African American women. Quality teaching is inextricably tied to quality research output.

My own research on African American women state legislators was initiated in the early 1970s with no special funding and while employed full time. Travel was underwritten by a research project in higher education for which I was a volunteer interviewer for a special group of academic administrators, some of whom were located in geo-

graphic areas with African American women state legislators. Later, the collaborative effort with Marianne Githens for *A Portrait of Marginality* (1977) was undertaken with similarly sparse resources. These experiences with limited financial support were more typical than atypical for those doing research on women and African Americans in politics.

A final word of caution is offered regarding the necessity for scholars to confront the authentic tensions that exist around questions of “race” within the study of women’s political behavior in the United States. If race makes a difference in the larger society, then race makes a difference among women in terms of life chances and access to power, including political power. This reality must be reflected in what is taught in political science courses which address gender issues, even if the reality is unpleasant.

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Teaching Against the Double Couplet of Problem/Victim

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In *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*, Gilroy argues that one of the definitive characteristics of contemporary racism is its use of the double couplet: the assignment of the status of both problem and victim. Gilroy asserts that Blacks must be brought back into history outside the categories of problem and victim. In my view, his analy-

sis applies to gender as well, even though racism and sexism differ in a number of important aspects. The notion of a cultural legacy that crosscuts such factors as age, income, or circumstances of psychological aberration dominates the discussion of both racism and sexism. As a consequence, stereotypes, inaccuracies, and subordina-

tion are perpetuated. A critical question for those of us involved in teaching then is: how can we avoid reinforcing the double couplet and its ahistoricism?

Teaching any introductory politics course poses a series of problems. Not fully aware of the distinction between politics and the study of politics, students want to