

A Place to Practice: Incivility, Curriculum, and Institutional Intelligence

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Imperatives of Place and Time

We write today as faculty members, and in Julie’s case, the director, of the Johnston Center for Integrative Studies, an alternative living-learning community housed in the College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Redlands. The University is located in the desert corridor of Southern California, apart from Orange County and Los Angeles by about an hour’s drive, but also in no way like either of those political and cultural hotbeds. While large state schools in Los Angeles, Riverside, and Irvine boast teeming student populations and draw frequent attention when conversations become nationally urgent, smaller regional campuses tend not to attract the kind of attention that make them prominent in debates within and outside higher education.

This was particularly true during the white-hot conversations about civility and free speech that prompted commentary, letters from University presidents, threats to defund public schools, protests, rescinded speaking invitations, pepper spraying, and calls for institutional self-assessment that made headlines from 2015-

2018. Certainly, issues of civility, the nature of free speech, the role of students in managing academic institutions, and the purpose of a liberal arts education were topics of intense discussion at Redlands long before the most recent irruptions of public attention—and they continue to be important areas of inquiry. But in Johnston, as in many programs and colleges across the country, we experienced and interacted with these issues quite differently—through curricular change, engagement with student groups, mentoring, and direct institutional engagement—than at the high-profile, “newsworthy” protests and demonstrations at other campuses.

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We argue in this essay that the practical and pedagogical investments made by faculty, staff, and students at the Johnston Center show another way forward for working with expectations about “speech” on college campuses, without falling into the simple yet powerful trap of characterizing student speech as either “civil” or “hateful.”

Our campus is not a particularly political one, and although the college faculty do integrate activism into the curriculum, actions that might be called “radical” or “disruptive” are not common on our campus. There are a number of activities that someone even passingly familiar with a liberal arts campus might say, “ah yes,

the students are engaging in speech, and sometimes even activist speech.”

Each year there is a production of the *Vagina Monologues*. Students concerned about environmental sustainability host forums on campus resource use, pressuring campus leadership to adopt more sustainable practices in land management, food services, and waste reduction. Take Back the Night and other events point out the disturbing nature of sexual assault, and demand action to reduce it on campus and in the community. Forums are demanded and held to discuss issues central to the collegiate experience of many students, including race, sexuality, and gender. Speakers such as Laverne Cox, Angela Davis, and Gloria Steinem give impassioned speeches as part of the guest lecture series hosted by student government. Students hosted a protest when funding for the school newspaper was eliminated.

But still, none of this activity is too disruptive, and most of it is positively genteel. Nobody has been asked to not speak. No alteration to the general operations of the University has been effected by student activism. This is Southern California, after all, the land of sunshine and smiles.

Many Johnston students participate in courses and student activities that are organized around social justice themes, and when there is protest or other action in the spirit of progressive politics, Johnston students are usually involved—and often the instigators. There has been a long tradition of such involvement since the Center’s founding in 1969.¹ In the foment

of social activism around race, war, sex, and later sexuality that marked the 1960s and 1970s, the Center drew to it both faculty and students who were exploring new ways of learning, attempting to avoid the traditional institutional structures of higher education.

Key among these structures to avoid was the hierarchy between students and professors that often locates the knowledgeable sage, the “brain on a stage,” as superior to, and therefore more “measured” than, students, whose fiery passions have yet to be appropriately contained. For fifty years, students and faculty have negotiated different ways of co-learning, which often takes the form of student-driven curriculum, student-facilitated seminars, and student activism. This all takes place on a campus that is decidedly not the hub of its local community. While student radicalism about a number of issues generates intense conversation on campus, if you walk the two miles to the downtown core of Redlands, you’d be hard pressed to find people in the community who are concerned about these topics. The Inland Empire has historically been the site of a great deal of labor activism, but today is also known as a place of great racial antagonism.² This is not the pastoral image of an ivory tower citadel—but instead a campus situated in what some might call hostile terrain.

And yet, we are tasked with helping students learn to engage the world around them in critical, thoughtful ways, which often means helping them learn how to negotiate calls for civility on the one hand, with a sense of being precarious and an urgent need to do something

¹ For a specific history of how this engagement has been influenced by John Dewey, see, Kevin Whelan, “Johnston and Activism: Dewey in Practice” in Bill McDonald and Kathy Ogren (eds.) *Hard Travelin’ and Still Havin’ a Good Time: Innovative Living & Learning in the Johnston Center 1979-2004*, Victoria: Trafford, 2004.) For a history of the early life and practices of the Center, see Bill McDonald

and Kevin O’Neill, *A History of Johnston College, 1969-1979* (San Francisco: Forum Books, 2003.)

² Matt Stevens, “California Prosecutor Put on Leave After Negative Comments About Maxine Waters,” *New York Times*, July 9, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/09/us/california-district-attorney-maxine-waters.html>.

on the other. As faculty members who see our role as primarily facilitating students' own learning goals, and as mentors to students whose political and professional goals often include the critique of institutions, we sometimes find ourselves aiding and abetting activism that makes campus entities uncomfortable or concerned—and we often bump up against policies and practices that are largely put in place to maintain institutional order, stability, and public image.

In a thought-provoking comment posted to the journal *SocialText*'s website, African American Studies professor Tavia Nyong'o and professor of women's and gender studies Kyla Wazana Tompkins, forwarded what they call their "Eleven Theses on Civility." In it, the authors theorize many of the logics and institutional structures that underpin calls for "civil discourse" or simply "civility" on college campuses.

For example, the "aesthetic" dimension of civility, which they argue becomes a style or a position from which the content of any given speech act can be divorced, effecting, they argue, the masking of institutional violence and long-standing disparities of justice and treatment that occur in society, and on college campuses, as well. In their third thesis, the authors argue that one of the fundamental aspects of this debate is that "calls for civility seek to evade our calls for change."³ As faculty members at the Johnston Center, we are quite accustomed to calls for change, and participate in or push back against student demands, as teachers and mentors. We help individuals and groups mold and shape their principled responses—supporting them to be better actors and advocates for their own demands.

Many of these demands take the form of everyday disagreements. As we have noted elsewhere, shared spaces such as bathrooms, hallways, walls, and offices can become the site of disagreement and debate among various stakeholders.⁴ These everyday negotiations are crucial to the development of a strong multi-use community, as they teach us all that our wants and desires exist in a contested terrain of purpose and expectation.

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For instance, one of our buildings has a coffee shop that provides work-study hours to students. It serves free coffee to anyone in the morning. It is also a kitchen where students cook their dinner. The conflict that yearly ensues over various expectations of cleanliness exposes clear fracture lines for cleanliness, professionalism, and the purpose of shared spaces. At weekly community meetings, which are a place to announce events and a time for deliberations about topics of importance, student disagreement often centers around the Center's relationship to the College.

Students line up on either side: we should attempt to build more bridges, incorporate Greek Life into our schedule of announcements, have more school spirit. On the other side: we should be separatists, willfully avoiding and excluding contact with the University to the maximum degree possible. Of course, individual students will chart their own path through this debate as they organize a life on

³ Tavia Nyong'o and Kyla Wazan Tompkins, "Eleven Theses on Civility" *Social Text Online*, July 11, 2018, <https://socialtextjournal.org/eleven-theses-on-civility/>.

⁴ Tim Seiber, Kelly Hankin, and Julie Townsend, "Beds, Baths, and Offices at the Johnston Center for Integrative Studies" in Meghan Sweeney and Jonathan Silverman (eds.) *Remaking the American College Campus* (McFarland, 2016).

campus. This debate is often sandwiched between announcements for environmental club meetings, requests to help find lost keys, complaints about noise levels and weekend parties, and students shaming each other for not following one or another protocol.

Whatever the topic, the deliberative pattern is crucial: issues are brought to the attention of the entire community—faculty, staff, and students—and discussed in a structured format, every week, without fail, throughout the semester. The everyday life of the center, its quotidian difficulties, teach us all how to be better negotiators, advocates, and speakers. They, in some ways, prepare us for emergent and emergency conversations as these topics make their way into our thoughts, our institution, our spaces. The rest of this essay will concern three such instances where this preparation prepared us with tools to address speech that easily becomes wrapped in the garb of debates about civility.

Below, we have gathered three examples, each taking place during the peak of intense national debates about civil speech on college campuses. We believe that these examples show how political and academic discourse, which often demands institutional change, can often be at odds with the very call for civility itself. For in locating themselves as the “neutral arbiters” of ongoing conversations, institutions take up a managerial role that is itself part of the problem—as seen from the point of view of students. As educators, and in part because of our role as situated teachers (rather than educators on a pedestal) that is at the core of Johnston’s educational mission, we find that we cannot maintain a “neutral” role when we mentor, teach, and engage with student demands.

Hopefully, the ways in which we have locally responded to campus issues might offer novel paths of thinking and acting in the new age of the (so-called) civil.

“Fuck tha Police”⁵

In the spring of 2016, I was just finishing my first year as the director of the Johnston Center for Integrative Studies. Like most campuses that semester, we were responding to calls from our students of color to better respond to a campus climate rife with explicit and implicit racism.⁶

I had been working with an adjunct professor to facilitate a class entitled, “Race on Campus,” which sought to put on a regional undergraduate conference on the subject. Students had envisioned the conference, put out calls for papers, penned press releases, done interviews with local press, and attended to all the logistics of the conference. When I came into the office on Saturday morning, the first day of the conference, I was greeted with three emails: one from the Vice President and Dean of Student Life, one from the Interim Provost, and one from the General Counsel. These emails all addressed an item on the conference agenda: a panel entitled “Fuck tha Police,” proposed by students from the University of California, Irvine and accepted by our conference organizers.

⁵ At the Race on Campus Conference at the Johnston Center in 2016, a student group from UC Irvine argued that campus police should be removed because they created a hostile environment for students of color (<http://www.raceoncampus.org/history.html>). Those students titled their panel after the N.W.A. song “Fuck tha Police”

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fuck_tha_Police).

⁶ “Racial Tension and Protests on Campuses across the Country,” *New York Times*, November 10, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/11/us/racial-tension-and-protests-on-campuses-across-the-country.html>. See also “Race on Campus: Progress Marked by Turmoil and Skepticism” November 6, 2016, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Race-on-Campus/238245>.

The three emails came with three distinct tones and sets of concerns: the first, from the Vice President and Dean of Student Life, passed on a concern about the title of the panel that had apparently been discussed by the Chief of Redlands Police and the Chairperson of the Board of Trustees. It focused on the appropriateness of such a panel. The second, from the Interim Provost, expressed concern that anti-police sentiment might cause conflicts, and queried as to how attendees of the conference would be managed. She asked whether we had anticipated potential protest from local residents, and she expressed support for the importance of academic speech. The third, from the General Counsel, expressed full support of the work that we were doing, and assured me that it was the difficult but important work of academia to have these conversations.

My responses to these emails were to: a) explain the reference, “Fuck tha Police,” and put it in cultural context for those who might not be familiar with the group N.W.A. or the then recently-released movie *Straight Outta Compton*;⁷ b) assure the administration that this was clearly advertised as a student conference that required registration, and that only registered participants would be admitted to conference events; and c) thank the administrators for their interest in the conference and invite them to register, attend, and listen to what students had to say.

Luckily, our event went without a hitch, and the students from UC Irvine, who brought a well-developed separatist argument to the conference, sparked some of the most interesting debate. Whether the Homeland Security van that was parked outside the conference building all day had anything to do with the panel in question remains a mystery in the lore of the

Race On Campus Collective, which has now put on three annual conferences.

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Despite some community and campus controversy, students were right to accept the panel (including the title). This was, in fact, exemplary of what such a conference should do: introduce students to unfamiliar ideas from perspectives different from their own, and then debate those very ideas. It was fruitful for attendees to seriously consider the point of view brought by the more radical student group. The organizers were also right to publicize the conference and promote an honest representation of the ideas that would be considered. Though that might not have been the publicity that the university was hoping for, it is our job to speak honestly and openly about the value and importance of academic discourse and the ways in which we generate knowledge. The current focus on institutional “optics” should not prevent us from entering into public debate about academic work and the mission of the university.

Each of the authors of the emails I received played their institutional roles in appropriate ways. They raised concerns, asked for clarification, and guaranteed the right of the faculty and students, under the auspices of a class, to practice academic freedom. However, the concern raised by the Chief of Police and the Chairperson of the Board of Trustees, the details of which were never fully explained to me, highlights the contours of distinct fields of discourse that might come into conflict in a small town with a small university; while the concerns

⁷ F. Gary Gray, *Straight Outta Compton*. Film. Los Angeles: Universal Pictures, 2015.

raised by the Provost highlight the ways in which all campuses must attend not only to the question of civility within campus borders, but also to a political climate that anticipates conflict—including violent conflict and hate groups.⁸

I write about this event not to critique any of the players or any of their concerns, but rather to demonstrate that the educational value of the conference is beyond question. That said, in how many ways would students have been pressured and silenced if they had not had the cover of academic freedom, by putting the conference under the umbrella of a formal class? And, to what extent could I, as an academic administrator, provided cover for the adjunct professor if anything had escalated?

When institutions turn activism into curriculum, how do we ensure that the creative and finally risky aspects of action don't get watered down through the lens of institutional risk-management and codes of civility? When students are responding to racist micro-aggressions or intolerance of non-binary gender identities, they are already in an uncivil historical and contemporary context. They are not the ones creating the atmosphere of uncivility. In fact, in most cases, these students have attempted to render their environment more civil through coursework, education, campus journalism, etc. The lack of, or in some cases, the resistance to, interpersonal and institutional change through the institution's existing means is the catalyst for uncivil action.

“Would you believe joining a ‘dance party of resistance?’”⁹

One aspect of my ongoing curricular development is electronic music. Trained in the analysis of digital media, and a fan of the music itself—I'm often asked by students to DJ for them at campus events and parties—this topic first made its way into the curriculum in 2017.

This happened to coincide, by pure coincidence, with the appearance of conservative commentator Ben Shapiro on campus. Many students in my seminar were upset, but honestly, there is so much that they can be upset by, and I try to respond to it nimbly and compassionately. Thus, it was with some sense of irony that in preparing this section, I returned to a blurb, published in the *Daily Wire*, that dismissively portrayed an event I helped students organize. Pushing past my desire for an old-fashioned eye-roll, I hope that this experience can address some of the ways in which being a teacher in the age of “civil discourse” means so much more than doing a bang-up job lecturing, or preparing a tour de force syllabus.

In March 2016, the University of Redlands invited Ben Shapiro, then editor of the *Daily Wire*, to campus as part of its Lectures and Convocations series. Shapiro is outspoken in his beliefs, including the idea that trans-ness is a mental disorder, abortion should be illegal, and there is no current institutional discrimination.¹⁰

⁸ Emma Kerr, “White Supremacists are Targeting College Campuses Like Never Before,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 1, 2018, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/White-Supremacists-Are/242403>.

⁹ Hank Berrin, “University’s Students and Staff Combat Upcoming Speech with ‘Dance Party of Resistance,’” *The Daily Wire*, March 8, 2017, <https://www.dailywire.com/news/14234/university-students-and-staff-combat-shapiros-hank-berrien>. This section was authored by Tim Seiber, Associate Professor, Johnston Center.

¹⁰ Sabrina Tavernise, “Ben Shapiro, a Provocative ‘Gladicator,’ Battles to Win Young Conservatives,” *New York Times*, November 23, 2017,

Many students, including women, trans*, and of color students, enrolled in my seminar, The Club, and wanted to protest Shapiro when he arrived.

At the time, campuses across the country were dealing with this issue, choosing variously to cancel speaking engagements, establish “protest zones,” or do nothing at all. These responses attempted to balance free open dialogue on university campuses with the institutional missions, at Redlands as elsewhere, that promised an inclusive and safe learning community. As with debates about club music, these issues often took the form of a diptych—on one panel all the arguments for “free speech,” and on the other every reason to contain or confront “uncivil speech.” As the terms of this debate seemed both too grand (one speech carries the weight of all free speech on its back!) and too arbitrary (this was a single event on a very busy campus), students and I decided to throw a party, using dance music as our political messaging. Anybody who didn’t want to be at the talk was welcome.

We invited a number of student groups to my office in the living-learning Johnston Center for Integrative Studies to give short presentations about their goals. Students learned how to DJ during class and then played sets for dancers to enjoy. Staff, faculty, and administrators were invited. *The Daily Wire* reported on the event by asking two rhetorical questions: “What’s the best way for university staff members to combat a speech given by *Daily Wire* Editor-in-Chief Ben Shapiro? Would you believe joining ‘a dance party of resistance?’ Yup.”

The naïve sarcasm of the statement fully misunderstands the social position of dance and music in culture and politics. Had the author truly never heard a protest song? More

importantly, its rhetoric belies a different tension that the protest party was organized to avoid: the sedimentation and polarization of the “free speech versus hate speech” debate. The author assumes that the goal of **Liberated (the name of the event) was to “combat a speech.” It absolutely was not.

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The party was a way of turning away from this argument, which falsely posits that all speech is organized in a militarized contest for the attention of an audience. A club is a mass of tiny conversations, many sites of speech occurring simultaneously, free in the sense that it is open, but not free in the sense that it is unregulated. In that way, a club is like a classroom. To be sure, there are rules for raves: bouncers enforce codes, social conventions regulate appropriate touch, cultural codes augur respect and inclusion. If broken, these regulations have consequences. Some have argued that clubland is a utopian alternative to everyday social life, an inspiring but incorrect assessment. One thing that universities and clubs have in common is that one has to gain admission, and can be kicked out, based on engagement with codes of conduct.

The way the University of Redlands affords students the “weapons” to “combat” a speech is enshrined in a “Free Speech Code.” It is in part the goal of Shapiro and his allies to use these codes to their rhetorical advantage. The tactic isn’t hard to discern: go to a college, say something provocative, wait for an “appropriate” student response, call them snowflakes for

²<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/23/us/ben-shapiro-conservative.html>.

this response, and win the day as the rational adult just trying to speak his mind. This language isn't just Ivory Tower gamesmanship: in July 2018, Attorney General Jeff Sessions spoke to a group of high school students, warning them that colleges are turning their generation into "sanctimonious, sensitive, supercilious snowflakes."

As evidence, he pointed to conflicts over "free speech" at places like Middlebury and UC Berkeley.¹¹ It was the estimation of my students that the tactics at these schools gave too much credence to the gravity of any given speech act, overreacting and thereby generating precisely the free speech codes that regulate student conduct at universities across the country. It is the creation of these codes—and not whatever Ben Shapiro or anybody else on the college lecture circuit says on this or that campus—that is the real issue at stake in these debates. Our protest party was in reality a tool to engage these codes; Ben Shapiro was just a means to an end.

The very fact that this party caused such an uproar was uncommon, given that students often use the lawn spaces in front of our offices to host open-mic events, dance parties (including an annual Johnny Cash Day celebrating the legendary singer), as well as all kinds of impromptu events that are amplified by speakers and electricity. Students in my seminar only learned after trying to schedule the event through the University's space reservation software that in fact the entirety of public space available on campus had been reserved for the time of Shapiro's speech. The reasons were to "not disrupt" the speech and also to protect students from potential conflict with guests who came to campus for the talk.

Operational efficiency and student safety were thus married in a union that would be durable against alternative claims to an engaged campus climate. Of course, these are quite legitimate interests and the University has every right to advance them. But for my students, it was so confusing that they couldn't play music to *make them feel safer* because, they were told, it *threatened their safety*. The distance between these two different versions of safety is precisely the zone in which "the civil" makes its emergence in public discourse.

At the University of Redlands, the "Student Expression Policy" was refined and redistributed in 2018. This policy asserts that students can express themselves so long as such expression takes place in approved locations, is nonviolent, does not damage property, obeys the Student Code of Conduct, and does not disrupt or "infringe on the rights" of others on campus.

This code, in an earlier version, was precisely the mechanism by which the University aligned itself with the Shapiro talk, arguing that the "right to free speech" needed to be protected by precluding students from having a public opposition party. The argument was that electronic music would be disruptive, that the public space was not approved, and that other student groups didn't have a professor assisting them in planning, therefore making this an illegitimate "student event."

In the end, students should listen to Shapiro—whom the University paid thousands of dollars to speak—and then have their party. My arguments were rather different: this was a part of the curriculum for my seminar. Student events policy doesn't override curricular innovation. We already know everything Shapiro might say—there are hundreds of hours of footage on Youtube—and thus this speech wasn't a unique learning experience.

¹¹ Chris Quintana, "Colleges Are Creating 'A Generation of Sanctimonious, Sensitive, Supercilious Snowflakes,' Sessions Says," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 24, 2018, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Colleges-Are-Creating-a/243997>.

In the end, the code that controls speech is much more important than this or that speaker. Still, the music was a problem. What if—gasp—somebody heard it? Wouldn't that be disruptive? Might this provoke conflict? Security was hired. Volume levels were tested. Meetings with Student Life professionals were had, the Dean got involved, as did the University's in-house council.

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The speech went off, the party was a success—it was all over in a flash. A stricter, more refined Free Expression code was distributed approximately a year later, which all students had to agree to in order to get an education. I'd suggest that the most important lesson I taught my students was not that they can just throw a party as a form of political speech. Nor was it that they were participating in a long history of using electronic music as activism.

Rather, it was that the benevolent policies that govern "free expression" are meant to secure the brand of institutions—their property safe, their operations smooth, capital flowing cleanly—and that in order to do this, they maintain a strict polar discourse that posits free speech against bad speech, good protest against noisy disruption. In the guise of civility, institutions of all kinds seek to advance their mission by containing action and speech in neat oppositions. The real target of any student protest is the power structure that governs what they can and can't do—not the content of any particular speech act. Negotiating with power is the most civil action a student can undertake.

Going Public¹²

In the spring of 2018, we were in the middle of a typical semester in Johnston.

Debates in a consensus community tend to range from the banal to the crucial. Typically, this process is effective at bringing most members of the community into at least passing agreement. The way it functions is to continue open dialogue about an issue until an agreement of all community members present can be achieved. This agreement does not mean that all are exactly in agreement, but rather that all members can live with a collective decision. If a member cannot live with the outcome of a decision, they may block its enforcement until further discussion is had. This process is applied to all proposals, from funding for a dinner to policies regarding racial discourse.

Most pressing in this semester were discussions on topics such as: institutional responses to trans/non-binary students and questions about how the #metoo movement has re-focused feminist practices. In addition to those discussions, the curriculum included the Race on Campus course, re-structured as a collectively run class. In short, the Johnston community continued its commitment to keeping social justice issues as a regular part of our living-learning experience.

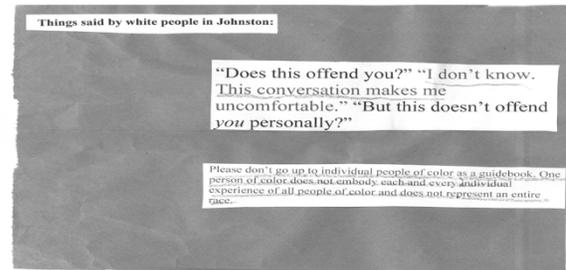
As had happened on campuses across the country, flyers reading, "It's OK to be White,"¹³ appeared on the doors of many buildings. In response, the Student Affairs division sent out a statement about the "Student Expression Poli-

¹² This section was authored by Julie Townsend, Director and Professor, Johnston Center.

¹³ Nick Roll, "Campuses Plastered with 'OK to Be White' Signs," *Inside Higher Ed*, November 6, 2017, <https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2017/11/06/campuses-plastered-ok-be-white-signs>.

cy.”¹⁴ This code, like many campus speech codes, outlined regulations about the nature of speech on campus in ways that inoculate the campus against radical speech, and maintain existing practices to the detriment of creating new ones out of institutional critique.

In an action that had been planned without this recent flyer and expression code in mind, one Thursday morning, a series of DIY flyers were posted in the Johnston community. These recounted “things white people have said in Johnston” and were accompanied by a letter that outlined the ways in which Johnston students of color were subjected to racial micro-aggressions in their day-to-day conversations.¹⁵ These flyers were just one part of an action that then included an invitation to listen to a student-produced podcast, in which women students of color discussed their experiences in the Johnston dorms, and then a facilitated conversation about racist actions and statements.



As the director of Johnston, I received an email from the Dean of Student Affairs that a student had written to her asking whether these flyers were allowed under the recently revised and circulated “Student Expression Policy.” Since Johnston is a living-learning community that largely regulates its own spaces, the Dean forwarded the email to me and correctly explained to the student that Johnston had its own practices to address this question. These would be a discussion at our weekly consensus-model Community Meeting, or a Johnston Peer Council process in which students would go through a Restorative Justice Model for a community harm. I reached out to the student, and he never responded to me.

As a result, the flyers and the letter remained posted in the Johnston buildings throughout the semester. The gathering of students and administrators numbered from about 40 to 50. We listened to the podcast and had a frank discussion of the climate in our community. Though I wouldn’t say that this action solved any of the racial tensions that exist in Johnston, in colleges across the nation, and in the U.S. more generally, it was an excellent example of how an arguably “uncivil” act provoked strong feelings and individual conversations that were then shepherd through a civil, mediated conversation. I would contend that the solid attendance at the podcast and the honesty of the ensuing discussion depended upon the so-called affront of putting racist statements on the walls for all to see.

¹⁴ The current University of Redlands “Student Expression Policy” can be found here:

<http://www.redlands.edu/globalassets/depts/student-affairs/the-office-of-community-standards-and-wellbeing/student-expression-policy-2017.pdf>.

¹⁵ This action was one of a handful of ways that students have recently anonymously intervened in the space of Johnston to make statements. For example, in 2014 a student yarn-bombed the steps of our building with statistics about rape and sexual assault on college campuses. That artwork was removed by students who felt that the statistics were triggering to survivors of sexual assault. Though this might have resulted in a contentious community discussion, it went unaddressed. By contrast, a work of art in one of our buildings was defaced in a way that suggested misogyny. This anonymous action was never explained by the person who defaced it, but it did provoke community conversation, students repaired the artwork, and they put up a statement about the defacement.

In the aftermath of that conversation, many of the flyers were defaced with challenges, and some with racist responses. This graffiti is also a crucial aspect of the intersection between anonymous public art and uncivil discourse. To her credit, the mastermind of the intervention wanted us to keep the defaced flyers up, rather than produce clean copies for the Johnston archive. Typically, we think of archival material as documentation for the purposes of the institution, as a record of our work, or in the current historical moment, as part of our assessment work. In this case, the documents in question brought interpersonal (arguably private) speech, via anonymity, to the community for public assessment.

For some, the interpersonal exchanges were uncivil; for some, the public airing of those quotes, rendered anonymous and decontextualized, was uncivil; and for others, the brazen disregard for the "Student Expression Policy" was uncivil. When seen from this vantage point, the category "uncivil" appears to enable the institution to excise disruption in favor of more polished institutional narratives. For our purposes, in Johnston, we want to honor the need for uncivil speech as part of the process of uncovering and contending with historical and contemporary injustice. The documentation of resistance and counter-resistance is essential to how we address the legacy of racism, especially in communities that see themselves as largely progressive.

I have since had a faculty member register a complaint that this kind of action makes the community unwelcoming for white students, especially white male students, and that they experience it as hostile. In the context of our community, this claim should be brought to Community Meeting for discussion. But that claim puts under erasure the very climate that the flyers bring to public light, which is that students of color find that the racist comments

of their white peers create a harmful environment.

Of course, the job of a consensus community is to seek creative ways forward that take us out of this either/or dilemma: either the students of color are subject to a racist climate OR white students feel comfortable speaking. The very structure of consensus models acknowledges that binaries cannot adequately address complex social problems. And, the terms of civility, though an important part of the discussions to be had, keep us in the binary and prevent us from moving towards a more just and workable solution.

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Bringing racist speech that occurs in the intimate or interpersonal spaces of the dorms to the public eye, by quoting that speech, is not uncivil.

Transformative Pedagogy in the New World Order

Because institutions are slow to recognize the ways that decision-making and policy-making might be unintentionally producing and reproducing racist, sexist, and homophobic educational climates, we sometimes need students to jerk us out of complacency. But we must not respond by entrenching ourselves in defensive discourse.

The university has a responsibility to show that institutions can be more inclusive, and a

further responsibility to model institutional responsiveness to current and historical injustice. Frequently, this responsibility has been met through recourse to codes for behavior and student activity on campuses. These codes, often modeled on corporate codes of inclusion, seek to define in advance the methods of student activity, separating them into appropriate and inappropriate, based on how a speech act engages with the operations of the institution. The argument goes: if we all just follow the code, then we will all have a safe and engaging learning experience.

As our examples above indicate, however, many students do not experience campus life from inside the prism of a policy. Instead, they meet daily events in their lives through the magnifying glass of their life experience, alongside the texts they are reading for seminars, and in consultation with friends, peers, and mentors. How should we support these students even if we sometimes don't agree with them, and at other times have different concerns at play?

We have argued that one key way we've addressed this issue is by making student political speech and activity a part of our curriculum. *Race on Campus* and *The Club* were both seminars that enabled students to bring forth their concerns directly as part of their learning. While the former was essentially planned in response to national conversations about race on college campuses, and in particular the way these issues manifested themselves at the University of Redlands, the latter became a site of political activity when current events interceded into the lives of students. Either way, in our responses to institutional stakeholders who became interested in the activities of our students, we both found recourse to arguments that, as a part of the learning experience of a seminar, student activities were properly the purview of the mission of the University and the demands of the class-

room, not, as might have been argued, codes about civility or incivility.

But is this a secure enough ground on which to rest our defense of student speech? Does incorporating activity into a classroom setting make it more legitimate or valid? We would argue that, in fact, it does not. Speech is not magically transformed when it is drawn into the classroom. It does not magically become civil when peers in a seminar discuss and debate. However, as a tactical position in relation to other stakeholders regarding student expression on campus, it is one way that faculty can support students whose primary relation to institutional concerns for the civility of the brand might be nothing more than an eye roll. We need to teach students how to engage better with external demands on their time and behavior, while at the same time not teaching them that obedience is the primary value.

We are fortunate to work at an institution that, for a variety of reasons, continues to support the work of the Johnston Center. Part of that support includes our work as teachers—even when that sometimes runs up against the desires of the University more broadly. In some ways, this is the prerogative of a nimble liberal arts institution adapting to the 21st century: student-responsiveness is a constant part of our recruitment and retention plans. Part of this nimble attitude is about values: the mission of Redlands, like that of many schools like it, fundamentally hinges on the capacity to help students become excellent critical thinkers and communicators.

What is striking is how uncommon this situation is across the higher education landscape. Difficulties that border on full-blown crises appear with all-too-frequent regularity on campuses like Reed, Evergreen State, Middlebury, Yale, and other schools of note. The responses tend to pit various units against each other: administration, student affairs staff, and faculty

position themselves as the neutral steward of rational civility, arguing that those they disagree with are operating on uncivil, or worse, disruptive, grounds.

If we could add a twelfth thesis on civility: if you are feeling extra civil about the work you are doing on campus, you are probably doing it wrong.

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