



University of Wisconsin - Eau Claire

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Anti-Racism Statement

Department of Geography & Anthropology, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

August 26, 2020

Racism damages everyone. The Department of Geography & Anthropology at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire is committed to pursuing anti-racist perspectives, practices, and outcomes.

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

1. Institutions of higher learning are implicated in White supremacist¹ and colonial histories and ongoing legacies. One aspect of this legacy especially relevant to us is that our own university, UW-Eau Claire, occupies the sacred and ancestral lands of the Ojibwe and Dakota people. White supremacist and colonial violence have continued in our curricular, personnel, pedagogical, and other institutional practices.
2. The disciplines of geography and anthropology have White supremacist and colonial foundations, histories, and ongoing legacies. Our department pledges to confront these legacies and unearth, create, and disseminate anti-racist approaches and perspectives within our disciplines.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

3. We regard the racialized² status of department members (as White, Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color) as having important consequences for how we are differently implicated in racist structures, as well as for what kinds of anti-racist work we do and how we do it. The racialization of individuals and individual experiences also has implications for the kinds of knowledge we produce, use, and disseminate. We recognize that racism is best conceptualized as a problem of dominant groups' investment, conscious or otherwise, in White supremacy. Our department accepts that the responsibility of anti-racist work should fall most heavily on those whose racialization renders them most socially powerful/least vulnerable and who do not have to confront the daily burden of racism.

LOOKING FORWARD/ONGOING SELF CRITIQUE

4. Given the above, we shall remain open to critique of the inherited or cherished assumptions, ideals, perspectives, and approaches we hold about our disciplines, our work, and our community that perpetuate racist structures. Our disciplines have critical traditions and tools that can promote anti-racist work:
 - a. The wide and interdisciplinary scopes of geography and anthropology allow for important anti-racist collaborations, such as work on environmental racism/ environmental justice at the intersection of social and environmental realms.

¹ White supremacy refers to attitudes and beliefs “predicated on the belief that Whites are entitled to *more*, which, in turn, is predicated on the belief that they are more deserving or ‘better’ than other groups”, and consists of individual or group practices that are performed *despite awareness* that they are likely to disproportionately harm people of color, regardless of animus (Pulido 2015: 810-12). In contrast, white privilege is the array of benefits that accrue to Whites, regardless of their awareness or intent, in a White supremacist system (ibid.). Both these concepts identify racism as a structural phenomenon and do not emphasize racial hostility or ill-feeling as necessary for racism to exist or be practiced. See Danya and Rosenfeld (2016) for an [interview with Laura Pulido on White supremacy and privilege](#).

² Racialization signifies “the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice or group” (Omi and Winant: 2014: 111).

- b. Reflexive approaches in our disciplines (approaches that incorporate a critical examination of how one sees the world) emphasize empathy as central to ethnographic fieldwork and other types of social research.
- i. For example, geography has developed vibrant sub-disciplines such as Black Feminist Geographies and Critical Cultural and Critical Physical Geographies that draw attention to the racial and gendered dimensions of social, environmental, and spatial inequities.
 - ii. Further, concepts such as uneven development explore the spatial nature of inequality, while decolonial and participatory mapping are among the discipline's tools used to reveal and search for solutions to those inequalities.
 - iii. Likewise, despite being in many senses the inventor of scientific racism, the discipline of anthropology has a documented history of attacking and debunking so-called scientific justifications of racial hierarchy for over a century. Modern North American anthropology's distinctiveness is rooted in the anti-racist tradition initiated by its acknowledged founder, Franz Boas, whose concept of historically situated cultural relativism has been an invaluable anti-colonial and anti-racist tool when deployed to insist on the inherent value and equality of all peoples and cultures.

We shall further develop and use such approaches to transform our research, teaching, mentorship, and service to produce anti-racist outcomes in our work.

Citations

Al-Saleh, Danya, and Heather Rosenfeld. 2016. "From White Privilege to White Supremacy: An Illustrated Interview with Laura Pullido". *Edge Effects*, July 19 (updated October 12). Accessed on July 15, 2020 at <https://edgeeffects.net/white-supremacy-environmental-racism/>.

Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. 2014. *Racial Formation in the United States*. 3rd Ed. New York: Routledge.

Pulido, Laura. 2015. "Geographies of race and ethnicity I: White supremacy vs white privilege in environmental racism research." *Progress in Human Geography* 39(6): 809-817.