

Briefing Report—2022—January – April

A Note from the Chair



On behalf of the East Coast Colleges Social Science Association's Board, it is my great pleasure to announce that ECCSSA is relaunching its newsletter, "The ECCSSA Chronicle" it will be a quarterly publication of ECCSSA's news and current events. Thank you, Vice-Chair Dr. Babita Shrivastava, who has taken this responsibility. ECCSSA has continued its presence by successfully organizing two webinars in 2022. In January, Dr. Green's webinar on " Higher Ed is having a Nervous Breakdown," and in March, Dr. Aybar's webinar "Is Higher Education on the Verge of an Academic Renaissance?". Our goal is to continue the efforts to achieve ECCSSA's goal. I am delighted to share that ECCSSA is organizing its 47th annual roundtable conference virtually on Friday, September 9th, 2022. This year's theme is "The Knowledge Economy and Purpose of the University."

In the end, ECCSSA's mission is to promote productive dialogue regarding the development of human potential through transformational research across the social sciences and related disciplines, which would not be achieved without the collective efforts of our incredible Board members.

Thank you!!

Dr. Sushma Shukla, Chair

SUMMARY OF COLLOQUIUMS

The Archaeology of Racism

By Dr. Stanton Green

"Americans continue to wrestle with issues of race and racism at many levels. I am not writing this article to argue whether racism does or does not exist in the United States. It is clear to me that it does. Nor am I not going to enter the Critical Race Theory debate. Again, it is clear to me that racism is a part of the founding of US history and that we need to accept that. At the same time, I do not believe that portraying contemporary white Americans as a group as fragile, guilty, or oppressive is unproductive. My goal is to contribute to the discussion of how we can 'see' racism through archaeology in ways that help us mitigate it through critical and civil public discourse conversation.

The societal impacts of racism have most often been approached through statistical and historical analyses of such things as wealth differential (Greason 2012)[1], differential police treatment (Grabner 2019)[2], red-lining residential patterns (Greason 2020)[3], and educational inequity (Bellfield 2021)[4]. All of these explicate societal patterns of white European American immigrants' advantage over other racial communities[5] in what many call institutional racism. I would like to pivot the argument a bit by taking on the question of how an archaeological viewpoint allows us to 'see' how deeply imbued racism is in American culture. To illustrate this assertion, I present several experiences where my archaeological research brought me in touch with experiences with the public that have revealed the deep roots of racism in the public narrative of American culture and history. Simply put, as an archaeologist, I have observed racism through the stories people tell of their past. This type of qualitative examination as a listener to and reader of stories complements the quantitative studies of the racial divide in our nation. These stories provide powerful insights into how American think (or don't think) about race. And as such, they can bring us to some new pathways toward mitigating (I hesitate to use the word eliminate) racial discrimination.

I begin by describing several professional experiences that revealed racism through my everyday interaction with students and other members of the public as I researched and taught history and archaeology in Massachusetts and South Carolina, a northern state and a southern state, and in today's parlance, a blue state, and a red state. I will follow this with some concluding remarks. Following Robert Bly (1996)[6], I consider Culture to be a story that narrates a community's common-held beliefs and values. As such, publicly told stories to reveal culture.

In most cases, there was no intent by the person with whom I was interacting to express a discriminatory attitude or action. Rather, the story revealed racial discrimination through its telling. Although I understand that these stories add up to an anecdotal demonstration, I would challenge readers to do two things while you are reading these stories. First, please do not immediately jump to the argument that the communities and individuals described were not revealing racism because they did not intend to be racist. Behaviors do not require intent to have racist consequences. Second, consider Casey's (ms.) notion that lived experience, often expressed through storytelling, can be a form of inter-subjective learning.[7] Most generally, please reflect on Appiah's position that discussing "(l)ive experience should not be used to end conversations, but to begin them." [8]

To continue reading this on his online newsletter, please go [here](#). To read another of Dr. Green's articles, please go [here](#).

Is Higher Education on the Verge of an Academic Renaissance?

By Dr. Jose Aybar

Is Higher Education on the Verge of an Academic Renaissance? Is the question posed by Dr. Jose Aybar on the ECCSSA Colloquium delivered on March 25th, 2022. The webinar developed three major themes: a model based on the major characteristics of the Renaissance; the current dissonance in higher education regarding academics, and a systems approach describing the convergence of academic forces to create a new status quo.

The Renaissance is a historical period between 1347 and the 1700's. It was a period of significant societal upheaval, chaos in terms of the aftermath of wars, and of great innovation. It was a transformative period resulting from mass migrations, global exploration, and discovery, and the transfer of knowledge. It was a period marked by creativity and the challenge of the very underpinnings of society and the challenge to the supremacy of Catholic dogma.

Prominent among the five major characteristics describing the Renaissance, Dr. Aybar posits three that were critical: increased interactions between cultures, technological innovation, and the impact of conflict and death. The comparison between these characteristics eschews significant parallels to those that have occurred in the last two centuries.

The Renaissance saw significant interaction among cultures resulting from the aftermath of the Crusades, the wars between evolving nation-states in Europe (particularly in Italy), and the result of exploration and discovery of the New World. It saw the development of the printing press, the evolution of the application of gunpowder for military uses, and the discovery of the scientific method.

The Renaissance was a period of untold death through the Black Plague, with an estimated 20 million dead between 1347 and 1631. It was a period of mass migration resulting from the wars. It was a period of re-birth and great travail which was also marked by an anti-Catholic intellectual movement that provoked the Church to create such instruments of censure and coercion like the Spanish Inquisition, 1545.

Dr. Aybar uses a shorter timeline for purposes of comparison, dating from the end of WWII to the present, and focuses on the events of the past 77 years, i.e, from 1944 to the present. Whereas the Renaissance was a phenomenon that ultimately spanned across the globe, the presentation hones in on the role of the US in this time period.

The parallels in terms of the nature of events begin with the rise of the US as a nuclear power in 1944 and continue through the "undeclared war" against Russia in the Ukraine which is still in progress. As the US emerges as a super-power it has pursued a policy of "Manifest Destiny" by attempting to "encircle" Russia. Strategically this has been carried out by weaning the ex-Warsaw Pact countries away from Russia. In fact, most of them have become members of NATO- the US imperial military alliance. And by application of sanctions designed to isolate Russia fiscally.

In the process of this 77-year interval of historical events, the world has seen mass migrations take place resulting from wars in the Middle East and now Ukraine. It has been marked by the deaths in millions, both civilian and military resulting from the wars. Not unlike the Renaissance period, it has been marked with over 7.28 million deaths worldwide in a space of three years resulting from COVID 19. It has also seen a veritable transformation of the means of communication resulting from the newly digitized economy and the effect of the algorithm. Most importantly, the US and the world have seen a shift in the authoritative control of knowledge to a knowledge economy wherein knowledge is freely exchanged and has NO boundaries.

In the process of noting the parallels between the characteristics of the Renaissance and the prominent events of the past 77, Dr. Aybar makes a note of the fact that the US is in the midst of a crisis. A crisis that has been exacerbated by the devastating effect of COVID 19 and the "undeclared war" in Ukraine. It is a crisis that is affecting every realm of its socio-economic and political structure. It is a crisis which has been some time in brewing, but whose effects are visible in a time compression of the last three years. Higher Education has not been spared the effects of such a profound crisis.

Dr. Aybar notes that higher education is not a priority for the US in terms of its spending categories. He describes the status of Higher Education as one wherein there has been a public hue and cry for outcomes which has resulted in structural reforms on the business infrastructure of Higher Education, but that very little has been done on the academic side. The changes in Higher Education have highlighted structural reforms theoretically leading to increased economic efficiency. It is also noted that the COVID 19 pandemic highlighted a significant drop in enrollment which has continued. The pandemic caused two things to happen which are worthy of note: 1.) Forced academic content to be fitted into courseware; and, inter alia, 2.) Limited the nature of the exchange between professor and student.

He further states that there are three major constraints that are impeding the evolution of Higher Education in the US. These are 1.) the Carnegie Unit; 2.) Governmental Policies and Procedures; and 3.) Administrative Diversity Oversight Committees.

On the first, he reminded the audience that the Carnegie Unit was created in 1936 in response to a pension crisis for teachers in the US. It was a measure of time on task. As the system evolved, knowledge for the given course has to be fitted within a given timeframe, and student achievement is measured by completion of "time on the seat "as it were. Increasingly, there has been an attempt to make it a quality measure of outcomes, but this has not yielded positive results.

On the second, Dr. Aybar referred specifically to the Higher Education Act of 1965, and simply noted that this has now become a patchwork of bills that are primarily concerned with "making Higher Education access more equitable." This patchwork of bills has nothing to do with the academic side of Higher Education. And on the third, Dr. Aybar explained that the various Administrative Diversity Oversight Committees which have arisen in the past couple of years were a reaction to President Trump's initiative to have the US Department of Justice probe into the misapplication of the Affirmative Action process in Higher Education. An initiative which was thereafter canceled by the Biden Administration. The Committees have now enjoined in the Higher Education dialogue regarding "freedom of speech" as well hiring practices. They are a manifestation of the Council of Trent initiative in 1545.

The above-noted constraints in addition to the already brewing crisis conditions caused by dwindling enrollments, student dissatisfaction with the content of education, and the dissatisfaction of the private sector regarding the utility of degrees, are calling into question the value of education. To that, you must add the rising cost of education. The combination of above noted factors is creating the conditions for a full-scale review of the curriculum and the functions of education in the US Higher Education system. For the first time in its history, Higher Education is becoming, in system terms, an open system wherein function and structure are candidates for review. Is Higher Education on the Verge of an Academic Renaissance?

Thank you!

UPCOMING CHRONICLE HIGHLIGHTS

ECCSSA 47th Annual Virtual Conference Roundtable, September 09th, 2022

CALL FOR PAPERS, RESEARCH, AND PROPOSALS

Theme: THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY AND PURPOSE OF THE UNIVERSITY

Please consider submitting your work and encourage colleagues to do the same!

Participants can register [here](#).

Future Colloquiums TBA

Please look forward to hearing more about it in the future!

Special Congratulations to Dr. Babita Srivastava for being awarded the William Waters Research Grant! Her research is focused on "An Investigation into the Infection and Mortality Rate of COVID-19 in Indian Women."

Contact Us:

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