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Teaching has served as my chosen activity for the better part of the past four decades. Teachers have been my career models, providing me with a sense of personal and professional purpose. From them I have obtained and in turn sought to share with others the benefits of a life of learning. The principal content areas in which I have elected to explore and apply the lessons of my training lie within the disciplines of African and African-American history. While the overwhelming majority of students whom I instruct are undergraduates, I strive to give them a sense of what history is like at all levels.

I view teaching and learning not as **events** but rather as synergistic **processes**. Teaching articulates with active observation and, like conversation, achieves maximal efficacy via **participation**, meaning most when approached as *a relationship requiring reciprocity*. To paraphrase Leslie Fiedler, “No one really teaches anyone anything, but, if we are fortunate, we get to learn in one another’s presence.” Learning should be a two-way street. No teacher should fail to recognize that teachers are taught by their students as much as or more than they may teach them. My particular pedagogical techniques may vary, but the underlying philosophy propelling them stresses primacy of fashioning safe learning environments that can challenge, inspire, assist and reward students in realizing that that which they gain through daily effort thereafter forms part of who they become. Facts themselves, while vitally important, at times can seem secondary to shaping habits of mind, methods and processes whereby knowledge may be acquired, processed, retained and interrogated, along systematic lines of inquiry.

Since most students I encounter may have only one experience in my courses, I include within each class material and pedagogical approaches using a wide array of techniques, source materials, genres and activities. Whenever possible, as I delineate disciplinary boundaries, I encourage transcending them. My courses routinely highlight not merely the oft-cited mantra of *change over time* and my standard definition of history as *a record of past events based upon surviving evidence*, but cases and encounters incorporating texts drawn from the arts (film, music, drama, fiction), sociology, politics,

archaeology, anthropology, and so on. The point of these inclusions is to model interdisciplinarity, as I specify how history functions as a field of study, by demystifying how historians perform their craft.

In recent iterations of classes I have sought innovative ways to bring students into closer connection with the full range of activities and motivations of historians, in hopes of humanizing them and their jobs. Increasingly I have done this through real time Skype conversations with scholars whose works my students are reading. I have had positive results with this in different learning situations, lecture surveys and seminar classes alike, each featuring this means of long-distance live interaction. In this way students not only watch but communicate directly with specialists they have been studying, and may see them holistically as accessible people eager to share time with them and keenly engaged in discussing how their writings are being read. Specialists with whom Skype exchanges have occurred include innovative practicing historians Robin D. G. Kelley, Nikhil Pal Singh, Adam Green, Bob Harms, Bob Edgar, Ousmane Sembène biographer Samba Gadjigo and journalist-historian Adam Hochschild. While I have relationships with many of these authors an equal amount are those previously known by reputation with whom I cultivated relationships originating either in conference settings or email. Sensing that their work was integrally tied to and reflective of their personalities I “recruited” them.

Lastly, as an Africanist, I realize that many of the most memorable lessons students learn are derived from direct, in-person interactions with Africans. I regularly seek to share these via classroom guest appearances by artists representing vernacular traditions, e.g., Zimbabwean *mbira* masters Cosmas Magaya and Chingodza Musekiwa, Burkina Faso based *jaliba* (griot) Dougoutigui Koné and Kenyan author Ngugi wa Thiong’o. Ideally, this approaches the transcendent effect of cultural immersion in a foreign research field. Each day I am blessed with the breath of life I wish to bring into the classroom the invaluable life lesson that there is no substitute for the power of presence and no greater gift than sharing social space with those whose earthly experience embodies what the artist Romare Bearden termed “The Prevalence of Ritual,” illustrating what the great Malian historian and international civil servant Amadou Hampâté Bâ meant by saying, “Whenever an elder dies, a library has burned down.”

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