The phrases “curriculum infusion,” “teaching/learning anti-racism,” “teaching against resistance,” and incorporating “diversity” or “multiculturalism” into the curriculum are all attempts to democratize, de-canonize, and open up traditionally Euro-centric teaching approaches in the humanities and social science courses. I have discovered within the last six years, that the best way to put these notions into practice is with the creation of a special topics course: The History of Violence in America. This course includes a challenging pedagogy, namely, service learning. The challenge is due to the fact that most of my students have been subjected to rote learning that is intended to ensure that they score well on standardized tests, or to the banking system of depositing knowledge which students regurgitate at the conclusion of the course, or as often articulated by them—to “give the teacher what he/she wants.” More school boards are requiring their students to complete a certain number of community service hours before graduation from high school. Still, my observation of the students I teach indicates that before college, too few of them are being exposed to a transgressive method of service learning that intentionally generates critical thinking about cultural and social assumptions, specifically about structures of privilege, hegemonies of power, as well as about innovative strategies to arrest systemic violence or learn how to dialogue with others within their own and also in neighboring communities to create healthy living environments for both of them, “toward the good of a more equitable society.” In fact, according
to Eleanor M. Novek, "traditional hierarchical educational strategies do not encourage" these kinds of relationships or "liberatory pedagogies."¹

Each semester I ask myself: are my students—a population of mostly white middle- and upper-class youths who hail from mostly mid-Atlantic states—prepared for a teaching methodology that challenges not only the ones to which they are accustomed, but one that inherently interrogates their access to certain opportunities that are inaccessible (or not readily available) to other members of our society? In my students' own words about depressed communities, women shelters, and middle schools, this paper highlights some of the benefits and outcomes from requiring students to perform twenty hours of service in a course entitled about violence in America. This transformative pedagogy inspires hope, promotes social justice, advocates agents of change, commitment to building community, and cultivating a universal recognition and respect.

My working definition of service learning is borrowed from Eyler & Giles:

Service-learning is a form of experiential education . . . where learning occurs through a cycle of action and reflection . . . as students work with others through a process of acting and reflecting to achieve real objectives for the community and deeper understanding and skills for themselves.²

Suffice it to say, "service learning," sometimes understood as "community service," is not novel; indeed it is not original with me. Yet, it registers an air of curiosity. To the students, the service requirement initially seems odd in a course about violence. In fact, on the first day of classes, as I walk the students through the syllabus, I reach the service component with some hesitancy; for I know from past experience this additional commitment of time will initiate a small exodus. It is because my students are clueless at the start that the "service learning" component in this course works. Not until about mid-semester are students having epiphanies, either visually or conceptually, that bring into focus the link between serving in an underprivileged community and studying the repercussions of a history of systemic violence in the foundational institutions of our country.

Seeds are planted throughout the semester—during lectures, through essay assignments, in structured journal entries, during in-class discussions and reflections—that make possible the linkage between service and the materiality of the course. Indeed, to reach an understanding of violence as both ubiquitous
and dynamic, the course starts with an examination of various theories of violence, such as: 1) theatres of cruelty; 2) overlapping spheres of violence—such as interpersonal, economic, and institutional or structural violence; 3) violence as symptomatic of being dis-honored, shamed, socially distressed and neglected; 4) ideologies of savagery (i.e. methods of dehumanization, de-individuation, de-territorialization, de-culturalization, and de-valuation).

By doing service and reading books by James Gilligan (Violence: An American Tradition), and Jonathan Kozol, simultaneously, my students have come to recognize dire residential realities (like those which engulf some individuals in Baltimore’s economically depressed neighborhoods) as “theatres of cruelty,” not unlike war zones where people duck, hide, run, and fight to avoid stray bullets and direct instrumental attacks. In these neighborhoods, like The Corner (described by David Simon and Ed Burns), the residences are victimized by drug dealers, over-satiated rats, lead poisoned walls, under-funded schools, ever mounting piles of un-removed waste (human and otherwise) and often insensitive health care providers or an absence of hospitals. For Patricia and her classmates, the title of Kozol’s Amazing Grace comes alive; they pause to honor and appreciate that only by “grace” have they escaped a life in the communities where they served.

Patricia, after participating in the Big Mayor’s Clean Up Day, recorded in her journal:

As I stood, cleaning up the garbage, I thought to myself how could anybody possibly live in these houses? [The houses . . . were filthy; the windows were either broken or boarded up.] I felt bad . . . because [of] such terrible living conditions. It also made me realize how grateful I should be for being able to live in a nice home in a nice neighborhood, and not in (what) I faced today.

The word “grateful” is mentioned repeatedly by Patricia. In her reflective journal entry, she moves beyond being stunned by the “unsanitary conditions” to active group engagement. In fact, this particular community activity was independent of the twenty hour, semester-long commitment Patricia had made to another service site. She states, “I learned a lot of things in doing this service; . . . I learned the value of teamwork.”

Patricia demonstrated why H. Levin was justified in being furious with schools that graduated students without having developed a social conscious-
ness or the skills to work alongside others to better the living conditions for their neighbors. For Patricia, service has come to mean activism, and activism spells “teamwork.” “Teamwork pays off when you put your mind to it,” she said. “I walk away from this service with a sense of accomplishment. I helped clean up a community that was in desperate need of it.” Like Ivan Illich, I warn my students, “It is profoundly damaging to yourselves when you define something that you want to do as ‘good,’ a ‘sacrifice,’ and ‘help’.” By doing service Patricia “learned” that 1) the opportunity to serve is always present; 2) the opportunity is, itself, a privilege; 3) even those who opt to stand alone physically in community, are systemically in relationship with other members of the community; and 4) genuine relationships between neighbors near and far emerge and thrive when their actions are based on a commitment to the care and well-being of each other. She remarked, “This cleanup was only a dent in the overall area. A lot of work still needs to be done, but hopefully this was a start to try and change this neighborhood for the better.”

Like Patricia, Kathryn not only confronted her privileged status through active engagement in a dilapidated urban environment, but she also learned how that status is inherently self-empowering, reassuring, progressive, and optimistic. Kathryn writes,

I got to spend a week in Camden. I got to sleep in an apartment at 634 State Street, a street where half the homes were boarded up, garbage lined the curb, and people sat on the front porches staring blankly. I was put completely out of my comfort zone, and an amazing thing happened—I met wonderful people, I learned a lot, and I have seen Camden: not just from the bridge, but from the inside. I was scared at first, mostly of being unsafe. I feared the people who walked down the street with angry faces on, who traveled in packs, who seemed to be up to no good. But I met many of them, and I learned that I had nothing to fear. They are people just like me, who get hungry, who cry, who smile and laugh, and who struggle. The biggest difference I found between them and me was that they don’t think they can succeed. They don’t think their lives can be better.

The Baltimore neighborhood (where Patricia picked up filth) and the Camden community magnified for my students structural inequities. In a word, the Camdenites revealed to Kathryn the subtle dynamic of institutional vio-
lence—i.e. municipal neglect; with the Big Mayor's City Clean Up in Baltimore, Patricia witnessed municipal exploitation. In Camden, Kathryn viewed and heard how a reality of despair, defeatism, despondency, hopelessness, and what Cornel West describes as nihilism, gnaws away at the universality of basic, shared human experiences and emotions. Meaghan discerned the same cruel reality while doing service at a women's shelter in Baltimore. In her very first journal entry, she wrote,

Each woman, even those in high spirits had the same look about them. I do not mean their physical appearance like their clothes or their hair, but they all had the same look in their eyes. I could tell by just looking at them that they knew and had seen more than I ever will, things I never even want to see. Their eyes looked for the most part, lonely, angry and desperate. How will I be able to make any sort of difference here?

Meaghan's experiences with homeless women in Baltimore, and Kathryn's experiences with Camden's predominately Hispanic and economically depressed community also affirmed their reading of Jonathan Kozol's *Amazing Grace* and *Rachel and Her Children*: about the power of an environment to create arbitrary but perceptual borders between neighboring communities, between socio-economic classes and ethnic groups; the power of an environment to frame and harness one's perception of possibilities—i.e. a hoped-for reality; and the power of a community to cause one to see him/herself as not the norm(al), as different, and as undeserving. For Patricia and Kathryn, the experiential, subjective (noted in the next paragraph) and theoretical sources of knowledge were balanced, resulting in "multidimensional forms of learning." According to Bonnie Winfield, "service learning is a pedagogical tool to accomplish this balance."

For Kathryn and Patricia, recalling their own neighborhoods reified for them the inequities of class and race (Kathryn worked mostly among Camden's Hispanic population and Patricia among African Americans) in the communities they served. These same inequities were apparent to students who performed service learning in the local public and private schools, in adult literacy programs, and in community computer labs. Dorcia worked as a "homework companion" at a local Catholic grade school in Baltimore that "provides a tuition-free education for all of its students." Yet, even of this very charitable
institution, Dorcia asks the hard question: “Does the school reach out far enough and justly attend to the needs of its students?” Citing a number of areas that could be improved, Dorcia focuses mostly on the student she tutored, a young black girl, who is being raised by her grandmother. “It would be a waste for [her] to graduate from [X] and then get pregnant in high school. For all the school is doing to save its students, [X] needs to address the tough matters that affect the children when they are not at school.” Dorcia’s concern is that her homework pal will become another social statistic.

Structural, institutional shortcomings and hidden inequities can become quietly woven into students’ self-perception, self-identity, and self-expectation, all of which are often influenced by the treatment students receive from teachers, administrators, and fellow students. Dorcia, quite insightfully, but very cleverly talks around this subtle dynamic of violence as the strictly academic approach by educational institutions to multiculturalism and to its diverse student population at [X school]:

Another of my concerns about [X school] is that I am not sure if the Black and Latino students are reaching their potential culturally. [X school] focuses on the academic, spiritual, and social components of the students but the cultural identity of those children seems to be neglected. Of course, the students should be considered as people first . . . but their cultural identification . . . is such a large part of who they are and who they will become. White students do not have to learn how to live as white people in America because they have positive influences in textbooks, on television, and basically everywhere else. Black students, on the other hand, have to struggle more to find out their place in society. These children need to know how and why the color of their skin and their economic background will determine their futures.10

Dorcia’s reflective remarks are telling. She underscores Winfield’s point that “Service Learning alone can not teach the profound insights that reflection of that service offers. Critical thinking must be applied to the concept of service. Reflection sessions and journals must address power, justice, privilege, and diversity issues,”11 and race.

My students, not unlike most college co-eds, live thoroughly and almost exclusively in a present state of mind, with typically little reflection on or care about past events, and only occasional moments of anxious concern about their
post-graduation status—i.e. employment, or acceptance into a graduate or professional school. In fact, as each semester looms near, I ask myself, what preconceptions is this class of students bringing into this history course? In particular: What assumptions are my students bringing into a course on the History of Violence in America? What are the cultural attitudes and societally accepted positions that have shaped their beliefs about what is violence, about where violence occurs, about how violence is committed, and about who are the most frequent perpetrators and/or victims of violence?

Assisting staff who run shelters in Baltimore, my students meet women, men and children who also live very much in the moment. At “My Sister’s Place,” Patricia observed what it meant to be de-territorialized, to be in a constant state of transition, to be without a home, to recall Ronald Takaki’s narration (In A Different Mirror) of the experiences of thousands of Native Americans, who were uprooted from their sacred fertile grounds in the Southeast of the United States during the Andrew Jackson administration and pushed, on foot, to foreign, barren, and hostile territory west of the Mississippi. She could conceptualize why Gilligan asserts that “poverty” is “the deadliest form of violence.” She and Laura B. were witnesses to the daily shuffleboard of some homeless women who make use of public and private shelters. Even these individuals move throughout the day between residential and non-residential shelters, between soup kitchens and shelters with laundries and showers, between shelters with day-care for children and ones which offered routine health exams, between shelters with a supply of clothing for all and shelters with job counseling. In the midst of all the movement, Patricia noted that “For the most part, all of the women have one short term goal—to find a shelter for the night. It made me think how hard it is to find a place to stay off the street.”

Informed by my students’ own words, it occurs to me that service learning actually feeds into their presentist perspective of the world; at the same time, service learning challenges the assumptions they may have made about people who are economically and socially different from themselves. Their assumptions have been based solely on the consumption of the mass and popular culture, as well as on traditionally, unquestioned beliefs. Service learning, however, plants and situates my students in a reality whereby they are forced to confront their own attitudes, values, beliefs, or in a word, themselves. Dorcia, from whom we heard earlier, would learn about her own preconceptions as well as discover her unconscious acceptance of a capitalist standard of values from the mouth and actions of a young boy in middle school. She writes:

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I remember last semester when Daniel’s bookbag broke. This boy always carried a load of books that weighed him down and tore his bookbag at the seams. I noticed he was definitely in need of a new bookbag but it was months before he got one. Daniel had to carry some of his books in his arms and made due with his tattered bookbag. The day I saw his new bookbag, I commented on how nice it was. ‘Yea, my mom bought this for me but I didn’t really need it,’ I recall Daniel saying. At that moment I learned that the more people have, the more they think they need. Underprivileged children (as they are labeled by over privileged observers) may not have a lot of material goods, and they may even know they do not have a lot, but what they have means a lot to them.

Service learning counters the stereotypes and begins the process of dismantling what the students have brought with them into the classroom. In the process of gaining a better understanding of themselves, that is, what they have come to like and quite painfully and embarrassingly come to dislike about themselves, the service experience opens up new mental territory. Not only does it expand their terrain of knowledge about the other, but it causes them to challenge the stereotypes they’ve accepted about any discriminated group without equivocation. For example, Dorcia’s learned that wisdom does not always come with age; it comes with experience.

When I came to college, I thought everyone younger than me was still an inexperienced baby. The students at [X school] awakened me to the reality that there are children who have seen more and been through more in their short lives than I will probably ever experience. I look at the students at [X] school as little soldiers because their lives ... involve so much violence and struggle.\(^\text{13}\)

While serving others, some of my students reluctantly enter into a participatory learning exercise; they come to truly acquisition knowledge, learning and understanding. Kathryn speaks openly and honestly of her own resistance to confront the harsh realities of others. In her final paper, she states we “blindfold the parts that are hurting. Perhaps if Philadelphians and people from New Jersey could see how Camden is hurting, they would help.”\(^\text{14}\) For Kathryn, even her own experiential learning was made desirable by the College as a way to fill-
up time during Spring Break for Credit. And very subtly, she admits that even still the attraction was dimmed by the physical state of the environment. She writes:

I never would have ventured into Camden if I had not signed up for Spring Break Outreach. I never would have driven off the Ben Franklin Bridge and into Camden, I would have no reason to be there, and truth be told, it frightened me at first sight. It didn’t frighten me because I haven’t seen an inner city street before, (I live in Chicago and went to high school across the street from housing projects, and drove streets like these many times before). It frightened me because it would be my home for a week, and I didn’t know if I was safe.15

Regardless, Kathryn took away the lesson from Camden: that it is by engaging in life’s experiences that one shifts from being an adaptive person to becoming what Paulo Friere would describe as an “integrated person.” Joy James paraphrases this idea quite well, by stating, “The adaptive person is defined as a conformist determined by socialization, with limited choices and capacity for critical thought; the integrative person is defined as someone who works to transcend such limitations and to act in the world to free up possibilities” (191).

By requiring my students to perform twenty hours of service, I have steered them into collective and constructive action and into leadership roles (self-starters and finishers) in their service communities. In the process of acting, they are asked to question the social and cultural foundations of existing biases, prejudices, stereotypes, attitudes, and beliefs and maybe their own, regarding socially marginalized persons, the materially poor, children at risk, adult literacy, HIV/AIDS patients, the homeless and shelters for women, and even treatment of the elderly.

Fundamentally, I am advocating in this course interdisciplinarity as well as critical thinking skills that challenge dis-associative and value-neutral educational practices. In addition to a service learning component, I have integrated into this course distinguished notable guest lecturers (e.g. Maryland’s Chief Justice, State’s Attorney for Baltimore City, Director of Homeless Services, founder of a Catholic Worker’s shelter, environmentalist activist, ex-convicts turned motivational speakers, disc jockeys, musicians, psychologists, etc.), and extracurricular field trips (e.g. plantation tours, U. S. Holocaust Museum). The assigned readings (some already mentioned) also include Nancy MacLean’s
Behind the Mask of Chivalry, Hannah Arendt, On Violence etc. are intended to stimulate and provoke students to interrogate their service experiences; to honestly confront their assumptions; to fuel their desire to learn more about America's domestic ethnic groups; to adopt a college life of doing service for others long after the course concludes; and to consider "active engagement" in a play of social justice projects for the remainder of their lives, either in groups or solo. Each resource of knowledge they access also moves the course "farther away from the realm of hierarchical pedagogy, and more into contact with" the communities in which they service; with their own agency, with themselves as sources of knowledge, and with the importance of their "contribution to the common good" and less with me—as the teacher/mentor. Novek agrees, saying, "Rather than telling students what to think and do, service-learning educators generate discussion about how to think and do, encouraging students to reflect upon the complexities of their social worlds."16

Because of the variety of service learning options from which they could choose, students either confronted blatant acts of violence, or subtle systemic violative conditions and situations. Their responses constitute a rich portfolio of expression of personal growth, self-critique, honesty, naiveté, shame, and pride. Through their voices one can also discern that concepts such as social justice, universal respect, humanitarianism, social consciousness and ethical responsibility, gain meaning. By requiring my students to perform service within communities of people that seemed so ethnically, culturally, racially, and economically different from them, I have caused them—with much resistance—to see themselves differently, to expand the narrowness of their own lives; and to recognize the fundamental threads of universality that binds each and every one of us.

Eleanor M. Novek admits that "even at its most self-reflexive, the service-learning approach cannot resolve all of the ethical or practical dilemmas faced by educators who are interested in adopting more egalitarian or liberatory pedagogies."17 The benefits of service learning as a pedagogy to expose mostly white students to the fallacies in the stereotypes of people of color are evident in my students' writings. Nevertheless, the History of Violence in America course best exemplifies my own pedagogical agenda and mission: I intend to prepare students to confront the world on terms that are not always written by persons who think and/or resemble the majority of the population with whom they may identify. As noted at the top of this essay, initially students have balked at the amount of time spent—both in and out of class. Yet, just before the close of the
semester, they tip-toe into my office voicing, send e-mails, or put in reflection papers, their words of gratitude for requiring them to experience and comprehend the "Jesuit mission to serve others and life-long learning" before they graduate from Loyola. Their comments attest to the transformative and the life-altering power of this pedagogy. Many students who register for this course are sophomores who often they continue to work with Loyola’s community partners in succeeding semesters. Few experiences, even in the face of resistance and sometimes hostility, could be more rewarding.

Notes

2. J. Eyler & D. E. Giles, Where’s the Learning in Service-Learning (San Francisco: Bass, 1999), 7-9. This definition is one of the few that is also featured on the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse Web page.


13. Dennis, 5.


15. Ibid.

16. Novek, 235. K. Krupar notes: "This pedagogy requires that students become profoundly and actively involved in their own learning, that they discover for themselves rather than accept verbal and written pronouncements, that they learn to map un-chartered territories and that they find themselves through the processes of trial and error." In paper "Service-Learning: A Method of Motivating Students to enroll in
17. Novek, 237.
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