



The Mahle Lectures

A Publication of Hamline University's Public
Lecture Series in Progressive Christian Thought

Volume 1

Issue 1 *Teaching Race, Memory, Justice, and
Reconciliation at Church-Related Colleges and
Universities*

Article 1

February 2024

From Charlottesville to Minneapolis: An Introduction to the Lift Every Voice and Teach Workgroup

Peter Slade

Ashland University, pslade@ashland.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.hamline.edu/mls>

Recommended Citation

Slade, Peter (2024) "From Charlottesville to Minneapolis: An Introduction to the Lift Every Voice and Teach Workgroup," *The Mahle Lectures Journal*: Vol. 1: Iss. 1, Article 1.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.61335/2997-0172.1013>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.hamline.edu/mls/vol1/iss1/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Hamline. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Mahle Lectures Journal by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@Hamline. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@hamline.edu.

From Charlottesville to Minneapolis: An Introduction to the Lift Every Voice and Teach Workgroup

Peter Slade (Ashland University)



THE PROJECT ON
LIVED THEOLOGY



Participants in the LEVaT Colloquium, Hamline University, May 2023

This issue of [*The Mahle Lectures*](#) presents content from the workshops and some of the conversations at the *Lift Every Voice and Teach Colloquium* held at Hamline University in St. Paul, Minnesota on May 18–20, 2023. The colloquium included twenty-six participants from twenty-one church-affiliated and Christian colleges and universities in disciplines ranging from Biblical studies and theology to anthropology, sociology, history, English literature, and theater.

The colloquium was the culmination of a two-year workgroup of the Project on Lived Theology involving ten scholars supported by a grant from the Lilly Endowment: [*Lift Every Voice and Teach: Teaching Race, Memory, Justice, and Reconciliation*](#) (LEVaT). We spent the three days in Hamline University drawing our colleagues into the conversations the workgroup has been having over the last two years. The articles presented here are not academic papers—though they contain significant academic research, wisdom, and classroom experience—they are “Workshop Notes” that serve as both a record of our gathering at a particular moment in the history of American Christianity and education and hopefully a place

for our colleagues to glean some ideas, tools, and inspiration for their own teaching and to continue the conversation.

The LEVaT project had its genesis in the recognition of a shift in church-affiliated and Christian education. For most of the participants in the workgroup, our careers as professors has been in the context of white American Protestant's (often awkward) recognition that they needed to understand and address racism in their communities and congregations. For church-related colleges and universities the publication of Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith's landmark book *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* in 2000, in conjunction with the movement within evangelical churches toward racial reconciliation spearheaded by Promise Keepers, garnered a new generation of evangelical scholars who began to write and teach about the church and race in America. The racial reconciliation movement resulted in an emphasis on planting multi-ethnic congregations, again marked by the work of sociologist Michael Emerson (*People of the Dream: Multiracial Congregations in the United States*, Princeton University Press, 2006). Even conservative Christian colleges and seminaries started to overcome their traditional aversion to topics once dismissed as the "social gospel" welcoming speakers and developing new curricula addressing the subjects of race, injustice, and the church.



The first gathering of the LEVaT workgroup October 8-9, 2021, online due to COVID

Things changed in the second decade of the century with the killings of Travon Martin in 2012 and Michael Brown in 2015 and the start of the #BlackLivesMatter movement, the nativist and anti-immigrant sentiments stoked up through the political campaigns of 2016, the White

Nationalist violence in Charlottesville, and to the Travel Ban of 2017. When we wrote the grant proposal for LEVaT in 2019, we had yet to experience the impact on our classrooms of the murder of George Floyd, the largest protests for Black civil rights in US history, and the reactionary forces they unleashed. However, it was clear even then that we desperately needed to consider how to adapt our curricula and pedagogical approaches to teach undergraduate students who have come of age in this era of hyper-partisanship and heightened rhetoric around race and immigration. The workgroup's rather lofty-sounding purpose as stated in the grant proposal was to "encourage and develop pedagogy from the rent and fraying fabric of our present to prepare our students for the necessary decades-long task of fostering hope and healing in our communities and country."

By the time we gathered at Hamline University in 2023, all the colloquium's participants recognized and had experienced the peculiar pressures playing out in our nation's institutions of higher education. That summer of 2023, GOP presidential candidates competed with each other in their condemnations of "woke" professors and universities and state legislators brought laws to ban "DEI" from campuses.¹ These political forces were playing out in particular ways at church-affiliated and Christian colleges and universities. As Rebecca Kim, one of our participants, wrote:

"A civil war [is] brewing among evangelicals on the college campus over racial justice [because]. . . the white evangelical right are framing their resistance to racial justice and redrawing the color line in the contemporary college evangelical landscape not with distant "social justice warriors" in broader secular society, but with those right inside their evangelical community"²

Many of us—particularly the professors of color—felt isolated in our respective teaching contexts and exhausted from this civil war. It was clear that LEVaT had become an important support for its members. One participant reported:

The evolution of this entire project from 2021 to the present has been INVALUABLE! In theory, I've always known that my experience as a professor teaching race at a Christian PWI was not uniquely my own, but it certainly felt like it. LEVaT enveloped me in a community of scholars who shared my experience. The exchange of knowledge and experiences was, indeed, soul care for me.

Another wrote:

This type of gathering is essential to sustaining professors in the pre-tenure, tenure, and late-career stages of higher education. Too many of us are isolated in our own institutions with

¹ Jaclyn Diaz, "Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis Signs a Bill Banning DEI Initiatives in Public Colleges," *NPR*, May 15, 2023, <https://www.npr.org/2023/05/15/1176210007/florida-ron-desantis-dei-ban-diversity>; Audra D. S. Burch, "Texas Lawmakers Pass Ban on D.E.I. Programs at State Universities," *The New York Times*, May 29, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/29/us/texas-dei-program-ban.html>.

² Rebecca Y. Kim, "Evangelical Civil War on the College Campus, White Evangelical Right Framing Resistance to Racial Justice in 2020s America," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, May 20, 2023, 1, doi:10.1111/jssr.12852.

little understanding of what resources may be available for us to enhance the classroom experience for our students. Just as importantly, it is crucial that we faculty learn how to care for ourselves in the context of PWIs that benefit from the presence of professors working to make our communities more diverse, but don't understand how taxing the work can be. This network, and networks like it, are indispensable resources for successful careers in the academy and human flourishing outside of it.



Workgroup participants on the road to George Floyd Square, Minneapolis, MN, May 18, 2023

The LEVaT workgroup grounded its task in the theological challenge for teachers laid out by Dr. Willie Jennings at our first meeting. Jennings argued that Christian education must free itself from the goal of shaping its students in the image of a white, self-sufficient man. Instead, our classrooms and institutions of higher education should become redemptive spaces for all people.³ Together, we set the group's course by identifying five crucial areas of conversation for those engaged in teaching race in Christian and church-related undergraduate college settings. These five topics became the five workshops presented in this issue:

1. Structural Change
2. Identifying Racial Narratives

³ The workgroup read Jennings' book on seminary education and considered how it translated to the undergraduate context. See Willie James Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2020). For more details on members of the workgroup and our meetings see <https://www.livedtheology.org/initiatives/lift-every-voice-and-teach/>

3. Christian Perspectives on Race
4. Teaching Race in Diverse Classrooms Without Hurting Our Students
5. Faculty's Positionality and Soul Care

We hope that you will find these workshop notes and other resources presented in this issue useful for you in your pedagogical contexts. The members of this workgroup intend that these notes will stimulate an ongoing conversation on faith, race, justice, and reconciliation in our classrooms.



THE PROJECT ON
LIVED THEOLOGY

**LIFT EVERY VOICE
AND TEACH**