Reflections by Libbie Freed, October 2015

- I teach World History and African history, so trying to make my courses ecumenical and non-eurocentric is already important to me.
  - I find a lot of textbooks and monographs even in these fields to be eurocentric; I try to select texts that are not. I do assign one exception very early on in the semester in my World History course, and use it as a teaching tool to talk about eurocentrism as a concept (and because except for its first distractingly and gratuitously eurocentric paragraph, the reading is a useful one).
  - Sometimes it’s little things – I use C.E., not A.D. in my courses (and explain why).
  - I deliberately start my World History course in 1400, in Asia (i.e. not in Europe or with Europeans). There are plenty of Europeans later in the semester, but for the first two weeks, we hardly mention Europe or Europeans; this helps me get to students who may only ever have considered history through a European lens.
  - I have tried to acknowledge multiple perspectives – this is important in history anyway, but in the courses I teach, it’s clear that (to give just one example) Cortés and native Americans didn’t see their encounters in central America the same way.
  - When discussing histories of violence/oppression (such as colonial history, slave trade, etc.), I have tried not to automatically adopt the perspective of the conquerer/enslavers – instead, I try to shift perspectives. I do this even for fairly “neutral” situations such as the Mongol rule of China in the 13th-14th century (i.e. something most of my students don’t seem to have a deep emotional attachment to, one way or another), and at least briefly remind students that these events would look different through different eyes.
  - I emphasize understanding over judgment – we’re trying to understand people in the past; however similar or different to us they were, they were still people.

- I attended the Campus Forum on Race in December 2014, and tried to listen. Because of what I heard there, I have tried to educate myself about microaggressions. I found a document online called “Speak Up at School” especially helpful: it explains why speaking up – not letting biased or bigoted comments slide – is crucial. Even better, it suggests specific courses of action and even specific comments I can make in response to microaggressions or other biased language. And, it usefully reminds me to consider the dynamics of any situation in which I may consider intervening.
  

- I have tried not to automatically assume that my students “are” any one perspective. We all have multiple identities.

- I also try to remember to stress – explicitly – that nobody’s going to be asked to “represent” any group, that students are just here as themselves, individuals.

- I find it useful to show and discuss Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s “Danger of a Single Story” TED talk at the start of the semester in my African history courses.
  
  [http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story](http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story)

- Since I expect students to work together discussing material in small groups and also to speak up to the class as a whole, and because I find it much easier to try to create a mutually respectful environment early on than to try to deal with aggression/etc between students later on, I spend time from the very start of the semester working to build that mutually respectful environment, working to get students comfortable talking in class and to each other in varying configurations. Even so, frankly, the results vary, so throughout the semester I try to keep a weather-eye on classroom atmosphere to try to make sure nothing’s impeding learning.

- I use mid-semester evaluations as a way for students to give me feedback about how things are going in my courses while there’s still time for us make changes. These evaluations are primarily a chance for me to ask students to reflect on how well they’re learning in the course so far, but they also provide an opportunity to students to (anonymously) mention issues with classroom dynamics, etc.