Empowering Student Engagement with Race in the Marketplace: A Research-informed Approach

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Abstract

We build a research-driven approach to university education about race in the marketplace, explaining what can cultivate student engagement. Our approach aims to create a shared understanding of the core components of teaching critical studies of race in the marketplace for instructors and to support student application of such knowledge to enhance marketplace equity. We design a structured pedagogical process, integrating discussion of key marketing concepts, power relations, and strategic issues central to understanding race in the marketplace. We detail how the course was implemented and empirically assess students' critical engagement using

text analysis and a pre-and post-course survey. Overall, we provide guidance for educators who desire to address issues of race in their curriculum and classrooms—whether as a semester-long course or through specific course modules.

Introduction

Many global events and atrocities over the last few years highlight the need for a broader understanding of the role of race in the marketplace. This need aligns with a worldwide emphasis on leveraging marketing and business practice and pedagogy to address societal inequities (Kipnis et al. 2021; Scalvini, 2024). Corporations, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies worldwide have developed pledges, policies, and programs to address issues of racial inequity in markets across retail, finance, health, education, and other domains (Johnson et al., 2019; Thomas et al., 2020). Among these are the Black Lives Matter (BLM) statements of US fashion brands and the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan (ArWAP) of the Welsh government—just two of

many examples of racial dynamics in the marketplace. Although we have witnessed a rise in media and marketplace discussions about how to address racism and intersecting oppressions, we have also seen the decline and decimation of such work. Terms such as "DEI backlash," "DEI rollback," and more recently, "segregationist" efforts (Ray, 2025), have been used to capture the increasing instances of brands, industries, and institutions distancing themselves from previously stated DEI commitments. This evolving climate underscores the importance of preparing business school students to critically engage with and navigate these polarizing shifts in industry DEI (dis)engagements.

As "educational institutions are fundamental to the path of change" (Francis et al. 2023), pedagogy on race in the marketplace can play a vital part in addressing marketplace and societal racism. By equipping students with the necessary analytical skills, marketing education can contribute to fostering a more equitable and socially responsible marketplace. A specific focus on race is addressed by the interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary Race in the Marketplace (RIM) Research Network, which contributes research to the field while engaging in impactful praxis and pedagogical interventions. Building with research on race in the marketplace and its scholarly lineage (Grier

et al., 2024), this article emphasizes the role of such work in developing research-informed teaching for marketplace equity and holistic forms of student engagement.

We develop a research-driven conceptual framework to guide course development and engage students with issues of marketplace equity. In addition, by focusing on insights from an implemented university course and its empirical evaluation, this article outlines crucial components of pedagogy that can engender students' ongoing engagement with critical issues of race in the marketplace. In turn, we contribute to research on meaningful student engagement by reflecting on how racial dynamics are implicated in the various ways that engagement is conceptualized and experienced. We do so by synthesizing prior studies of student engagement and transformative pedagogy (Gurrieri & Finn, 2023; Oseghale et al., 2023) with insights from critical studies of race in the marketplace (Francis & Robertson, 2021; Grier & Poole, 2020; Johnson et al., 2019; Poole et al., 2021). We complement our conceptual contributions with a qualitative analysis of student work and a pre- and post-survey to provide evidence that students critically engage with the material of the developed course. By focusing on the pedagogy of race in the marketplace, we outline key

components of research-informed teaching for student engagement and
marketplace equity.

Background: Setting the stage for a race in the marketplace pedagogy

While an exhaustive analysis of race and its multifaceted relationship to
the marketplace extends beyond the scope of this research, we begin by
delineating key terms central to our discussion on integrating race into
marketing pedagogy. Race is a social construct categorizing individuals
based on physical and sociocultural attributes, arranging them
hierarchically (Omi &Winant 2014). The historical persistence of race,
manifested through colonization, slavery, and other structural forms of
oppression, has embedded racial constructs in societal beliefs and
behaviors reflected in racism that permeates the marketplace (Davis,
2017; Grier et al., 2017; Poole et al 2021). These forces engender
hierarchies that privilege certain groups while marginalizing others,
which is evident, for example, in biased consumer targeting, and
inequitable distribution of material and symbolic resources.

The concept of "race in the marketplace" encompasses the
myriad ways that race and racism shape market systems and influence

business practices, marketing strategies, and consumer behavior. Research in this domain examines how this racial structuring influences marketplace dynamics, access to economic opportunities, and consumer resistance (Grier et al., 2024). Empirical evidence demonstrates how historical and systemic racial biases affect marketing practices, consumer experiences, and marketplace outcomes such as consumer finance, branding, target marketing, healthcare access, and algorithmic discrimination (Bone et al., 2014; Johnson et al., 2019; Thomas et al., 2020). Scholars in this field analyze both discriminatory practices and efforts toward racial equity in various industries. We adopt the broad definition of racial equity in which race does not determine access to resources and life chances (Race Forward, n.d.) and characterize marketplace equity as the processes and outcomes in which race does not shape consumer access to opportunities, experiences, and outcomes in diverse marketplaces.

In constructing a research-driven approach to education about race in the marketplace, we draw on a range of scholarly works across such disciplines as education, history, marketing, media studies, psychology, and sociology. Our discussion emphasizes the literature relevant to race and marketplace (in)equity that informed the

development of the *Race in the Marketplace* course, while recognizing the extensive body of existing research. As our course is based in the United States, we encourage scholars to design courses that draw from the broader diverse body of knowledge, adapting our framework to their specific geographic and sociopolitical contexts.

Transforming business and marketing pedagogy for social justice

In recent years, there has been a gradual swell in research and teaching on issues of (in)equity and (in)justice in business school settings (Crittenden et al., 2020; Prothero & Tadajewski; Thomas et al., 2020). This shift has been driven in part by evolving accreditation standards and university expectations that require social impact and emphasize the role of business schools as a "force for good" in society (AACSB, 2020; Dyllick, & Muff 2023; Scott et al., 2022). Student expectations are also shifting, with prospective business school applicants increasingly demanding curricula that prepare them to address systemic inequalities (Choudaha, 2020; Jirova, 2024).

As a result, business education increasingly incorporates social principles alongside traditional profit-driven models, reflecting a broader commitment to social responsibility (Read, 2022). For instance,

as of 2023, more than 800 business and management schools across 96 countries have signed onto the United Nations' Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) initiative, which seeks to develop future business leaders who prioritize sustainability, ethical decision-making, and social impact (Upadhyaya et al., 2019). These trends underscore a significant transformation in business education, positioning societal impact as a central consideration in the development of future business leaders.

At the core of the integration of social themes in business is a concern about social inequality and social justice. In marketing, this shift is addressed through multiple research and pedagogical perspectives, including diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), social impact, and sustainability, among other topics (Crittenden et al., 2020; Grier, 2020; Prothero & Tadajewski, 2021; Scott et al., 2022). Research and teaching in and across these overlapping areas relevant to social justice in the marketplace have examined how systemic inequities shape and reflect consumer behavior, marketing practices, and broader economic structures. For example, scholars have critically analyzed how marketing both reinforces and challenges social hierarchies, highlighting issues such as discriminatory advertising, exclusionary branding, and

the exploitation of marginalized communities in global supply chains (Bradshaw & Tadajewski, 2011; Grier et al., 2024; Heath & McKechnie, 2019).

Building on these broader shifts, pockets of pedagogy within business schools have sought to address issues of race as a specific factor in injustice and social inequity (Poole & Garrett Walker, 2016; Thomas & Jones, 2019). Race has received particular attention in these discussions due to global atrocities and heightened engagement with racial justice movements. The racial diversity of consumer markets is "increasing in complexity and nuance" (Thomas & Jones, 2019), reinforcing the oft-cited business case for studying race based on demographic change. Beyond the demographic imperative for businesses, the ability to constructively engage with racial dynamics in the marketplace is a necessary skill and moral issue of curricular responsibility for marketing educators (Burton, 2005; Grier, 2020). Societies continue to struggle with social injustice across domains, including retail, healthcare, and financial markets (Blackwell et al, 2017; Johnson et al, 2019). Students must be equipped to navigate and address these evolving challenges. Indeed, some curricular transformations related to race have been driven by student-led

movements such as Rhodes Must Fall, which began in 2015 at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. Initially focused on removing a statue of British colonialist Cecil Rhodes, the movement expanded to broader issues of institutional racism and a demand for decolonizing education (Fall, 2018).

Scholars such as Abdallah (2024) conceptualize "the Business School as a postcolony," underscoring its historical ties to colonialism and epistemic domination and the proliferation of this continued practice. Marketing and business practices evolved alongside slavery and colonialism, yet these entanglements have received limited attention in traditional business research and curricula (Francis, 2023; Grier et al., 2019; Thomas & Ncube 2025). While efforts to "decolonize" business schools exist, they remain "unavoidably incomplete" due to the historically, culturally, and politically entangled nature of knowledge production (Abdallah, 2024, p. 1). These debates shape discussions on race in the marketplace, drawing attention to the broader implications of historical legacies in marketing education and the need to more deeply engage with non-Western epistemologies and Global South pedagogies.

The shift to encompass social justice in business education represents an opportunity for institutions to create inclusive learning

spaces where students feel empowered to critically engage with the evolving world around them, both during and after their studies. Scholars have long advocated for critically engaging with marketing topics in the classroom (Burton, 2005; Catterall et al., 2002). While "[c]ritical pedagogy is unusual, in traditional business school education" (Mavin et al., 2023), its importance is evident. A growing body of research demonstrates that integrating social justice education in business curricula not only improves student academic, social, and cognitive development and critical thinking but also enhances civic engagement and post-graduation consciousness (Bowman & Park, 2015; Denson & Chang, 2015; Keith et al., 2023; Thurston, 2017). Indeed, for students, justice-oriented pedagogical approaches "can generate new ways of seeing and doing marketing" (Guerreri & Finn, 2023, p. 108).

At the same time, teaching issues of race can present challenges for both the instructor and student as it requires navigating deeply entrenched social, economic, and political structures while fostering critical engagement in potentially uncomfortable discussions (e.g., Grier, 2020; Kipnis et al., 2021; Ní Raghallaigh, 2025). For instructors, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds, incorporating race-conscious pedagogy can carry material risks, including pushback from

students, institutional resistance, and professional repercussions (Liu, 2023). The prospect of facing forms of backlash and harassment due to leading pedagogy on race can prohibit many instructors from doing so. However, as the pervasiveness of marketplace racism makes clear, the need for pedagogy that tackles racial dynamics in the marketplace persists. Teaching race-related topics necessitates an intentional approach that acknowledges that students may have direct or intergenerational experiences with racial trauma, requiring pedagogical strategies that prioritize psychological safety, emotional regulation, and empowerment (Carello & Butler, 2015). Recognizing the potential for class discussions to trigger past trauma and the need to foster a safe and inclusive learning environment, our course design prioritized student well-being alongside critical engagement.

Many business programs are traditionally rooted in neoliberal capitalist frameworks and may implicitly or explicitly support a non-critical approach that prioritizes corporate interests over systemic critique (Hewer & Brownlie, 2007). Indeed, business curricula often embed the positive impacts of marketing while sidelining the numerous recorded negative impacts (Tadajewski, 2016). Students may struggle with cognitive dissonance, as confronting racial inequities in business

challenges dominant narratives of meritocracy and free-market fairness (Bradshaw & Tadajewski, 2011; Grier 2020). Moreover, the classroom contributions of students, including the preexisting knowledge and experience they bring to a course and develop through both peer-to-peer and faculty-student dialogues, may challenge a standardized approach to pedagogy.

These challenges highlight the opportunity for educators to create structured yet flexible spaces for critically addressing the racialized dimensions of the global economy without alienating learners. Critical marketing education can equip students with the analytical, reflexive, and practical skills to address issues of race, while also ensuring that the teaching of such topics occurs in ways that acknowledge differences between students' personal experiences (e.g., racial, geocultural, sociopolitical, trauma-related) and how they engage with pedagogy. Accordingly, we engage the agency and knowledge production *of students* as part of pedagogy on race in the marketplace, in addition to discussion of the heterogeneity of racial consciousness shifts that can be part of their learning. Essentially, there is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to research-informed teaching on race in the marketplace, but as we outline, there are core components of such teaching that can

engage all students. We next turn to these pedagogical possibilities.

Pedagogical possibilities and the racial politics of engagement

While there are extensive bodies of work on marketplace equity and student engagement, these topics rarely are engaged in tandem while focusing on racial topics. Addressing that research gap, we engage pedagogy in a way that makes connections between teaching interventions and students' experiences of marketplace settings beyond the context of education, both during and after their university experience. In doing so, we contribute to recent scholarly discourses on justice-oriented marketing education (Grier, 2020; Gurrieri & Finn, 2023; Thomas & Jones, 2019).

Issues of race are endemic to the marketplace and crucial for the next generation of societal leaders to understand. Yet, business school students are rarely trained in how to address them (Grier, 2020; Thomas & Jones, 2019). Discussions of race and racism are often embedded in broader issues of "diversity in marketing education" (Crittenden et al., 2020), leaving students unprepared to deal with explicit racial and racist dynamics from a marketing perspective that also addresses the wider "matrix of domination" (Hill Collins, 1980) of which racism is a part.

Also, due to how inequity is reproduced in business school faculty search processes (Grier & Poole, 2020), students are often unlikely to be taught by faculty with a wide range of racial backgrounds. The combined impacts of this can be a hampered pedagogical experience that is devoid of substantive diversity, failing to equip students with the skills to address issues of race in the marketplace.

Published articles on pedagogical approaches to integrating discussion of race/racism into the marketing curriculum are limited, as is guidance for instructors who want to focus on this important topic in interdisciplinary ways that also account for the well-being of students and faculty, including by acknowledging potential differences between their experiences. As institutions around the world work to root out systemic racism in policies, procedures, and practices, it is crucially important for scholars, practitioners, and students to understand the role of race in the marketplace in contemporary society and the long history that has shaped it. This understanding is reinforced by repeated high-profile controversies that signal the need to develop students' skills in understanding racial dynamics in the marketplace (Grier et al., 2019; Grier, 2020) if they are to effectively address them within and beyond the classroom.

Novel frameworks for race-related curriculum development

The evolving body of research on race in the marketplace provides an opportunity to build fresh new paradigms for knowledge propagation by embracing insights derived from curriculum development and student engagement.

While extant studies have identified elements of student engagement as including "physical (behavioral) engagement, emotional engagement, and cognitive engagement" (Sun et al., 2024), we focus on the role of *critical engagement*, which cuts across these other modes of engagement and includes the ability to both challenge and be challenged in pedagogical spaces. This should not be mistakenly confused with advocating for antagonism or animosity. Rather, we affirm the productiveness of challenging dialogues on race in the marketplace when they are approached from a place of openness, mutual respect, and reflexivity. Incorporating inclusive learning strategies and providing autonomous support are vital for enhancing students' behavioral, cognitive, and emotional engagement in the learning process" (Oseghale et al., 2023). We define "inclusive strategies" as teaching methods that actively involve all students, encouraging them to share their diverse

perspectives and engage critically with course material (Gay, 2018). By facilitating collaborative discussions, integrating varied resources, and employing reflective assignments that leverage students' agency, we create an environment where we hope all learners feel valued and empowered to contribute.

Critical engagement supports social justice orientation as it directs students to recognize marketplace inequity. Thus, we contend with the crucial role of critical forms of engagement in research-informed teaching on marketplace equity, and, by extension, in inclusive pedagogical approaches. Having detailed the broader context of our work, we describe the use and benefits of research in teaching and how it undergirds our framework and structured approach to develop a research-informed course about race in the marketplace. We then detail how the course was implemented and assess student response using text analysis and a pre-/post-course survey. Finally, we distill the implications of the research to guide scholars and educators who desire to effectively address issues of race and racism as part of curriculum development and the cultivation of open and dynamic classrooms. We intend for this research to be dialogic in that we hope to inspire or support other researchers and educators to expand and evolve this

approach in ways that account for differences and similarities between geocultural, disciplinary, and institutional contexts.

Research-informed course development

Some scholars argue that marketing research is disconnected from real-world problems and lacks societal impact (Burke & Rau, 2010; Gurrieri & Finn, 2023; Kriz et al., 2021). However, we believe critical studies, such as those on race in the marketplace, can be impactful by disrupting oppressive dynamics and enhancing learning experiences.

Combining practice and research in the classroom fosters intellectual growth for both students and educators. This approach enhances student curiosity, adaptability, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills while emphasizing social and moral sustainability in marketing. It also enriches instructors' creativity and research relevance, promoting novel questions that are beneficial to various stakeholders (Gutierrez, 2011). Engaging with the latest knowledge fosters interdisciplinary and multi-vocal approaches in both students and faculty.

With this in mind, we, the course Instructor (an African American

woman) and Teaching Assistant (a White American woman pursuing a master's program in Anthropology), developed a research-informed course defined as built on relevant discipline theory, cutting-edge knowledge, and research to support evidence-based practice (Dawson & Burke, 2008). The resulting course consisted of three modules, including lectures and readings, associated with class concepts and marketplace challenges. The third author (a woman of African and Welsh descent) contributed as a multi-semester guest lecturer and group project judge. Each author's positionality brought a different perspective to the teaching and this research, including diverse experiential knowledge and disciplinary perspectives.

Our multiple vantage points, including our worldviews, lived experiences, and social identities, shaped both the course design and the analytic lens of this research. These diverse dynamics supported continual dialogue and self-reflection among the author team to consider how our subjectivity and context influenced course design and the research process. As an African American woman in a predominantly White institution, the instructor was sensitive to issues of representation and inclusion in classroom participation. The graduate student who served as a teaching assistant offered insights into student experiences
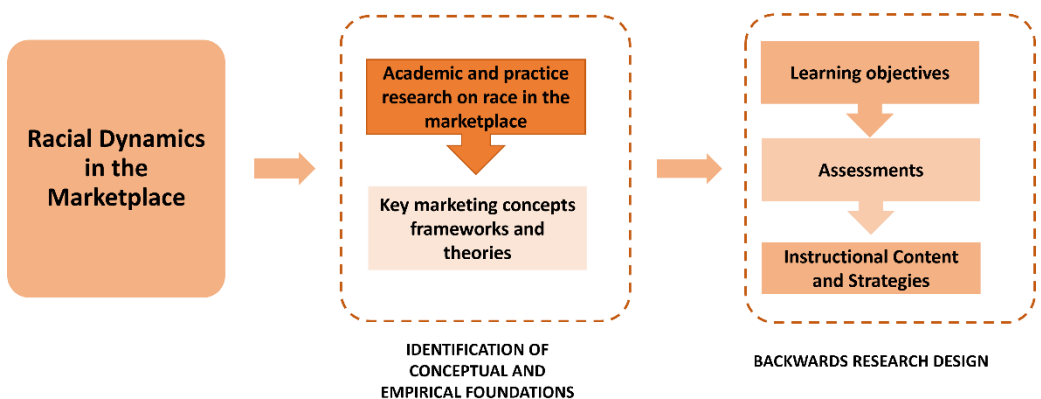
while also critically engaging experiential and disciplinary dimensions of Whiteness. The third author helped to interject a non-US perspective into both the class and the research. These diverse dynamics supported continual dialogue and self-reflection among the author team to consider how our subjectivity and context influenced course design and the research process.

Creating a conceptual framework for the course design involved identifying the basic system of concepts, beliefs, and theories that support and inform understanding of marketplace racial dynamics and integrating these with key components that guide the development and implementation of courses (see Figure 1). Marketing challenges and solutions often exist at the intersection of practice and research, which provides fertile ground for teaching. We have emphasized critical pedagogy given the centrality of the analysis of the relationship among sociopolitical powers and processes, including the construction of knowledge itself. We also build on educational research, integrating best practices and strategies for cultivating student engagement and teaching about issues of race, including active collaborative learning experiences, diverse types of assessments, and critical reflexivity (Harbin et al., 2019; Thomas & Jones, 2019). This approach foregrounds the

importance of creating a safe space for students to question what produces knowledge, where it originates from, and how it is developed and shared.

A backwards design approach (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) guided the course development. The backwards design process involves three key steps. First, an instructor develops learning objectives as indicators of what students should know and be able to do by the end of the course. Second, the instructor creates assessments to measure that learning. In the final step, the instructor plans a sequence of lessons that will prepare students to complete the assessments throughout this process.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for Course Design

Stage one: Identify and develop learning objectives

To develop learning objectives that reflect the essential knowledge and skills students need to master, we integrated what students need to know about marketing with theoretical, conceptual, and empirical research about the *domain* of race in the marketplace. Research illustrates how pervasive race-related marketplace dynamics can shape peoples' opportunities, experiences, and outcomes which influence both consumer and societal well-being (Bone et al., 2014; Francis & Robertson, 2021; Johnson et al. 2019; Poole et al., 2021). Racial dynamics in the marketplace occur globally, though racialized experiences in diverse contexts differ on fundamental dimensions (Grier et al, 2024). Research in this area often has a practical orientation, given it is driven by real-world concerns such as retail racism, health disparities, or financial injustice (e.g., Sephora, 2020).

Race plays a key role in the functioning of markets by filtering human variation within a hierarchical system of personal and commercial value that is interpreted through perceived physical and cultural traits (Grier et al., 2019; Poole et al., 2020). To support learning, essential knowledge about race in the marketplace must

address the specific ways in which existing racial and global hierarchies influence marketplace dynamics and impact market practices, consumer experiences, and marketplace outcomes. This requires attention to issues of power, privilege, and inequality that are embedded in social, cultural, or economic hierarchies underlying diverse markets and the study of them. Such issues are also implicated in socio-spatial dynamics in the classroom, necessitating a pedagogical style that embraces communication and assessment approaches that support students to safely and bravely engage and express their own ideas and sense of agency.

Both a contemporary and historical understanding is necessary given that marketplace inequity is supported by structural racism embedded in political, cultural, social, and economic systems and institutions (Grier et al., 2019). A sense of history supports an understanding of the socially constructed nature of race and racism and provides context to capture the origins of the ongoing influence of race in the marketplace. The recognition that racism is not perpetuated just by individuals but also by institutions and societal structures reinforces the importance of understanding the role of institutionalized racism and structural inequalities in marketplace dynamics. Finally, the practical

application of knowledge is paramount, as students need to be able to make informed, analytical, and equity-based decisions in marketplace and workplace settings.

Four learning objectives were developed to capture these important linkages of race to marketing practices and policies, consumption dynamics, and marketplace outcomes.

1. Describe historical, economic, social, and cultural factors which underlie the ways race relates to contemporary marketing practices, consumer experiences, and marketplace outcomes.

2. Analyze how institutionalized racism and structural inequalities shape marketing practice, consumer behavior, and marketplace outcomes.

3. Explain how marketing can be used to support more racially equitable marketplaces.

4. Design and apply marketing strategies to support marketplace equity.

Stage two: Determine assessments

In the second stage of the backwards planning framework, the course instructor conducts assessments to determine whether students have met the desired learning outcomes. We designed a variety of assessment types to allow students to both play to their strengths and to grow. Learning occurs from a more concrete to abstract level (Bundick et al., 2014), so assessments range from broad, open-ended assignments to more structured ones that progressively increase in complexity. Moreover, we embed strategies for critical engagement as we design assessments.

Three early assignments aimed to support and assess foundational learning. A *reflection journal* (2% each, for a total of 8% of the student's grade) was used to gauge students' self-perceptions and to support critical reflexivity (Thomas & Jones, 2019). Student journals also served as feedback loops that revealed psychological responses to course content, allowing for adaptive strategies to support an ethically responsive learning environment. Students submitted a journal at four specified periods throughout the semester (one-page maximum), where they reflected on their evolving knowledge, thoughts, and feelings about the course. The *Blog & Tell* assignment (10%) required each student to

post on a class blog an observation of racial dynamics in the marketplace with a discussion question and then present it to the class in five minutes or less. They could upload video, audio, print, or a vivid description —accounting for different accessibility needs and learning styles. This assessment supported students' spontaneous identification and analyses of racial dynamics, while also nurturing their accountability to each other as they posed and responded to provocations with their peers. A *short quiz* (10%) was included early in the course to ensure students had a basic understanding of the essential course concepts. Questions were designed for students to reflect on their knowledge of the direct and indirect ways race factors into the marketplace before moving into more complex course topics.

Later assignments were designed to build on foundational knowledge. A *case analysis pitch* (16%) was used to assess students' analytical abilities and to apply theory to practical marketplace issues. The assignment involved the development of a marketing plan to expand a company's target audience amidst specific racial dynamics. A *special topic assignment* (20%) allowed the students to select a short-paper topic within a specified marketplace domain. For the first two classes, the domain was environmental justice and for the later two

classes, it was social sustainability and race. The final course assessment was an integrative project called *Reflecting Race* (26%) which was built on photo-elicitation techniques (Sobande et al., 2021a). Students were required to identify a challenge at the intersection of race and markets, explain potential marketing remedies, and reflect it all through photographs. The novel, experiential, and collaborative learning assignment supports students' understanding of marketing concepts by internalizing theory via guided practice (Grier, 2020). *In-class participation* was assessed after each class (10%). Detailed rubrics were provided to students for all assignments.

Stage three: Design content for instruction

The final course design stage involves identifying the content of the desired knowledge and activities to encourage critical analysis, integration, and application of that knowledge. The learning objectives and assessments were elaborated into specific course content and teaching methodologies through a framework developed to capture (a) *key theories, concepts, and approaches* for comprehending racial dynamics in marketplace activities across domains, (b) *analysis of marketing activities and racial dynamics* across different types of markets, and (c) *marketing strategies to support marketplace equity*

(see Figure 2). These three sections frame the course.

Instructional content

To guide students' knowledge of how race intersects with marketplace concerns, we emphasized research and popular materials that were critical, interdisciplinary, global, and intersectional, key dimensions important to ascertaining race in marketplace issues (Grier et al., 2019). The content was selected from diverse sources, including academic research, case study databases, organizational research reports, popular press articles, online multimedia materials, and custom-created cases (for a breakdown of topics within these three framework topics, see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Course Content

The required textbook, *Race in the Marketplace: Crossing Critical Boundaries*, is an open-access, interdisciplinary, edited volume designed to capture how race-related issues manifest in marketplaces worldwide. Although markets in business school curricula are often explored primarily in economic terms involving monetary exchanges, the text considers RIM issues more broadly, viewing markets as "socially constructed fields of social interaction and systems/networks

of exchange featuring a wide range of valued assets and resources"
(Johnson et al., 2019, p. 8). Multiple sites of exchange are examined in
different contexts, including retail, finance, housing, healthcare, and
religion, which helps students to integrate their learning (Longmore et
al., 2018). Topics include race and technology, skin-lightening in Asia
and Africa, racialized healthcare in France, racial narratives in Puerto
Rico, and financial services in the United States. A special issue of the
Independent Social Research Foundation (ISRF) focused on visual
reflections of "Race and Markets" served as a secondary text (Sobande
et al., 2021b). In-class examples emphasized marketing controversies,
including negative impacts of marketing that are relatively absent from
business school classrooms. The course was continually refined
throughout and after each semester.

Instructional strategy

Few course materials were specifically designed for teaching
about racial marketplace dynamics, so a key *instructional strategy*
included the development and application of three focusing or *essential*
questions to guide the analysis of marketing activities and racial
dynamics across different types of markets and to evoke critical
engagement. These questions were intended to stimulate challenging

dialogue that served as a "form of value creation rather than knowledge transmission" (Burke-Smalley et al., 2017, p. s05, Wiggins & McTighe, 2012).

1. What is the role of marketing in the focal market issue?
2. What is the role of race and any important intersectional elements in the focal market issue?
3. How could the situation be different?

These questions emphasize the use of marketing theories, frameworks, and concepts, draw on students' emerging understanding of the role of race, and prompt them to consider ways to change the situation. The three questions are reinforced throughout discussions of readings and are embedded in assignments. More broadly, each question serves a unique yet reinforcing role that supports student integration of the learning objectives. Critical reflexivity and analysis of race-related marketplace challenges were leveraged as key strategies to encourage learners to question assumptions and to consider multiple perspectives and potential marketing interventions.

Finally, the course's design, content, and instructional strategies

were intentionally grounded in creating a culturally safe, ethically responsive environment. By supporting students' agency in engaging with challenging material, we sought to minimize emotional risk, foster empowerment, and promote inclusive, transformative learning.

Implementing the race in the marketplace class

The course was implemented in Spring 2021 in a private university in the Northeast region of the United States. The course has been taught four separate times with class sizes ranging from 8 to 29 students. Each semester students encompassed a vast number of self-proclaimed identity group cultures and countries as well as diverse experiences and knowledge about race in the marketplace (See Table 1). Thus, the course seeks to promote learning and growth amongst students who range from being unaware of racial marketplace issues to those who are conscious of or have significant experience with marketplace inequality.

Table 1: Description of Students

Variable	Level	Fall 2022	Spring 2022	Spring 2023	Spring 2024	Total
Gender	Male	1	2	0	7	10
	Female	7	5	6	22	40
Race	Asian	2	3	2	4	11

	Black	4	1	2	7	14
	Middle Eastern	0	1	1	0	2
	Hispanic	0	0	0	7	7
	White	2	1	1	10	14
	Others	0	1	0	1	2
Education Level	Undergrad	8	6	6	11	31
	Grad	0	1	0	18	19
School	Arts & Sciences	3	2	2	1	8
	Business	4	1	1	19	25
	Communication	1	4	3	8	16
	Public Affairs	0	0	0	1	1

Each class began with *Blog & Tell* followed by a discussion of readings, with attention to the concepts and practices relevant to the dimension of marketing being discussed. In the introductory session, students were required to bring an example of "how race played a role in the marketplace" and to introduce themselves to the class. In addition, the syllabus and all assignments were discussed, with an example provided of the *Blog & Tell* assignment. The first three weeks of the course laid the foundation for understanding the myriad ways in which race matters in the marketplace. A series of readings and multimedia material established the context for identifying, visualizing, and analyzing the interactive nature of race and markets (see Figure 2, section one sample readings). Students also reviewed websites focused

on racial market dynamics worldwide (e.g., ERIF.org) and discussed a brief case on a brand name change for the hypothetical "overseer whiskey company" (Miller et al., 2020).

The second section of the course emphasized critical analysis of racial dynamics in specific market domains. The readings, cases, and assignments illuminated challenges and opportunities that arise in the strategic marketing process when members of racialized groups intersect in significant market and societal contexts such as retail establishments, financial institutions, healthcare organizations, and neighborhoods. In-class discussions built on the interconnected nature of race and other identity coordinates within these specific areas of exchange.

For example, a popular session considered racial dynamics in global beauty ideals through three textbook chapters on the economics of skin-lightening creams, Asian beauty ideals, and colorism, and a case study on the *Fair & Lovely* skin-lightening brand. This course section used a similar conglomeration of scholarly research, teaching cases, and practical examples to consider race in customer service, financial well-being, housing, health, and virtual market spaces. The use of different domains and sectors reinforces agility with marketing concepts and applications while supporting the need for interdisciplinary

understanding among business students. This approach also encourages inclusivity by exposing students to diverse perspectives.

The final section of the course focused on the application of marketing to support marketplace equity. The section considered inclusive marketing strategies, social marketing, counter-marketing, anti-racism, impact evaluation, and standards for assessing marketplace racial equity. For example, the session on "marketing for behavior change" encompassed academic research about social marketing and anti-racism, an Ad Council anti-racism campaign targeting White parents, a government report on the Australian Anti-Racism Campaign, and a case about a social marketing intervention designed to disrupt structural racism. A diverse set of guest speakers, including corporate marketers, authors, and thought leaders, spoke on issues of racial equity in the marketplace.

Assessing student engagement with course content

As previously described, student engagement is typically broken down into three dimensions: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral (Sun et al., 2024). Cognitive engagement involves the mental investment and effort students put into learning as evidenced by critical thinking or analysis, reflection on learning processes or strategies, and connection

of course content to prior knowledge or experiences. Emotional engagement refers to students' emotional reactions to the learning process, such as expressions of interest or enthusiasm, feelings of satisfaction or frustration, and emotional connection to the content. Behavioral engagement encompasses participation and involvement in learning activities and includes observations or reports of extra effort or initiative in learning or intention statements to use class knowledge. As an overlapping notion, critical engagement with course content involves actively analyzing and questioning materials, discussions, and ideas related to race and marketing.

We build on this framework to assess student engagement with the course content through review and analysis of students' work. Qualitative analysis of student work can illuminate whether students are making meaningful connections to the material (Mandernach et al., 2011). Analysis of student coursework to assess engagement emphasizes the process and extent to which students invest in course activities (Mandernach et al., 2011). Here, we focused on the students' *reflection journals* and the *Blog & Tell* assignments. These open-ended assignments have few specific requirements and allow students to engage with the course material as much or as little as they desire and in

diverse ways.

For the *Blog & Tell* analysis, the instructor reviewed all assignment posts on the class discussion board, notes from each in-class session, and subsequent feedback and grades shared with the student presenter. The review sought to ascertain aspects of critical engagement with course content, as indicated by the quality and depth of students' writings and presentations and the critical and interdisciplinary nature of their discussions. The *reflection journal* data was analyzed in three steps using ATLAS.ti. First, the data was coded to capture cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement statements within the journal. These codes were then grouped and synthesized into themes and sub-themes, which reflect evidence of critical engagement with the course material. For the analysis of both the *reflection journal* and the *Blog & Tell* assignments, evidence of critical engagement with the course content was based on the focal cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement criteria from prior literature (e.g. Sun et al, 2024).

Findings of student engagement

Blog & Tell presentations

Over the four semesters, there were 48 *Blog & Tell* submissions, which resulted in 78 text pages when printed, suggesting most students went over the one-page maximum limit in their write-ups. Student *Blog & Tell* submissions captured a diversity of topics including health disparities, gentrification, financial services, colorism, the wealth gap, and discrimination in the digital marketplace, and students had to deeply engage to identify and describe the marketing dimensions of the topic relative to the week's focus. Although there was a stated five-minute limit, with no slides or props required, the students' posts and presentations included PowerPoint slides, images, tables, and citations and reflected extensive preparation and investment in the assignment. Students frequently used the three "essential questions" to frame their posts and presentations.

Student engagement with the assignment began well before their post- or in-class presentation, as many students made office-hour appointments to discuss potential topics. In these conversations, students expressed a range of emotions, from worry and concern about selecting the 'right' topic to wanting to engage their peers. The *Blog & Tell* posts and presentations reflected complex, nuanced discussions that considered multiple perspectives on a topic. For example, one student

wrote "a story about ecotourism in Maricá, Brazil and how it increases racial land inequity for the indigenous people of the Mbyá Guarani community." The student identified the government, the racialized Indigenous community, the German technology company, Swiss hospitality company, and a major global hotelier as important stakeholders and considered the influence of racialized spiritual beliefs and cultural practices on marketing efforts. The question provided to the class queried, "In the pursuit of social sustainability, should marketers care more about the environment or land sovereignty? If we are all on stolen land, are we doing the land justice when we take stewardship away from the people who call it home?" Like many presenters, the student provided two versus one questions for class discussion. These questions served to ignite critical engagement as students discussed and debated a robust set of issues and perspectives from a marketing perspective.

Students often linked their presentations to some aspects of their identity. For example, one Asian American student, who had not spoken in class before her presentation, started with a bold question to the class: "Can you believe, that in 22 years [...]*The Bachelorette* [only just] had their first Asian bachelorette?" Such explicit reflections of how students

linked to their identities were quite common. Moreover, students often commented during their presentations that they had become more interested in the topic and would pursue additional research on what they had learned. Finally, many of the presentations extended well past the five-minute maximum time limit and would have gone on longer if not stopped, emphasizing strong behavioral engagement in both the presenter and observing students.

It was clear that students were heavily invested in the assignment and were highly and critically engaged. Students get to draw on their interests and curiosity while simultaneously deepening their knowledge of the context and practice of marketing strategy. Students were able to identify and critically analyze race in the marketplace issues in diverse markets and ideate marketing strategies as they discussed a broad array of race in the marketplace topics. Moreover, the assignment engendered a sense of accountability on the part of students while also supporting them to apply skills they are developing in the course as 'low stakes' independent research on relevant course topics.

Reflection journal analysis

For a total of 50 students across four semesters, there were a total of 173 reflection journals. Although most were one page, many

students often went over the one-page maximum restriction. Student reflection journals ranged in their depth of engagement from summarizing course content to reflecting on the relationship of course topics to school, work, and life experiences. As with the *Blog & Tell* assignment, many journals included citations, photographs, screenshots, and tables based on additional research students felt compelled to do, though not required or recommended. Many journals also emphasized specific course materials, often discussing alternative views of cases and other readings, indicating critical engagement. Two primary themes were identified within the reflection journals: *New Perspective* and *Working for Equity*. Each theme had subthemes encompassing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement types.

The first theme, *New Perspective*, showcased internal change within students—highlighting a new awareness of structural inequalities in the marketplace directly related to the course. This theme reflected students coming to the table with a reframing of their current lives. For some, this involved shock at the prevalence of inequity in facets of marketing and life that could be overlooked or engaged with uncritically. For others, this reframing encompassed sorrow and frustration at the reminder of their lived experiences. However, most

students indicated a sense of gratitude for the professor, speakers, and course for highlighting these inequities—both those who previously did not notice the impact of racialized spaces and marketing and those who were acutely aware.

The second theme, *Working for Equity*, showcased the external shift within students that led to the desire for change. Students explicitly described a greater sense of a 'call to action.' From identifying that inequity made them feel negative emotions (such as frustration, anger, sadness) to deciding that they want to make a change and determining how to use their positionality to influence change, students explored what it means to be a socially responsible citizen and future marketer.

Both themes reflected critical engagement with the course material, specifically its cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. Each theme synthesized students' questioning of course material, emotional ups and downs, behaviors related to course content, and their expressed intentions to use their course learnings towards social justice in their careers and lives.

We will discuss these themes in greater detail next. Additional examples are showcased in Table 2: Example Student Quotes from *reflection journals,* which presents corroborating evidence of critical

engagement from student journal entries. Each theme is split into subthemes that reflect cognitive, behavioral, and emotional engagement, though there are many instances of overlap between the subthemes. Pseudonyms are used with student quotations in Table 2.

<div align="center">*New Perspective*</div>

I am now aware of and can connect different experiences to marketplace inequity. Students routinely related learnings from the course to their real-world experiences. For example, Sofia noted: "We learned about racialized space, so I reflected on when I felt that I was in a racialized space. I was the only colored individual in my writing class, and one classmate asked me if my last name (German) was indigenous because I have tan skin and am from Honduras." Journals also reflected a nuanced understanding of the intersectionality of racialized inequities that impact everyone, regardless of identity and ability. Another student mused, "The way that demographic information is being used to customize marketing tactics that disproportionately impact is alarming. It sorts [sic] of made me think critically about my own consuming habits and the wider societal ramifications they imply" (Amira). Student reflections also highlighted their new understanding of how corporations use marketing to target different groups and how the course impacted

them overall.

I feel this new perspective. Throughout the journal entries, a clear pattern of charged emotional words was utilized. These words reflect shock, discomfort, sorrow, pain, positivity, optimism, inspiration, hope, frustration, curiosity, confusion, disappointment, eagerness, and surprise at the prevalence of racism in the marketplace and in daily life, among the wider sense of the course being "eye-opening." The emotionally charged language reflects an impactful learning experience and the potential for students to carry on these learnings throughout their lives. As one student states, "One of the most eye-opening realizations for me has been understanding how race doesn't just impact the products we choose to buy but also the very spaces we call home" (Ayanda). The student not only identifies this new perspective but reflects on how this adjustment has changed their outlook.

I now have tools to support equity. Students, throughout the course, described feeling empowered because they now had the language and tools to describe this intense phenomenon, whether it was something of which they were newly aware or had been grappling with their whole lives. One student expressed gratitude for the course, stating, "I love this course and feel myself speaking more confidently about race in the

addressable market more outside of this room" (Doris). Other students

expressed similar sentiments—one even going as far as to say, "I also

feel that the vocabulary learned in class has helped me feel more

confident when discussing these topics with my peers. Before it always

felt like a struggle to talk about race because I don't know what the right

words are, which might sound like something small, but it plays a huge

role in not offending others or even to formulate better arguments"

(Valentina).

<p align="center">*Working for Equity*</p>

I see how I can use marketing for equity. Students connected their new

perspectives with a call to action through marketing. For example, one

student reflected on the impact of a case study, stating, "What has

recently struck me was the Gilead case. After having to create a pitch, I

realized how big a role intersectionality plays in marketing and how

effective a campaign will be. A vital attribute is understanding

intersectionality and correctly conveying it to the consumer audience.

Without that deep understanding, many people within your demographic

won't be seen. This harms the campaign's ability to reach a bigger

audience and influence them to take an interest in your product. This

makes me think of all the times I didn't see myself in the commercials,

TV shows, or movies I was watching and how that played a role in how I perceived myself. Having adequate representation is important for grasping the attention of all individuals you are marketing to" (Aisha). This student tied together different ways in which their experience of class content, specifically creating a pitch, changed their perspective on both their prior experiences (not seeing any representation of themselves) and the importance of understanding intersectionality in advertisement campaigns. Their reflection also highlights a deeper engagement, one in which they saw what was not working in terms of maximum impact and determined what was necessary to move forward for a more successful, impactful marketing campaign.

      I see inequity and I don't like it. Much like the emotional engagement within the *New Perspective* theme, there was a large presence of frustration, anger, sadness, and discomfort with current inequity, and in particular, the role that marketing plays in this inequity. Students reflected with heavily charged "call to action" language, with one student simply saying, "Marketers need to do better" (Liz). This same student expressed confusion and frustration in this journal entry, stating, "What I am still confused about is why many food industry giants are enabling the existence of food swamps and deserts through

their actions and inactions" (Liz).

Table 2: Example Student Quotes from Reflection Journals

Theme:	New Perspective (I am now aware)	Working for Equity (I can use my knowledge to create change, I know how to make a difference)
Cognitive	"I think also that this specific point in the class (working on the cases and our reflecting race projects) has affected the way that I watch television or how I pay attention to the neighborhoods around me. Questions like, "Is this show about x shown to me because I fit a certain demographic?" "How hard am I finding it to find a product I need in a store?" instead of approaching these things aimlessly or paying attention to which restaurants are near each other in a neighborhood and how that might explain who inhabits the town." – Ester "Walking through the bustling streets, camera in hand, I couldn't help but notice the subtle yet significant ways in which race influences the marketplace. One striking example was the use of locking	"Empowering people, rather than name-calling and shaming, is the key to successful counter-marketing in my opinion. Marketers who focus on empowerment have the ability to bring more people to their cause-and-effect real change. I don't know why appealing to negative consequences is a key component of counter marketing, specifically for healthy eating." – Bianca "All these lessons have made me think differently about my future in marketing. I want to be part of a field that's inclusive, responsible, and genuinely cares about people's well-being. I am excited to take what I've learned and put it into practice in my career." – Aditi "Regarding health equity, marketing plays a pivotal role in addressing disparities and promoting access to healthcare resources and information. By employing targeted strategies,

	cabinets in certain stores, seemingly designed to restrict access to products primarily used by African American individuals. It was a stark reminder of the systemic inequalities embedded in our society, even within the realm of commerce." – Aditi

"Understanding the concept of racialization is vital for supporting marketplace equity. It explains how practices and ideologies apply to racial identities in ways that worsen inequalities. An example is stereotyping certain groups as risky credit recipients. Countering this through financial education programs is one approach. Intersectionality also matters—people have overlapping marginalized and privileged identities. A Black woman faces both racism and sexism. Marketing efforts must consider these complexities." – Amira | marketers can raise awareness about health issues, promote preventive measures, and facilitate access to healthcare services among underserved populations. The goal is to ensure that everyone, regardless of socio-economic status or background, has equal opportunities to attain optimal health outcomes." – Elena |
| Emotional | "But RIM has made me feel like I have a perspective to contribute, how an eye for equity early on is super critical" – Doris

"Reflecting on my research | "I always wondered, why is everything where we live inferior? Why do we have police helicopters flying over our home day after day? Why do we never eat out at nice restaurants? Why are these broken-down spaces inhabited by black and |

	into the intersection of race and the environment, I was surprised by the profound connections between these issues. Initially, I hadn't considered how they might overlap, but my study of "Asthma Alley" in Mott Haven, South Bronx, made it clear that environmental racism is a critical and troubling reality." – Allie "This class has not taught me many new things about the structural inequity in this country, I felt that every day of my life. But this class is giving me hope that I did not have previously in Kogod classes." – Morgan	brown bodies, while the beautiful, bright, areas with well-manicured lawns were primarily occupied by white people? As I read the text from the bulletin, I realized how it all has become racialized and that those with money and influence, simply have chosen to neglect our communities." – Lucas "While we had this conversation, I felt that even if you change the name or the marketing strategy, this brand is promoting a product that is damaging to consumers' skin and is promoting the idea that lightness equates to beauty regardless of how you frame it. I am frustrated by products like these and by the space that they take up in the market and I don't like the demand that these companies create for such a product." – Bianca
Behavioral	"Taking this course has empowered me to untangle messages I am receiving from the marketplace about the worth of women, Black women in particular. Additionally, I feel equipped to have conversations with marketers about traditional practices and how to better incorporate racially inclusive marketing	"I now realize that the marketplace serves as a stage for the development and reshaping of racial and cultural narratives in addition to serving as a forum for business dealings. This realization enables a more sophisticated marketing strategy that embraces authenticity and diversity. I've been able to see the pervasive influence of racism in daily transactions by

	into those strategies." – Robin "To me, this is not just a class. It's a tool for our generation to change the world. This is a tool for dismantling the harmful structures on a corporate level that have oppressed people like me since the start of European settlement in the Americas. To me this is not just a grade, it's a way for me to sharpen my tools to fight. Most likely, in the fall I will work as a freelance creative, partnering with brands, helping them create a visual representation of their brand persona." – Morgan	connecting these ideas to my experiences as a consumer and a student, which has been both educational and transforming for my personal and professional growth" – Bola "I think counter-marketing is not very helpful except that it sounds better according to the policy. It would be better to use other types of education instead of just printing these warnings on the packages or some posters. For soda, companies innovated diet soda with less sugar to help reduce unhealthy elements for consumers. New rules or innovations are always helpful." – Gia

I want to make a difference. Students were able to take real-world actions and tie in course learnings. This helped the students to not only understand why things may occur but also ways in which they could make change in the real-world using marketing. One student reflected on an incident where six 8th graders created a mock slave auction on Snapchat, highlighting the relevance between the concepts discussed in class and this real-world example of pervasive racism. The exercise compelled the student "to apply the principles and theories we've discussed in class to understand the underlying dynamics at play"
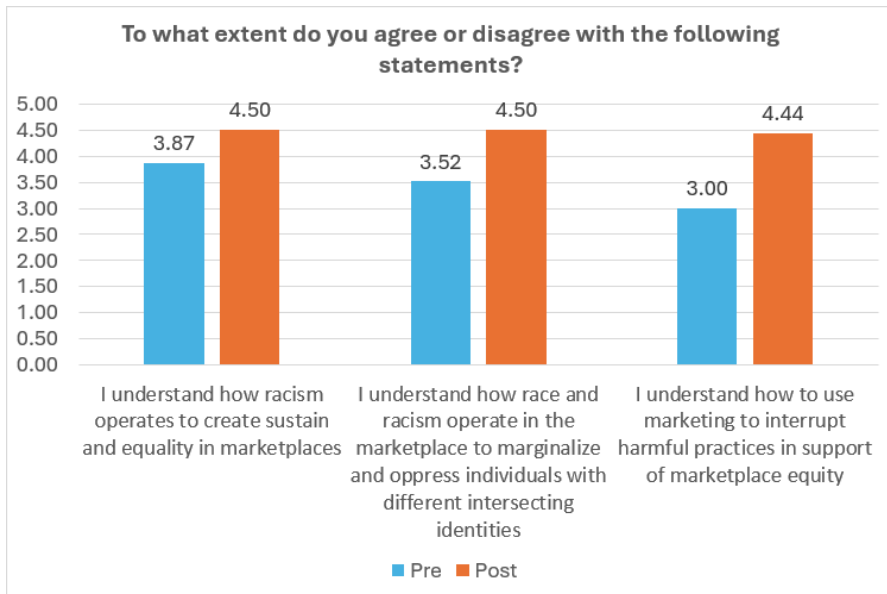
(Allie).

Summary Analysis of students' reflection journals highlights their critical engagement with course content. Journal entries reflected how student perspectives underwent a metamorphosis as the course progressed. Early on, students expressed shock, feeling overwhelmed, confusion, and curiosity (emotional engagement) at the existence and prevalence of marketplace inequity and exerted significant effort to understand better (cognitive and behavioral engagement). Then, as the course began providing potential tools and approaches, students felt more confident in discussing marketplace inequity, perceived a heightened awareness of the responsibilities of marketers, and expressed a desire and commitment to use marketing to support marketplace equity. As the course came to a close, students felt an overwhelming sense of empowerment, clearly expressing more complex and nuanced marketing relationships and integrating this new perspective with their personal experiences. Moreover, student reflections demonstrated a shift from their new perspective of feeling a call to action to feeling as if they had the tools to make a difference.

Survey of essential questions

A brief pre-and post-survey was conducted in the Spring 2024 class session. Three questions were included to assess student perceptions of the focal issues guided by the essential questions, i.e., the role of race and intersecting identities in the marketplace and the role of marketing to support equity. Each question was assessed on a scale of one to five, anchored with 1 = "strongly disagree" and 5 = "strongly disagree." Results of the survey analysis showed that students perceived an increase in (1) their understanding of how racism operates to create and sustain inequality in marketplaces (pre: 3.87, post 4.50; T = -2.66, p = .01), (2) how race and racism operate in the marketplace to marginalize and oppress individuals with different intersecting identities (pre: 3.00, post 4.44; T = -4.80, p < .001), and (3) how marketing could be used to interrupt harmful practices (pre: 3.52, post 4.50; T = -3.68, p < .001), (see Figure 3: Student Pre- and Post-Perceptions of Learning).

Figure 3: Student Pre- and Post-Perceptions of Learning

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	I understand how racism operates to create sustain and equality in marketplaces	I understand how race and racism operate in the marketplace to marginalize and oppress individuals with different intersecting identities	I understand how to use marketing to interrupt harmful practices in support of marketplace equity
Pre	3.87	3.52	3.00
Post	4.50	4.50	4.44

Summary of evidence of student critical engagement with course content

Our investigation provides evidence that crucial components of pedagogy can engender students' ongoing engagement with critical issues of race in the marketplace and support a social justice orientation towards marketing. Analysis of student work identifies how students made notable mental, emotional, and behavioral investments to accomplish course activities. Moreover, students challenged the material and their peers by considering alternative perspectives on course readings, as well as their own and others' *Blog & Tell* presentations. Findings show that students were emotionally connected to the course content, enthusiastically applied it to their interests, identities, and

experiences, and expressed their motivation to use the knowledge they gained as a future responsible marketer and citizen of life.

Engagement "highlights the attitudes and dispositions necessary for extending learning beyond the classroom experience" (Mandernach et al., 2011, p. 277). Critical engagement connected class content to students' prior knowledge and experiences and fostered meaningful learning. This approach, grounded in a social justice perspective, enhances the likelihood that students will apply the knowledge and skills they acquire to promote equitable marketing practices. Findings also show that students were surprised by how prevalent race and racism are in marketing and business, reinforcing the importance of their exposure to topics reflecting marketplace experiences worldwide. Findings imply how course content built on practical marketplace challenges and relevant scholarly research can critically engage students and enhance their awareness and understanding of racial dynamics in the marketplace.

We add to prior research demonstrating that a pedagogy that engages students with marginalized voices and ideas can foster a critical orientation and assist in critical understanding of power and privilege, all in support of social justice (Grier, 2020; Gurrieri & Finn, 2023;

Thomas & Jones, 2019). Future research can examine the content, specific duration, nature, and effects of this engagement on learning. For example, prior research shows how the conceptualization of diversity-related courses emphasizes educating White students about novel concepts such as racism, while marginalizing and diminishing their engagement of students of color who often have significant experiential knowledge (Starck et al., 2021). Our findings on the heterogeneity of racial consciousness suggest how strategic pedagogical approaches can greatly benefit students with varying levels of awareness and experience with race and racism in the marketplace or more generally.

Guidance for educators, scholars, and administrators

We share our key lessons learned as guidance for scholars and educators who desire to introduce issues of race into the curriculum, whether through a semester-long course, through specific modules, or as longer-term pedagogical processes and critical modes of inquiry. At the outset, it is important to consider the rationale for the course, instructor, and business school objectives; preexisting expectations; the size of the class; knowledge of the students; and the university context (Thomas & Jones, 2019). These considerations are necessary to ensure that one's course objectives align with institutional needs.

Our contributions emphasize how course design, particularly assessment and instructional strategies, can support critical engagement with race-related course materials. Note that our approach to and understanding of student engagement is a holistic one that surpasses a focus on a single evaluative exercise, coding system, or perceived metric. Critical engagement leads to meaningful learning experiences that connect marketing concepts to students' knowledge and experiences, supporting a social justice-oriented approach to marketing. Findings show that one effective strategy for fostering critical engagement involves designing assignments that actively incorporate students' agency and understanding into the co-construction of course knowledge. Assessments that allow student choice and freedom within specific guidelines and that connect to real-world challenges can motivate students to think critically about what they are learning and how they are living. When assignments are aligned with students' goals, identities, or interests, they are more likely to engage deeply in the learning process (Bundick et al., 2014). Moreover, this provides a means for self-directed engagement, which supports cultural and racial safety (Gay 2018). This structured flexibility is important given differences in students' prior knowledge and experiences.

A key focus of the present research was an acknowledgment of the heterogeneity of students' initial level of understanding concerning course content. Each student approached a course with different levels of familiarity and experience with issues of race and racism, within marketing and other contexts. For some students, the information may be new and hard to discuss, much less digest; others will be well acquainted with the issues. The early journal submissions and the short quiz helped students gain a sense of comfort and knowledge levels. *Blog & Tell* provided a weekly pulse of the class as the students engaged with classmates in a safe space to discuss their selected issues. The assignment encourages students to think critically about marketing concepts in a low-stakes fashion and emphasizes interdisciplinary learning as students look to identify the information to post and present their topic. The *Blog & Tell* assignment also allows those same topics—*students'* interests—to be weaved into other course discussions and assignments to apply various marketing concepts throughout the course, increasing relevance and engagement for them. Therefore, it is essential to utilize strategies that 'meet students where they are' and empower them to actively co-create course knowledge, to support a future social justice orientation, and to support the growth of the evolving field of

race in the marketplace.

Pedagogical flexibility and responsiveness are also key to accommodating students' differing 'jumping off points' with race—creating a safe space where students can comfortably express their understanding in a way that 'makes sense' to them. The reflection journal assignment supported instructor cognizance of the sociopolitical dynamics underlying the issues presented to strategically support the safety and critical engagement of all students. For example, in the first semester, the sole self-identified White student expressed in their journal concerns about power dynamics that muted their participation. This led to an in-depth discussion with the student to understand the concern, followed by a discussion in class of tokenism and solo status that allowed the issue to organically arise and be discussed in the context of course content. This exemplifies the core of trauma-informed teaching: acknowledging sociopolitical dynamics in the learning space, addressing emotional complexity with empathy, and creating a culture where all students feel empowered to actively participate with honesty, vulnerability, and integrity.

In addition, instructional strategies that effectively guide students in comprehending both the substantive and disciplinary

dimensions of course content can significantly enhance critical engagement. This is shown by using essential questions that serve to deepen students' understanding and provide a coherent framework for students to approach course content, even in assignments where their use is not required. Overall, instructors can guide students to a deeper consideration of course content through creative design and implementation. Of course, it is also important for instructors to model critical engagement with course material in class. It is easier for instructors to encourage students to explore multiple perspectives when they critically engage with the course content. The incorporation of multiple perspectives can be further strengthened through the use of guest speakers, made more accessible through technology, which enables instructors to feature diverse speakers with a wide range of viewpoints in class throughout the semester.

The novelty and breadth of creative and multimedia assignments, as well as pedagogical methods such as the *Blog & Tell* and *Reflecting Race* assignments, reinforce critical engagement. The *Reflecting Race* project involved photography to ascertain racial market dynamics (Sobande et al., 2021a) built on the engagement-inducing

aspects of novelty in problem-based learning (Grier, 2020). Future research can examine additional methods and approaches.

Development of assessment and instructional strategies is often somewhat independent of specific course content. However, it is crucial that the content used in a course also reflects the reality of racial dynamics present in the focal marketplace(s). The creation of frameworks and typologies that identify and characterize marketplace controversies driven by racial dynamics would highlight the often-ignored negative impact of marketing and benefit both research and teaching. In addition, while there has been a noticeable increase in case studies featuring *racially diverse protagonists*, there remains a significant lack of case studies that specifically address *racial dynamics* across diverse markets. Expanding case studies to capture the types of racial dynamics embedded in ongoing controversies observed across diverse global marketplaces would be particularly beneficial to support critical engagement.

The present research highlights an approach to research-informed teaching. Our detailed development process can help instructors to examine issues of race in the marketplace from their perspectives. Instructors who desire to prepare their students to address

racial dynamics in worldwide markets can modify the approach to suit

focal objectives and context(s) as necessary. Instructors might develop

custom modules to capture a specific area or domain of interest. For

example, a session on race in a global marketing class could focus on

consumer behavior in international marketing strategy development

through a problem-focused group project that supports relevance to

students (Grier, 2020). Alternatively, a module in a services class could

address racial dynamics in marketing services across commercial,

health, and financial markets. In both cases, the *Blog &Tell* and

reflection journal assignments can be adapted to emphasize a particular

topic and essential questions used to guide students toward specific

substantive topics and/or marketing tools.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several important limitations that should be

considered in interpreting its findings. First, the research was conducted

exclusively within the context of a US-based classroom, shaped by

specific sociopolitical and institutional dynamics regarding race,

diversity, and pedagogy. As such, the insights derived—while

valuable—may not be fully generalizable to educational or marketplace

contexts outside the United States, given differing histories of race and racialization, diverse educational approaches, and context-based understandings in other national or regional settings. Caution should be exercised in extending these conclusions to international contexts without appropriate adaptation and consideration of local realities.

Our assessment of student learning and attitudinal change relied primarily on short-term measures and reflections collected during a single semester. While these qualitative and immediate responses provided useful windows into student engagement, emotional labor, and ethical development, they do not capture the evolution of learning outcomes over time. The absence of a longitudinal design limits the ability to assess whether knowledge, critical consciousness, or behavioral intentions persist beyond the course's conclusion. Future research should incorporate longitudinal methods to more thoroughly evaluate the sustained impact and transformative potential of race-focused pedagogies. We also do not explicitly delve into the relationship of student and professor identities that may contribute to the socio-political climate of the classroom and the interactions therein. Our findings on student engagement did not suggest specific issues, yet we recognize every classroom is different.

These limitations present fertile ground for future research from diverse methodological perspectives. For example, while many of our pedagogical activities—such as unsettling dominant Western narratives and centering student voice—align closely with Decolonial praxis, we do not fully engage with Decolonial theories. Recognizing these dynamics, future research should further engage with Decolonial theories, Global South pedagogies, and non-Western epistemologies to interrogate the complex structures of exclusion and advance epistemological plurality in marketing theory and practice (Thomas & Ncube, 2025).

Finally, although our findings did not indicate widespread issues of cultural safety or undue emotional labor among students in this class, we recognize that each learning environment is unique and such concerns may arise differently elsewhere. Future research can explore how ethical dimensions, including trauma-informed teaching, emotional labor, and cultural safety, can be robustly operationalized and assessed across a range of educational contexts to strengthen both ethical pedagogy and scholarly understanding.

Concluding thoughts

The approach and content described in this paper aligns with

the emphasis on social justice and social sustainability within marketing and business, particularly to remedy inequity worldwide. We emphasize the need for students to be familiar with racial dynamics in the marketplace, as well as their role in supporting marketplace equity. We describe the domain of race in the marketplace and its relationship to the evolving school and marketing curricula and articulate how the integration of research into teaching can expand faculty knowledge and support student citizenship behaviors in our global marketplaces. We build on existing knowledge about race and marketing to identify what students need to know and outline the type of interdisciplinary content necessary to achieve that understanding. The specific conceptual framework we design to develop the course supports realistic teaching filtered through the integration of research from an evolving interdisciplinary subfield (Grier et al., 2024).

Our conceptual contribution explains why racial dynamics in the marketplace should be studied, how they relate to marketing concepts and provides a framework and detailed information for a relevant course design (MacInnis, 2011). We complement our conceptual contribution with qualitative and quantitative evidence that students critically engage with the material of the developed course. Given the interdisciplinary

nature of marketing, markets, and the numerous academic approaches to racial dynamics, there are multiple possible approaches to exploring racial dynamics in the marketplace, building on research. We hope to motivate such research.

Corporations, non-profit organizations, and government agencies worldwide address issues of racial (in)equity in financial, health, and other consumer and business markets in implicit and explicit ways that require marketing skills (e.g., Blackwell et al., 2017). The guidance provided in this paper can support educators to engage student learners—future practitioners—with this important knowledge while enhancing both group's awareness and understanding of racial issues in the marketplace. Our adoption of an interdisciplinary approach supports the development of more thoughtful marketers and business leaders who will be better prepared to support marketplace equity for all consumers. The emphasis on marketing controversies around race brings a more balanced perspective to the marketing classroom, which often ignores such occurrences.

Our contributions aim to ignite serious study of a pedagogical domain where it has been lacking. There is a need for a greater understanding of the role of race across diverse aspects of marketing

(e.g., business-to-consumer, business-to-business), along with the experiences of specific racialized groups and diverse marketplaces (e.g., regional, and national contexts). It is crucial to frame and integrate relevant issues of sustainability given significant concerns about environmental justice and social issues worldwide (Grier et al., 2024). Too often, sustainability emphasizes climate concerns and sidelines embedded issues of social equity. Intentional and thoughtful use of race-related research in the curriculum can enable students to utilize business skills in the service of racial equity and develop the interdisciplinary skills necessary to address the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, which embed issues of inequity.

Our approach lays the groundwork for students and faculty to examine the world around them in a way that explicitly considers the social impact of marketing and business decisions. With a new generation of marketing professionals—and scholars—who can, at the very least, understand how racial dynamics emerge in the marketplace, the marketing field can support marketplace equity and the social sustainability of the marketing discipline.

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