

MICHEL

Yes, I do think that the Black Matters course has taken new urgency in this current climate. If we think, for example, of the most recent elections, the campaigns that we all heard on TV, on the radio, in the newspapers, it's clear that identity politics played a key role. So if you think of the various claims about immigrants, about Muslims, about race, about blacks, identity politics, I think, was a major focus of the campaign.

DEGRAFF:

And I think the students themselves, when I look at-- when we started, I gave out the questionnaires asking them why they took the course, what drove them to Black Matters. And many of them actually assume that the course is called Black Matters because of the Black Lives Matter movement. But in fact, that course started 10 years ago, before there was a Black Lives Matter movement.

But within themselves, they came to the course wanting to address current political issues, including issues of race, of identity, of migration, of religious hatred. So definitely, there was a sense of urgency coming especially from the students' perspective themselves. They wanted to discuss these issues and get a better understanding of how to process, but also how to counter some of these claims about identity, race, religion, migration, etc.

So as I was thinking about the syllabus and the course description, I couldn't help but thinking about the slogan of building walls to protect, say, the US. And as I was picking texts and choosing guest speakers, I realized that it was important to create a new narrative around this issue of walls, because I think that our humanity is in reach when we can build bridges instead of brick walls. So for me, the course-- and also for some of my guest speakers-- it was important to create a new narrative around the concept of building bridges that indeed will make this world great, not just the US, but the world great.