MICHEL DEGRAFF: From the very beginning of this course is designed for this semester, we wanted to connect the humanities, the classroom, with social justice. And luckily, we had guest speakers who themselves have been engaged in social change. So for example, I mentioned before John Turman. There was also Professor Fox Harrell. In fact, most of our guest speakers have been engaged in real life trying to make change for social justice. And because some of our students were themselves children of immigrants, many of them got very interested, for example, in the issue of migration. Or to protect the rights of migrants who had been under attack in the recent couple of years.

Thanks to John Turman, some of the students connected to the MIRA group, which is the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy coalition. And they were actually very happy to do so, to be able to connect not only the personal biographies, but also the classroom work with actual action for social change. And we also got to understand the ways in which what we are studying in this course-- for example, the issue of language and assimilation-- have impacts, say, in the courtroom.

So the issue of language and assimilation was particularly evident in the court case of George Zimmerman. The trial of-- Zimmerman was accused of killing Trayvon Martin. This young black boy who was seen in his neighborhood after seeing his dad and he was-- after he bought some Skittles and some drinks and he was killed by this vigilante. And the reason why he was acquitted is because the star witness for the prosecution, Rachel Jeantel, who happened to be this young woman of Haitian and Dominican decent, and because of the way she spoke, she spoke with a black accent. And that accent, undermined her credibility. In fact, some of the jurors were clear that they would not believe her because she sounded-- because of the way she spoke.

And there's a beautiful analysis of this episode-- a very sad episode-- by John Rickford and Sharese King in the journal, the journal *Language,* where they showed very clearly that that was the main factor for Rachel Jeantel to not be believed by the jury. So here this is a clear case where attitudes towards language have an impact on social justice.