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TEACHING IN THE WAKE OF TRUMP

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Introduction

Nancy Perez, Marisol O. Ruiz, Andrea Delgado and César G. Abarca
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For this issue, we invited submissions that explored the interdisciplinary techniques, strategies, modalities, theories, concepts, tactics, and antics for teaching in the wake of Trump. According to Christina Sharpe, being “in the wake” is a method for encountering a past that is not a past, one that insists on a “sitting with, a gathering, and a tracking of phenomena” for living blackness in the still unfolding aftermaths of slavery, a lived awareness of being in the wake of an unfinished project of emancipation (2010:13). We employed Sharpe’s multi-pronged definition of the wake to explore the afterlives of slavery and racism as they appear in the wake of Trump, and the historical and modern conditions which produce this era as a symptom of a decaying U.S. Empire (2010:11). By integrating multidisciplinary approaches, we sought to unpack the economic, political, cultural, environmental, educational, and social implications of this catastrophic time which will leave negative consequences for years to come. The articles in this edition identify where the wake resides, and discuss ways communities continue to resist and make change. Accomando and Anderson examine the resurgence of far-right ideology and its current racist discourse against CRT (Critical Race Theory) by highlighting the George Floyd and Breonna Taylor protests of 2020. They argue that this political, social uprising was a continuation of generations of racial justice organizing demanding accountability and structural changes that were met with a “long predictable history of American backlash” that resulted in “draining the pools of knowledge.” In his piece “Border Fetishism,” Abarca similarly tracks the increased racist discourse generated by Trump, focusing on the xenophobia that foments a “border fetishism”—a simultaneous attraction and repulsion of the US-Mexico Border, its inhabitants, and its culture. He argues that we need to better understand this discourse and its global, social media dimensions in order to decolonize and support the many communities fighting to

preserve their indigenous ancestral lands and abolish the immigration system.

Several photo essays in this issue provide a visual insight into these discourses and sites of rebellion Mónico’s photo essay displays the hyper militarization of the police force through snapshots taken at a 2020 George Floyd protest in East Bay, California. The photographs showcase the militarized “warrior cop” figure demanding obedience and dealing punishment, while the people demanded justice. Similarly, Dolek’s photo essay reflects on the importance of global, geographical sites of resistance. His piece tells us the story of Devrim Stadium in Ankara, Turkey where revolutionary activism by university students at Middle East Technical University (METU) painted “Devrim” (“Revolution” in Turkish), inspiring generations of young revolutionaries to continue the tradition of resistance against an authoritarian regime.

The next set of articles speak of the ways young people are reclaiming their identity and aligning themselves to social justice ideologies as a way of survivance. Gellman, in her article, writes about the pivotal importance of heritage Yurok and Spanish languages as sites of resistance against culturecide and white supremacy overall. Ruiz and Chavez write about youth’s participatory action research as a journey of healing when connecting to their internal power of wisdom. Shayne emphasizes the importance of archiving and documenting the activism of local feminist groups. Shayne and her partners developed an assignment that asked students to research local feminist and gender justice organizations in order to document their activism through interviews and photos, highlighting their important work in an open access archive. Finally, Bell, Perez, and Ruiz end with the triumph and challenges that come with the attempts to institutionalize the resistance of Ethnic Studies. Through poetry we are reminded of our voices as truth telling and our collective power to create memories, ruptures, solidarity, and change.

Our Silence Will Not Protect Us . . . and Neither Will J. Edgar Hoover: Reclaiming Critical Race Theory under the New McCarthyism

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. . . and when we speak we are afraid
our words will not be heard
nor welcomed
but when we are silent
we are still afraid.
So it is better to speak
remembering
we were never meant to survive.
—Audre Lorde (2020:283)

The Trump administration ushered in a manufactured moral panic against critical race theory and antiracist education that has outlasted his presidency. Education bans enforce collective amnesia. As we battle this new McCarthyism, educators and activists must not forget the lessons of the original McCarthyism.¹

In the highly praised “week in the life” biopic *Being the Ricardos* (Sorkin 2021), the answer to the red-baiting innuendo and outright attacks against Lucille Ball is to call in the big guns—FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover—to issue a dispensation, in the form of a live phone call assuring the studio audience that America’s top comedian had been cleared of all charges of communism. Ball had earlier testified before the Cold War career-crushing House

Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), successfully persuading them that she had checked the Communist box on her voter registration form only to honor her grandfather, not because she actually had any Communist ties. The story nonetheless flared up in a red-ink headline accusing the redhead of being a Red, and the survival of her extremely popular TV show—and her career—was at stake.

In the dramatic climax of the movie, Hoover’s benevolent words exonerating Lucille Ball are met with thunderous applause from the studio audience, reporters snap photos, and professional death for the “I Love Lucy” team is averted. In real life, however, Hoover never made that phone call, and the FBI continued to keep a file on Lucille Ball and husband Desi Arnaz (Villarreal 2021). Director Hoover, Senator Joseph McCarthy, and other Cold Warriors used red-baiting, unfounded allegations, and intimidation to construct a demonized enemy and amass political power. That writer-director Aaron Sorkin, known for his snappy dialogue and smart take on American politics, would treat the fanatically anti-Communist and life-ruining Hoover as benefactor rather than perpetrator is more than just an imprudent exercise of poetic license. With a script that barely gestures toward the profound harm caused by McCarthyism and red-baiting, this 2021 film sends exactly the wrong message in a contemporary moment when a new McCarthyism has engulfed the nation.

¹ Spoiler alert: This commentary reveals the ending of a popular film. Also, democracy.

We would like to offer a different message to educators today worried that the best way to defend themselves from right-wing attacks against a manufactured bogeyman is to insist that they (or their children's kindergarten teachers) do not now teach nor have ever taught critical race theory (CRT).

Attacks on antiracism education, the Pulitzer Prize-winning 1619 Project, and critical race theory seek to silence any discussion of systemic racism, cynically cloaked in a thin pretense of opposing hate, division, and the “anguish” of (white) children. Kindergartners are being saved from picture books about Rosa Parks and high schoolers are being sheltered from Nobel laureate Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* (1987). These attacks—while similar to earlier “culture wars”—are part of current strategies to undermine democracy (Crenshaw 2022). In addition to voter suppression and storming the U.S. Capitol, destroying truthful education is a key ingredient in the recipe to dismantle democracy in the name of patriotism.

Developed by legal scholars of color in the 1970s and 1980s, critical race theory offers a vital lens that can inform how we educate ourselves, our students, and our communities about the history and present-day manifestations of systemic and structural racism. These academic approaches also provide tools for imagining and creating a more just society that does not rely upon racial hierarchies. We cannot allow the cynical fear-mongering of the Right to make us abandon or denounce what we know are valuable pedagogies and epistemologies.

Unveiling The New “Un-American”

On September 4, 2020, three days after bit player Chris Rufo had a cameo on Fox News in which he declared (in his best Joe McCarthy) that critical race theory had “pervaded every institution in the federal government,” the Trump administration issued a memo with the simultaneously innocuous and ominous subject line “Training in the Federal Government” (The White House 2020). The Office of Management and Budget Director spelled out the President's targeting of “un-American” activities:

The President has directed me to ensure that Federal agencies cease and desist from using taxpayer dollars to fund these divisive, un-American propaganda training sessions. . . . [A]ll agencies are directed to begin to identify all contracts or other agency spending related

to any training on “critical race theory,” “white privilege,” or any other training or propaganda effort that teaches or suggests either (1) that the United States is an inherently racist or evil country or (2) that any race or ethnicity is inherently racist or evil. In addition, all agencies should begin to identify all available avenues within the law to cancel any such contracts and/or to divert Federal dollars away from these un-American propaganda training sessions. (The White House 2020)

This memo decrying “un-American” activities confirms the sentiment of a popular meme: “Racism is so American that when you protest it, people think you are protesting America.” By the end of the month, Trump issued Executive Order 13950, with the clownishly Orwellian title “Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping,” banning diversity trainings and other antiracism efforts by federal agencies and contractors. On his inauguration day, President Joe Biden revoked Trump's gag order. Nonetheless, within six months, Florida, Arkansas, Idaho, Iowa, Montana, Tennessee, and Oklahoma had already passed measures to ban critical race theory, anti-racism education, and/or the 1619 Project (the acclaimed *New York Times* project that “aims to reframe the country's history by placing the consequences of slavery and the contributions of Black Americans at the very center of our national narrative” [Hannah-Jones et al. 2019]). A majority of states and countless localities have followed suit with over 600 anti-CRT measures alone (Reinhard 2023). These sprawling and vaguely worded proposals (and even “tip lines” for informants) are intended to silence teachers, mobilize the Trump base, and suppress an honest grappling with this nation's history and present.

How Did We Get Here? Racial Reckoning To Racist Retrenchment

In the summer of 2020, widespread protests against systemic racism swept the nation and the world in the aftermath of the police killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. These protests built upon decades and centuries of collective resistance against racial injustice, and they also signaled a shift. People and communities that had never protested before—and had never uttered the words “systemic racism” before—were participating in demands for structural change alongside national and community groups that have been strategizing for racial justice for

generations. Protestors wanted accountability in specific killings, but they also called attention to historical and deeply structural causes of police brutality and social inequities. Statues and plaques honoring Confederate generals and other defenders of slavery came tumbling down in places like Virginia, Kentucky, and South Carolina (Ebrahimji, Moshtaghian, Johnson 2020). Policymakers, journalists, and even the casual consumer of news could not ignore these collective voices.

Something was beginning to shift. “It feels different this time,” wrote Nikole Hannah-Jones in June 2020:

The changes we’re seeing today in some ways seem shockingly swift, and in other ways rage-inducingly slow. After years of black-led activism, protest and organizing, the weeks of protests since George Floyd’s killing have moved lawmakers to ban chokeholds by police officers, consider stripping law enforcement of the qualified immunity that has made it almost impossible to hold responsible officers who kill, and discuss moving significant parts of ballooning police budgets into funding for social services. Black Lives Matter, the group founded in 2013 by three black women, Patrisse Khan-Cullors, Alicia Garza and Opal Tometi, after the acquittal of Trayvon Martin’s killer, saw its support among American voters rise almost as much in the two weeks after Floyd’s killing than in the last two years. (32)

The concerted right-wing response to this transformative period of collective (and effective) uprising against structural racism was an intense effort at containment. This backlash has come in many forms, including the discursive maneuver that *antiracism* is the real racism, and that anguish comes not from discrimination but from *talking about* discrimination. Aiding and abetting white supremacy, this lie aggressively tries to divert attention away from the truth-telling of these protests and silence any discussion of systemic racism and concrete strategies for change.

In September 2020, this cynical gesture appeared in Trump’s memo and executive order, narrating a perverse caricature of critical race theory, and professing to defend (white) Americans from the supposed harm that this diverse body of academic work was allegedly causing to their psyches, their children, and the nation itself. Trump was voted out of office two months later, but the retrenchment continues.

The Long, Predictable History Of American Backlash: Draining Pools Of Knowledge

[W]herever there is race reform, there’s inevitably retrenchment, and sometimes the retrenchment can be more powerful than the reform itself.

—Kimberlé Crenshaw (Wiener 2021)

Backlash is nothing new. Attacks on education are nothing new. Painting social justice as division is not new. Calling antiracism the *real* racism is not new. It is worth noting here that projection is a key tactic of fascist politics. See Jason Stanley’s *How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us and Them* (2018), among other recent studies of old and new fascism.

In her brilliant study *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide* (2016), Carol Anderson offers a searing analysis of American history as a series of white-led backlash to Black advancement, from Reconstruction to the election of Barack Obama. Backlash can take various forms. In recent years it has metastasized as birtherism (reacting to the first African American President by claiming he’s not American), anti-trans bathroom bills and athletic bans (reacting to federal recognition of same-sex marriage with anti-trans legislation), Sharia law and travel bans (reacting to the mere existence of Muslim Americans anywhere in the country), voter suppression laws (reacting not to voter fraud but rather to the changing demographic makeup of the electorate), and similar fantasies based on lies but still galvanizing a conspiracy-primed public.

A central lie throughout American history has been the reassurance offered to working-class white people that they have more in common with the wealthy white elite than with fellow workers of different ethnic backgrounds. Whatever degradation white folks suffer, at least they are not on the bottom. Heather McGhee, in *The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together* (2021), argues that white people have historically fought to maintain their relative status and make sure someone else is on the bottom, even when that meant destroying public goods that benefit everyone. In the face of social advances, white Americans have closed schools, opposed health care, and even drained public swimming pools, just to keep people of color out, even as each backlash hurt their own education, health, and communities. Educating ourselves and our students about this pattern and about how we don’t have to see justice as a zero-sum

game is crucial to reversing this “divide and rule” dynamic deployed by the elite. In the battle over education, the zero-sum terms have been set as “if we study the history of *you*, it damages the history of *us*,” rather than, “an honest grappling with our true history benefits *all of us*.” Today’s teaching restrictions will diminish everyone’s education. Lawmakers are draining pools of knowledge rather than allowing a truthful and inclusive history to circulate.

Backlash targets education because reactionary forces know that education is powerful. Truthful education arms the populace against disinformation, conspiracy theories, divide-and-rule manipulation, and lies. This has always been the case, but education is even more vital in an era when people get their news and “information” from monetized internet sources and social media.

Many educators, from elementary schools to universities, have responded to contemporary attacks on their teaching by asserting that they are not actually teaching critical race theory, saying that CRT is a fairly obscure academic theory taught in a handful of law schools. Such defenses are understandable, particularly when teachers, librarians, principals, and elected officials are finding their jobs endangered, and violent threats are being launched online, in heated school board meetings, and at people’s homes. And of course, it is true that no one is teaching Derrick Bell’s casebook on *Race, Racism, and American Law* (2000) to middle school kids. At the same time, responding with denials actually plays into the hands of the Right’s goal to “brand” CRT as something toxic.

A tweet from Chris Rufo, who got the anti-CRT ball rolling, nakedly boasts about this disinformation strategy: “We have successfully frozen their brand—‘critical race theory’—into the public conversation and are steadily driving up negative perceptions. We will eventually turn it toxic, as we put all of the various cultural insanities under that brand category” (Meckler and Dawsey 2021). This weaponization of a label the Right intentionally misrepresents obviously harkens back to Senator Joe McCarthy’s sheaf of blank papers not actually filled with the names of “known Communists,” but it also takes place in a new era with even more dangerous modes of disinformation in the hands of right-wing strategists who need only Fox News and a sheaf of tweets.

Denying membership in this phantom club might seem like a prudent act in this theater of threats.

Teaching Truth To Power: Reclaiming Critical Race Theory

We propose a different approach. Teachers and their supporters should enthusiastically embrace the paradigm-shifting lens of critical race theory and point to its power as theory, praxis, and pedagogy. We know the dangers are real. Educators are being threatened, attacked, and fired. Much is at stake. Our point is that ceding critical race theory to the Right’s misrepresentations only empowers the tactic. And because they’ve painted this complex theory in such ambiguous and slippery terms (it disrespects our “founding fathers,” it makes [white] children feel bad, it divides, etc.), one can’t ever really prove one’s hands are clean. Even bland institutional buzzwords like “equity” have been painted as dangerous code for CRT. Critical race theory is a vital lens to help us make sense of the disparities of wealth, health, housing, education, and imprisonment in U.S. society that persist even after the Civil War Amendments, *Brown v. Board of Education*, the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and other legal gestures toward racial equality. By shining a light on systemic racism, critical race theory allows us to analyze the many ways that racism is maintained, even in the absence of explicitly racist laws and overtly racist individuals. Without critical race theory, we are left to believe—incorrectly—that such disparities are due to innate differences or individual failings.

Key Components Of Critical Race Theory

American law is born of racism and gives birth to racism.

—Mari Matsuda (1996:52)

Race-baiting right-wing lawmakers are passing laws declaring that race is irrelevant to our national story. This flurry of cookie-cutter legislation actually proves the relevance of critical race theory. Race is central to an understanding of U.S. law, and law is central to an understanding of U.S. racism. Here are some actual elements of critical race theory that we propose instructors at all levels can embrace—in our classrooms, our own self-education, and our work to share knowledge within our communities.

- Race is a social construction, with real consequences
- Racism has always been embedded in U.S. law and all our institutions—it is ordinary, not aberrational
- Racism is systemic and structural, not just interpersonal

- Understanding racism requires intersectional analysis
- Storytelling from multiple perspectives can help counter dominant narratives

Race is a Social Construction, with Real Consequences

[The “social construction” thesis] holds that race and races are products of social thought and relations. Not objective, inherent, or fixed, they correspond to no biological or genetic reality; rather, races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient.

—Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (2012:8)

A core premise of critical race theory is the idea that race is a social, political, cultural, and legal construction, invented to justify exploitation, exclusion, enslavement, and genocide. Calling race a construction is *not* to say that race doesn’t matter. On the contrary, once invented, race has profound consequences. Playwright Lorraine Hansberry describes this paradox succinctly in her play *Les Blancs*: “It is pointless to pretend it doesn’t exist—merely because it is a lie” (1994:92).

In her essay “What Race Isn’t: Teaching about Racism,” poet and teacher Aurora Levins Morales describes teaching this paradox as a “tightrope walk”:

To expose the notion of biological race as fraudulent, to look at the actual genetics of human diversity and see that there is no such thing as race, no human subspecies, without allowing any quarter to the liberal pretensions of colorblindness, to the literal white-washing of real differences in culture, experience, power, resources. To demolish the idea of fundamental biological difference and refuse to let anyone get away with “We’re all human beings” meaning “We’re all like me” or use the true statement that all lives are important to undermine and dismiss the specific power of saying, in the face of systematic and deadly racist violence, that Black Lives Matter. (2019:110)

While those who seek to ban antiracism education say that such pedagogy will divide us into rigid camps, Morales insists that a truthful telling of the manipulations, alliances, and betrayals that make up U.S. history can actually help students of all races see their own identities with more complexity and thus build coalitions with more integrity.

She concludes her essay, “If we can teach the history of racism in the United States as a history of the shifting needs of empire, . . . if we can hold the tension between disbelief in race and belief in what racism does to us, we will enable more and more young people to remake old and seemingly immutable decisions about where their interests lie and with whom” (111). Racism has always been used by the ruling elite in this country to divide and control the masses. Today the anti-antiracism forces are not afraid of division—that is just their cover story—they are afraid of the coalition-building that is possible when people understand their history and the unequal power relations that govern their lives. Such alliances across differences were clearly manifesting in the 2020 summer of protests, activism, and policy proposals.

This, in fact, is what scares the Right about teaching the true story of race in America—*not* that it will divide us, but precisely that it might interrupt the divide-and-rule manipulations that keep us apart.

Racism Has Always Been Embedded in U.S. Law and Other Institutions—It Is Ordinary, Not Aberrational

In August of 1619, a ship appeared on this horizon, near Point Comfort, a coastal port in the English colony of Virginia. It carried more than 20 enslaved Africans, who were sold to the colonists. No aspect of the country that would be formed here has been untouched by the years of slavery that followed. On the 400th anniversary of this fateful moment, it is finally time to tell our story truthfully.

—The 1619 Project (Hannah-Jones et al. 2019:1)

Opponents of the 1619 Project and critical race theory would have America’s students believe that slavery and other forms of racism are mere past aberrations—brief exceptions to American Exceptionalism—this despite the fact that two-thirds of our first eighteen presidents enslaved their fellow humans (making it an aberration to lead the nation and *not* be a slaveholder), and over 1,700 members of Congress held people in slavery (Weil, Blanco and Dominguez 2022). The U.S. Constitution, while it stealthily avoids the word slavery in 1787, upholds the practice in several provisions, including a fugitive slave law, the “compromise” to count enslaved Americans as three-fifths of a person, and protection of the international

slave trade. And yet, the anti-education bill passed in Texas makes it illegal to teach students that “slavery and racism are anything other than deviations from, betrayals of, or failures to live up to, the authentic founding principles of the United States” (Foster et al. 2021).

Critical race theory helps us comprehend the founding principles of the United States as complicated and contradictory, rather than simplistically perfect. It offers an honest accounting of early laws enshrining racism as well as a way to understand how those legal principles—even after they are reversed—continue to influence law and society. The 1619 Project asks us to look at racialized human enslavement in the 1600s to begin to understand the true story of our founding, and our present.

A 1662 statute in colonial Virginia held that a child born with mixed parentage would follow “the condition of its mother,” thus cementing racialized American enslavement as not only permanent for the individual but also perpetual for future generations (Higginbotham 1978:43). This law is also an indicator of the widespread rape of enslaved women, solving the reality of mixed-race children by making them legal property instead of heirs to their father’s privilege, as Harriet Jacobs put it, “thus taking care that licentiousness shall not interfere with avarice” ([1861] 1987:76). This colonial principle becomes the law of the land throughout the slaveholding states of the United States.

While the Constitution codifies birthright citizenship in the 14th Amendment (1868), with the Supreme Court affirming the principle in *U.S. vs. Wong Kim Ark* (1898), anti-immigrant forces today are fighting to change U.S. law to make the children of immigrants follow the condition of their mothers.

The 1790 Naturalization Law, which remained in effect until 1952, restricted naturalized citizenship to immigrants who were “free and white.” Let’s sit with this legal fact for a moment. U.S. law officially defined naturalized citizenship as white for 162 years (a very long aberration indeed, if we try to fit this fact into Texas’s law). In his book *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race*, legal scholar Ian Haney López offers a detailed history of twisted court rulings deciding which groups could qualify as “white” and receive the many benefits accorded to legal whiteness. In 1922, for example, the Supreme Court held that Takao Ozawa, despite his American schooling and

English fluency, could not become a citizen since he was “clearly . . . not Caucasian” (2006:60). Indian Americans (literally “Caucasians”), on the other hand, were initially deemed white, but later deemed not white (*U.S. v. Bhagat Singh Thind* 1923). Racially barred from naturalized citizenship, those who had already gained citizenship were denaturalized.

Today, seven decades after the repeal of the racist 1790 law, we still see racialized treatment of immigrants, refugees and asylum-seekers, in law (such as Trump’s Muslim bans) as well as the unequal enforcement of laws. Which immigrants are more likely to be subjected to workplace raids, endless detention, family separation, and deportation? It’s not British nannies hired by wealthy parents or white Canadians overstaying their student visas.

An academic course that allowed itself to be informed by critical race theory could trace these twists and turns for students to gain a more nuanced understanding of notions like “American” and “citizen,” and how they have changed over time for political purposes. Teaching such an understanding is now illegal in several states.

Racism Is Systemic and Structural, Not Just Interpersonal

African Americans are not significantly more likely to use or sell prohibited drugs than whites, but they are *made* criminals at drastically higher rates for precisely the same conduct. In fact, studies suggest that white professionals may be the most likely of any group to have engaged in illegal drug activity in their lifetime, yet they are least likely to be made criminals.

—Michelle Alexander (2012:197, notes omitted)

For centuries, slave laws and Black codes targeted African Americans explicitly. Such laws are no longer on the books, but they live on through the racialized criminalization that is now baked into the prison industrial complex. With or without overtly racist laws or bigoted law enforcement officers, people of color are more likely to be stopped, searched, charged, tried, convicted, and sentenced to prison time than white Americans, and therefore also more likely to suffer the life-long consequences of having a criminal record. Michelle Alexander details this prime example of systemic racism in *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*.

One of the biggest challenges we face as classroom instructors who teach antiracism is combating the idea that many of our students have that racism is solely an individual and interpersonal phenomenon. Racism is seen as individual malice of a relatively small number of ill-intentioned people. This individualized perspective provides comfort to many people who do not harbor explicitly negative feelings toward people of color. They can feel relieved that they are not at all part of the problem of racism, and they believe they do not benefit from the current racial system. While individual racists certainly exist (and they are more emboldened today than they have been in decades), the problem of overt racism is only a part of the problem of racism. Racism is a system of inequality based on the presumption of white superiority. As we demonstrate above, racism is embedded in our institutions and is supported and maintained by laws, policies, and practices in history and the present. Social psychologist Beverly Daniel Tatum (2017) talks about the prevalence of cultural racism akin to smog in the air. When racism is particularly damaging we can see the toxic air we breathe. At other times, we may not be able to see the poison we breathe in, but it is there nonetheless. Racism permeates our institutions in such a way that it can seem invisible, but that doesn't mean it's nonexistent.

While anti-CRT crusaders insist that racism is only explicit racial hatred of individuals, Tatum defines racism as a system (not just a feeling) of advantage (not just discrimination). She offers another metaphor to symbolize the structural nature of racism, which functions as a conveyor belt or moving walkway. Structural racism moves without any effort on our part and regardless of our individual attitudes, benefiting people in the dominant group. Active racists run on the walkway, committing intentional discrimination; passive racists who stand still are still carried along, receiving the benefits of the system; active anti-racists turn around on the moving walkway and move in the opposite direction, faster than the speed of racism.

The anti-antiracism mob screams in manufactured anguish that such definitions accuse white people of being inherently bad. On the contrary, critical race theorists make two things very clear: 1) this machine moves along with *or without* anyone's badness, and 2) people in the dominant group *can choose to become actively antiracist*. For example, white people can work in coalition with

people of color to strengthen antiracist education or join other efforts to dismantle systemic racism. It is up to white people, not critical race theorists, whether white people turn around on that walkway.

Haney López, in his 2014 book *Dog Whistle Politics*, also offers multiple ways to understand plural racisms, with *racism as hatred* as only one form, alongside *structural racism*, *implicit bias*, and *strategic racism* (2014:41-50). This last form is the deliberate deployment of neutral-sounding dog whistles to activate a base and generate political gains. "We have learned to see racism in the spittle-laced epithets of the angry bigot," he writes. "We must also learn to see racism in the coded racial entreaties promoted by calculating demagogues" (2014:50).

Opponents of critical race theory are invested in not only limiting the definition of racism to the angry bigot (and ignoring systemic racism and other forms of less overt racism), but also redefining racism with Orwellian precision so that antiracist critical race theorists are the real racists.

Understanding racism as systemic is the most important contribution of critical race theory. It makes sense of the enduring racial disparities in the U.S. despite "formal" equality. It does *not* tell white people to feel guilty (another central claim of the anti-CRT machine). It tells white people that they—with or without effort or ill intent—will receive certain benefits ("white privilege" is one of the key terms the Right seeks to ban). The goal is not for white people to feel "anguished" about this fact—white people's guilt does little to end systemic racism. The goal is for white people to do something to end systemic racism.

Understanding Racism Requires Intersectional Analysis

I am Black and I am female and I am a mother and I am bisexual and I am a nationalist and I am an anti-nationalist. And I mean to be fully and freely all that I am!

—June Jordan (1992:189)

While critical race theory foregrounds the analysis of race, it also recognizes that race (as an identity) and racism (as a system of oppression and privilege) do not exist in isolation. Whereas its attackers say that CRT reduces everything and everyone to race, actual critical race theorists know that identity is complex and understanding racism

requires intersectional analysis. Kimberlé Crenshaw published groundbreaking law review articles three decades ago that placed women of color at the center of the story in order to reveal the need for intersectionality in efforts to end discrimination and gendered violence. In “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color” (1991), Crenshaw details “how the experiences of women of color are frequently the product of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism, and how these experiences tend not to be represented within the discourses of either feminism or antiracism” (1243-44, notes omitted). Her critique targets oppressive institutions as well as single-minded movements for liberation. Intersectionality has since become a widely referenced concept (and even buzzword), and at times the complexity gets lost. More than just the identity math of “race + gender,” intersectional analysis tells us to examine both the multiplicity of identity and the interlocking nature of systems of oppression.

Critical race theory, infused with intersectional analysis, tells a crucial part of the story of injustice in the US, but it is of course not comprehensive. Other bodies of theory have a more transnational focus or a deeper analysis of settler colonialism, imperialism, racial capitalism, heteropatriarchy, ableism, and environmental devastation. Critical race theorists do not pretend to have all the answers, but their early focus on intersectionality made it clear that they understood the need for multiple lenses and a rigorous practice of looking for what is missing.

Legal scholar Mari Matsuda (1996) articulates intersectional analysis through a particularly accessible tool for teaching and activism:

The way I try to understand the interconnection of all forms of subordination is through a method I call “ask the other question.” When I see something that looks racist, I ask, “Where is the patriarchy in this?” When I see something that looks sexist, I ask, “Where is the heterosexism in this?” When I see something that looks homophobic, I ask, “Where are the class interests in this?” Working in coalition forces us to look for both the obvious and the nonobvious relationships of domination, and, as we have done this, we have come to see that no form of subordination ever stands alone. (64-65)

Matsuda, Crenshaw, and other feminist scholars of color

have applied this analysis to law as well as movements for resistance. Dorothy Roberts (2017) and Loretta Ross (Ross and Solinger 2017), for example, have brilliantly demonstrated how reproductive justice is not solely a matter of women’s gendered rights, as race and class have always intersected with gender in both the denial of and movements for reproductive rights. The singular story of white middle class women fighting *for* the right to abortion and birth control erases the multiple ways that Black, Latinx and Indigenous people have also had to fight *against* forced sterilization. Trans men like Cazembe Murphy Jackson, a “Black, Southern, queer, trans organizer” and rape survivor, have been telling their abortion stories to “encourage reproductive justice groups to be more inclusive *and* inspire LGBTQ organizations to move outside their silos and take on the issue of reproductive rights” (Terrell 2021). The intersectional tools of critical race theory offer us a much more nuanced and complex way to understand both oppression and social movements.

Storytelling from Multiple Perspectives Can Help Counter Dominant Narratives

Stories humanize us. They emphasize our differences in ways that can ultimately bring us closer together. They allow us to see how the world looks from behind someone else’s spectacles. They challenge us to wipe off our own lenses and ask, “Could I have been overlooking something all along?”

—Richard Delgado (1989:2440)

We could have told them a different story.

—Harriet Jacobs ([1861] 1987:146-47)

The legal scholars who created critical race theory invoke poetry, drama and storytelling as seriously as they cite statutes and court cases. They recognize that U.S. law tells a dominant narrative that leaves out stories from the bottom. “Using stories, testimonials, and accounts of personal and mythical experience, writers of color evoke a worldview that challenges the status quo in legal thought” (Matsuda 1996:51). Slave laws banned literacy and testimony—literally writing Black voices out of official records—but Harriet Jacobs, Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Phillis Wheatley, and thousands of other enslaved Americans insisted on telling their stories anyway, offering powerful counternarratives through autobiography, oratory, journalism, poetry, and interviews. Derrick Bell and

Patricia Williams are among the founders of critical race theory who incorporate their own personal histories, along with fables and allegories, to illuminate complex legal arguments with lived experience and imagination.

This aspect of critical race theory is part of what makes this intellectual project born in law schools a viable and accessible strategy in a range of classrooms. Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* weaves a haunting narrative around the true story of Margaret Garner, who attempted to kill her young children rather than watch them be returned to Kentucky slavery, teaching generations of students deep truths about U.S. slavery in a work of fiction. (A white mother's outrage that her 17-year-old son was assigned this Pulitzer Prize-winning book in an AP English class helped Glenn Youngkin win the 2021 governor's race in Virginia.)

Lorraine Hansberry's family challenged restrictive covenants in Chicago, resulting in a little-known Supreme Court case (*Hansberry v. Lee* 1940), but it is her play *Raisin in the Sun* ([1959] 1995) that moves viewers and readers to viscerally feel the injustice of housing segregation. Fred Korematsu challenged Executive Order 9066 and his name is on a shameful Supreme Court decision upholding the incarceration of Japanese Americans (*Korematsu v. United States* 1944); the children's book *Fred Korematsu Speaks Up* (Atkins, Yogi, and Houlette 2017) vividly uses lyrical storytelling and visual artifacts to teach about anti-Asian racism and the need to speak up in the face of injustice. Javier Zamora's heart-stopping poetry tells the harrowing experience of fleeing El Salvador as a nine-year-old child trying to reunite with his parents in the U.S., and offers a humanizing counternarrative to the demonization of immigrants and unaccompanied minors. Bao Phi's fearless spoken word performances and beautiful children's books shine a light on the experiences of Vietnamese refugees and other Asian Americans resisting discrimination and erasure. Frank Waln's Indigenous hip hop and campus visits combine rap and storytelling to teach audiences about genocide, colonialism, intergenerational trauma, mental health, and survivance.

Such counter-storytelling can address the erasures built into a legal, political, and cultural landscape that privileges already dominant points of view. Anti-democratic forces fear these voices because they have the power to move us to think in new ways.

What Now

The hopeful part of the description offered by outsider theorists is the recognition of the vulnerability of racist structures . . . the deep contradictions and instability inherent in any racist organization of social life. All the sorrow songs of outsider jurisprudence are thus tempered by an underling descriptive message of the possibility of human social progress.

—Mari Matsuda (1996:23)

Critical race theory seeks to understand *and change* the racist structures that organize our society. Matsuda describes it as a theory of not only law but also justice—defining a just world as “one that heals the wounded among us, that brings back the lost and the wasted, that elevates all human beings to their highest potential” (1996:53). We do not have to accept the system of inequality, domination, and division that we have inherited. And critical race theory is a tool to dismantle, not create, imposed divisions.

In a recent interview about the attacks on the school of thought she helped to found, Matsuda urges all of us to respond to these attacks with two actions (Atmos 2021). First, we have a duty to educate ourselves—we have all been miseducated about our history, about how racism operates, and about the struggles that communities have engaged in to create a just world. Second, we need to take that knowledge and join together with others to work toward positive social change, on any front. It might be registering voters, volunteering at a food pantry, organizing a book circle with your local NAACP chapter, painting a community mural, or finding out how to support your kids' schoolteachers. The very act of working together is a vital strategy.

Change happens in coalition, not isolation. Heather McGhee argues against being trapped in the zero-sum narrative that has been imposed upon us and instead reaping the benefits of the “solidarity dividend” of working together across differences.

As with the red-baiting of McCarthyism, HUAC and J. Edgar Hoover who surveilled Lucille Ball (and hundreds of other actors, activists, politicians, pastors, educators, and everyday people who wrote a letter to the editor), today's CRT-baiting has people feeling afraid and isolated. Keeping your head down and your mouth shut feels like a safe course of action. These are indeed dangerous

times. It is not hyperbolic to say that academic freedom and democracy itself are under attack. We write this as tenured university professors who are unlikely to lose our jobs. At least for now—one of us teaches in Texas, where efforts to support the academic freedom to teach critical race theory have been met with efforts to end university tenure. Those of us with some degree of job security have an increased duty to speak honestly about the value of critical race theory and the real motives behind the attacks. All of us have a duty to contribute to truthful education. When silencing truth is the goal, speaking out has to be the response.

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Snapshots of Resistance and Solidarity in the East Bay

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The 2020 summer uprisings were the culmination of years of witnessing unchecked police abuses and incompetence from an inexperienced presidential administration. People poured out into the streets to protest the murder of George Floyd that year. But there was something else that was brewing underneath. The murder, along with the pandemic and a racist president, had pushed people to the brink of discontent. The Trump Administration had no real plan to curb the pandemic, nor to investigate the killing. Frustrated Americans across the country expressed their grievances on the streets that summer. The ineptitude they witnessed for the last four years had led to pent-up anger. Another policing killing caught on camera and lack of response to ensure public safety galvanized people, but it was not the first time this had happened.

In the winter of 2014, students, residents, and community activists met every night for a week, demanding the end of widespread police misconduct. Another senseless murder of an unarmed Black person caught on camera thrust people onto the streets. It was triggered by the decision not to indict NYPD Officer Daniel Pantaleo for slaying a father, storeowner, and neighbor Eric Gardner. The people of the East Bay community were rightfully enraged by this unconscionable decision and believed that Pantaleo needed to be held accountable for his actions. When the residents took to the streets, a militarized police force armed with batons, rifles, and drones met them. This image of a “warrior cop” sent a strong message to the community that they were unwilling to disarm, and would continue to support the proliferation of militarizing themselves.

I joined the marches that week. I took photographs of the fury that saturated the streets of the East Bay. Though the collaboration of multiple police departments confronted unarmed protestors, the images I captured left me feeling optimistic. An energy permeated the air. Together, we demanded justice and expressed our frustration while the police demanded obedience. They protected property,

while we protected each other. When they knocked us down, we picked each other up.

The possibility of transformative changes had imbued people from all different backgrounds. We had a community comprised of various races, genders, progressive ideologies, and ages that coalesced all over the county. It appeared on the surface that some white people would no longer stay silent or ignore the atrocities that had become routine for over-policed communities of color.

I noticed a shift of perception transpiring. Prior to this era, people who did not experience some form of police violence rarely spoke out against the violent tactics aimed at working-class, non-white communities. When residents of the East Bay converged on the streets, they began to understand how an authoritarian institution represses dissent. That is not to say, that these people are able to fully comprehend what it means to be under constant surveillance. But at the very least, they received a taste of the repressive measures that hyper-police communities of color endure all over the United States.

Each of these pictures represents two diverging communities: One where the police are willing to separate themselves from the people and criminalize them in the process; the other challenges a violent institution that operates on an inflated-budget with several military resources at their disposal. It was because of these confrontations that the notion of defunding the police entered the mainstream conversation. Indeed, defunding the police has been silenced by both mainstream political parties, but that does not mean that these so-called leaders can lecture the public on morality. We have seen unchecked power reign for decades. With leadership that supports law enforcement and not the populace, violent police officers will continue to exert control in our communities. But wherever injustice appears, there will always be people willing to oppose it and demand that police officers be held responsible for their actions.



Border Fetishism: Decolonizing of the Imaginary Border Ideology and Discourse

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Abstract

Then Presidential Candidate *Toxic Orange*, during his political campaign for president, promoted his xenophobic and racist ideology by stating that all immigrants crossing the US imaginary border without inspection were *rapists and drug dealers*. The vitriolic speech and vivid language used to demonize and dehumanize individuals seeking a better life and to contribute to the US economy, found acceptance and support in a significant portion of the population and mainstream media. This article will describe the social construction of the Mexico-US border as an object and place for wild ideology and discourse based in white supremacist and racist premises. Additionally, a concept named the *Border fetishism* will be used to analyze this phenomenon that is at the same time, attractive and repulsive, for many US residents and where dreams, rejections, and aspirations live and compete, in the same space.

Introduction

I realized that I had been so immersed in the media coverage of Mexicans, that they have become one thing in my mind. The abject immigrant. I have bought into the single story of Mexicans... So that is how to create a single story. Show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become.

– Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009)

International borders exist beyond imaginary lines in crisp and well-drawn maps. With access to the internet and many mapping applications, one can even virtually explore and visualize a border region without having to be physically there. In the public imagination, international borders are shaped by mainstream media propelling neoliberalism and promoting sanitized images of commercial goods in shiny ship containers, trains, commercial trucks, and busy people transiting forth and back between these borders. The US–Mexico Border, since before the Mexican–American War (1846-1848), has been a contested space. Hernandez (2018) describes it as such: “[There] is a need to recognize that and reconceptualize “border problems” that serve as proxies for social processes of power and inequality rooted in historical and racial divides” (4).

US-based popular culture has created a fantasy of the US-Mexico Border: novels, movies, paintings,

photographs, and any other cultural artifacts have contributed to the shallow and misguided construction of the region. With the US’s War on Drugs started in the 1980s and the War on Immigrants in the 1990s, the 1,933 miles long border has also become like a war zone. It is militarized beyond belief. For instance, military bases next to the border (i.e. Fort Bliss, in El Paso, Texas) has an international presence of domestic and international military personnel year round: Germans, Canadians, and many more. Foreign armies train their soldiers in desert warfare there, and their presence contrasts with Border Patrol Stations, Homeland Security Offices, and many Immigrant Detention Centers which are spread over the region. It is a show of geopolitical and military power. The border region serves as an initial and final point where discourse on immigrants begins and ends. It is both political theater and social tragedy; corporate economic booming and worker exploitation; environmental disaster and ground of resistance.

Also, there is a deployment of all kinds of technological surveillance systems being tested there. US Air Force drone pilots constantly use border areas as training grounds, following vehicles crossing to the US-Mexico Border as part of their training. Other advanced detection devices along the border assist US Border Patrol agents in tracking and capturing immigrants trying to enter the US without inspection. The US- Mexico Border looks and

feels like entering into a big surveillance prison with many guards deployed (by car, four wheeler, and horse), flood light towers, and low flying helicopters. In contrast, the Canada-US Border feels and looks like entering another dimension: there is minimal inspection (if any), no questioning, no interruption, no unforgettable inquiry, in the journey between borders.

The mythology of the US-Mexico Border exists as an artificial *in-between space* of lawlessness and transgression; a void filled by abnormality. However, it is also a space of regeneration, invention, resistance, and survival. People on the Mexican side survive knowing that behind a tall metal fence—or just metal wire in some areas—which superficially divides the region in some areas, exists a land where “wild dreams” come true. For those on the US side, a trip to Mexico is an escape from the mundane and highly stressful life in the US. Mexican border cities offer loud music, cheap liquor, spicy food, cheaper medicines without a prescription, and high tolerance to misbehavior. These views merge to form the region as an ever-changing and mixed contested space.

The region's fragile social and economic ecosystem adapts to the high need in the US and elsewhere, of cheap commodities made by low-wage workers. *Maquiladoras*, or mass manufacturing plants located in this region, allow US and other foreign transnational corporations to take advantage of the low-wage and relatively young labor supply in Mexico. Along with lower labor and environmental protections, minimal regulation allows for these companies to increase their profits while exploiting the abundant workers supply. These workers, from all over Mexico, Central America, and beyond, find higher wages in this region and even a chance to access the US with a border card visa, without having to risk one's life crossing it.

Important actors in this border stage are human beings. Desperate economic, political, and human rights conditions in their countries of origin, Mexico, Central, South American, and the Caribbean, trigger these individuals to become long-haul migrants and to start their journeys to the US, mostly by land, but also by sea and air. So, the US-Mexico Border is a complex landscape of infinite human possibilities. A place where both nightmares and dreams, criminals and honest workers, corruption and redemption, hate and love, despair and hope, live side-by-side. The region is now one of the most diverse places

where international migrants from all over the world converge with aspirations to cross the imaginary line.

I propose that due to the increased xenophobic and vitriolic discourse generated by Agent Orange and its supporters in the US, they have fermented the Border Fetishism that many white Americans embrace about the US-Mexico border. Let me unpack the many layers of this love-hate relationship, along with the attraction and repulsion of what is unknown. The analysis of this discourse has direct implication in how we decolonize this region and show others how to better understand it.

From Orientalism to *Border Fetishism*

Scholars who have contributed to our understanding of the construction of the “other” and illuminated how colonialism has influenced the social and cultural construction of international borders and, in special consideration, to the US-Mexico Border. Their work assists us in understanding the fetishism of the border, for both the place and people who live there. Said (1978) in his seminal work, *Orientalism*, described the attraction and repulsion of the far middle eastern colonies by the empire states and its elites. This contradiction in construction of the other and its promoting ideology assist us to understand how he understood this attraction and repulsion to the Middle East's people, culture and identity. Said's *Orientalism* is defined by the development of an European culture and identity based on the subjugation of its colonies' culture and identity. In the same token, the US culture and identity cannot be understood without the consideration of other countries' identities such as Mexico. And the US-Mexico border, with its unique identity and culture, depends on the mainstream cultures of both the US and Mexico. For many unaware visitors, the vitriol and xenophobia of migrants begin at the entry point at the border.

The Border: A Story and a Myth

Border Fetishism is the simultaneous attraction and repulsion of a symbolic and artificial construction of the border culture and region as unique and isolated. It is not only feeding an individual's imaginary image of the region, but a collective hysteria of fake reality. However, this culture exists in the midst of two or more mainstream cultures: US and Mexico, primary, but with increased international migration, more cultures and countries are represented and

contributing to the evolution of the border. So, there are multiple perspectives on how this fetishism developed in the last 100 years. For the public in the US, the discourse has progressed from a paradise from alcohol prohibition to the racist and xenophobic imaginary romanticism of *Agent Orange* and his supporters who continue to feed the myth of the border region as a lawless, modern *wild west*. For the public in Mexico, the border became at the same time a region where the Mexican mainstream culture disappeared and was greatly influenced by US-based culture, and where *maquiladoras*, imported vehicles and stuff from the US, and travel back and forth from the US are part of daily living.

A second read, a decolonial read, is that in the political, social, environmental, and cultural struggle to reclaim this geopolitical border, the contemporary definition of it is also a precedent of the claims of Indigenous Nations which continue to care for the border region. Who has the right to claim this space? How could it be shared? How will it continue to evolve to reject the colonial project of keeping migrants out? One applicable and appropriate metaphor is best proposed by the lyrics of rap underground group Aztlán Underground's *Decolonize* lyrics, *We didn't cross the borders, the borders crossed us!*

Decolonizing the Social Construction of the Borderlands

Borders are set up to define places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a value and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary (Anzaldúa 1987, as quoted by Martinez (2011:210)).

The fourth read of the border culture and its contemporary discourse could allow us to imagine border regions and places where merging of language, culture, and identity are in constant flow due to the constant movement of consumer products and people.

From the perspective of Indigenous Nations, which have lived and cared for the borderland and other areas, from time immemorial, the physical restrictions along the border, or the incomplete wall, is a reminder that colonialism still exists.

Leza (2019) describes the US-Mexico Border region as the traditional and ancestral homelands of 36 federally

recognized tribes – including the Kumeyaay, Pai, Cocopah, O'odham, Yaqui, Apache and Kickapoo peoples – who many were split in two by the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and 1853 Gadsden Purchase, which carved the modern-day states of California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas out of former Northern Mexico. The shadow of colonialism has obscured the resistance and struggle these nations endured to preserve their connection to their ancestral lands.

For instance, for the Tohono Oodham Nation, its traditional territory was divided by the creation of the new border and its restrictive border crossing. It gets in the way of people to transit forth and back to perform ceremonies and reconnect with relatives along to visit their ancestral sacred and ceremonial sites in the region. Even the simple visits among relatives is restricted by the everyday reminder of border patrol guards, army personnel patrols, and the increasing presence of armed vigilantes militias which patrol the area disguised under the false pretense of protecting national security and American sovereignty (Lawston and Murillo 2012).

One way the mythology of the violent and lawless border is represented by the construction of the Border wall, so called US-Mexico Border Fence. The wall is symbolic of the extreme violent attempts by the US to control drugs and human trafficking, Martinez (2011) who lived and worked less than a mile from the wall states, "As I looked at the repeating posts, I felt small. I could see the wall and my own feet planted to the ground. Yet, somehow I conjured up an image that expanded my view beyond the field I was" (217). The wall represents the fears, violence, and suspicion on the US side; on the Mexican side, the wall represents the limits of where the country ends. A reminder that the neighbor in the North wants a physical separation between the two countries. However, the wall itself has become an artifact of cultural and poetic resistance. It now contains critical and inspirational messages of hope on both sides of the fence. Ironic for a barrier that it was meant to divide. It now unites.

Dismantling the Rapist and the Drug Dealer Mythology

Using immigrants as scapegoats is not new. Hernandez (2011) also emphasizes the anti-Mexican racism as Anti-Indianism. He expands,

The U-S//Mexico border has been stereotypically associated with violence and conflict, which itself is often distorted by historical accounts and official information outlets alike...the discourse of “border violence” is constructed with U-S centered, xenophobic, and anti-immigrant emphasis on hyper-sensationalized stories of immigrant invasion and drug violence (162).

As described above in this work, the xenophobic discourse and rhetoric use is at first ignorance of those most far and second, the repetition of stereotypes of immigrants as criminals fit into the narrative of the lawless border. Scapegoating immigrants during the presidential campaign benefited those who wanted to increase US-Mexico border enforcement measures and increased the presence of armed militias along Border Patrol Agents, the Army, and countless officers from local law enforcement agencies along the border.

The dehumanization of immigrants, about those coming from Latin America, later was used to separate families and children, implement cruel and unusual punishment for those seeking humanitarian asylum in the US. Once immigrants are less than human, inflicting trauma and pain becomes less relevant for those wanting increased deportations and family separation.

So dismantling the discourse and stereotypes and the hate directed to immigrants is now a daunting process. First, society needs acknowledge that this new wave of attack on immigrants is distinct from others in the long history of racism and xenophobia. One dimension that made this phenomena unique is the global dimension of it: the scapegoating of migrants had an echo in other receiving countries such as Italy, Greece, and Norway, to name a few. The resurgence of right-wing and nationalistic movements across Western Europe are connected to the concerted efforts to target migrants. Second, the hate against immigrants was magnified by the new landscape of both alternative social media and mainstream social media. The spreading of hate via cell phones and other devices makes it difficult to counter when moving from social media to mainstream media. And lastly, due to the lack of a comprehensive immigration reform in the US since 1996, it is impossible for those who remain undocumented and even those who benefited via the Deferred Action for Children Arrival (DACA), without a recourse to regularized their legal status.

But immigrant communities are resilient, and even without legal status, these places are thriving and refuse to be dehumanized and defeated. Undocumented and DACAmented individuals continue to defy the definition of a *model migrant* and constantly organize direct actions to bring attention to their cause to gain a pathway to legal residency and citizenship. Their restless efforts to change the immigration system is an inspiration to us all.

Post-Trump: What is Next?

Countering the vitriolic xenophobic discourse of immigrants in the US with statistics and personal stories of success is futile. The discourse and images are rooted in racism and fear. No amount of counter arguments will be able to pursue those who vilified migrants to change their minds or accept them. But these concerted efforts have had real consequences even after Trump’s first term in office. Other right wing politicians at the local, county, state and federal level have taken this discourse and magnified it in multiple campaigns. The impact on immigrant and human rights have been horrific so far. But it could get worse.

The US-Mexico Border as a playground to the international attack against migrants will likely continue without a major overhaul of the US’s immigration industrial complex. Resistance to this wave of attacks need to be swift and direct: celebrating our communities in cultural and social gatherings, educate the new generation of children and youth who are from immigrant families about the painful xenophobia and racism against our communities, and reaffirm the right for human beings to migrate and safe their lives and futures.

As educators, we have a responsibility to provide resources and readings to our students to promote understanding and solidarity. Recommending books about the border such as Luis Alberto Urrea’s *The Devil’s Highway*, Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Alfredo Corchado’s *Homelands: Four Friends, Two Countries, and the Fate of the Great Mexican-American Migration*, or even Fernando Flores’ *Tears of the Trufflepig* are a good starting point. Highlighting the work of El Colegio de la Frontera del Norte (Northern Border College, EL-COLEF) a Mexican higher education institution dedicated of the study of the border region (www.colef.mx) other highlight for those interested in learning more about this

region and the people who live, work, pray, play or go to school in this region.

Betita Martinez in her book *De Colores Means All of Us: Latina Views for a Multi-Colored Century*, stated, "All points to the great need for radical force within each community of color to pursue liberating politics and combat conservative or reactionary tendencies within each community (1998; 253).

Conclusion

Along with the vitriolic and xenophobic public discourse propelled in our last presidential period, it brought a wave of misinformation and *fake news*. Global migrants face, with risks of losing life, physical or mental harm, the backlash of host nations. The US, a former receptor of a large number of political and economic refugees, has become a hotbed of hate towards migrants. Those years are gone and those migrants who have remained after many years of tight immigration law enforcement, arrest and deportations face many challenges to reach legal status. The price to reach the US without inspection in the most dangerous border in the world has already been paid with interest. The remnants of the Agent Orange presidency will continue to be felt by the migrant communities and the only recourse we have is to continue to resist, and fight back.

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Ironies of History and the Dissidence of Memory

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Located at the heart of Ankara, Turkey's national capital, Middle East Technical University (METU) is among the largest public universities in Turkey, with an international reputation in education and research excellence. Its history, however, offers a compelling story concerning the ironies of history and the urgency of dissident memory to inform contemporary social justice struggles across the globe. This dissident memory is rooted in political struggles and revolutionary dreams of a passionate generation of university students for social justice and freedom.

Founded in 1956, METU was indeed designed as an exemplary Turkish university for the education of technical personnel in accordance with the American university system and western standards. It was part of a deliberate Cold War anti-communist strategy in higher education. The historical irony, however, is that it soon became a stronghold of revolutionary activism by university students in the '60s and '70s with a passionate embrace of anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, and anti-fascist sentiments. It became a stronghold of the '68 movement in the country with revolutionary student leaders involved in widespread solidarity campaigns, including land occupations by the dispossessed peasantry, factory occupations by the industrial working class, and associated strikes and demonstrations.

In 1968, a handful of revolutionary students inscribed the word Devrim (Revolution in Turkish) in giant

letters on the stands of the METU stadium. The legend is that the revolutionaries "invented" an "unremovable" paint that made the stadium's destruction the only way to get rid of the letters. The legend's relation to historical reality has already become beside the point as the Devrim Stadium has fed dissident collective memory, inspiring generations of young revolutionaries since then. For decades, it has been the place for large-scale sports events, collective forums, spring festivals, political marches, and graduation ceremonies. The joy meets activist passion here; banners calling for revolution decorate concerts and festivals. The dissident collective memory welcomes the youth, inviting them to imagine an alternative future.

It is, however, a source of fear for the forces of order. Given the country's increasingly authoritarian political climate, the university administration has been trying to "ban" spring festivals, trans parade marches, and even official graduation ceremonies at the Devrim Stadium. Together with progressive faculty and staff, the METU students have been resisting the pro-government university administration's attempt to eradicate this historical monument while reclaiming the collective memory inscribed into dissident tradition via the "unremovable" legend of D-E-V-R-I-M!

**IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE RESISTING METU
STUDENTS, FACULTY, AND STAFF!**



Devrim (Revolution) Stadium at METU, Ankara-Turkey
Photo Credit: Georgina Cerda Salvarrey (2022)

Speaking Up: School Climate and Language Politics in the Trump Era

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Abstract

Identity politics are fraught. High school is a prime location where such politics play out and interface with state-dictated norms and values about acceptable social behavior. This article examines identity politics during the Trump era in two far Northern California high schools to better understand the impact on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) students. I argue that while the Trump effect allowed hostility towards BIPOC people to be expressed more openly in general, schools can also be sites of resistance to culturecide—the killing of culture—that diminishes the role of minority ontologies and epistemologies in the formation of young people. Yurok and Spanish language courses serve as spaces of heritage language revitalization that challenge White supremacist ideologies embedded in curricula as well as wider US culture.

Introduction: Schools as Microcosms

Identity politics—when people from any type of a shared identity engage in political behavior outside of tradition political party structures—are fraught. Public schools provide a particularly potent space to examine them for two reasons. First, schools are primary locations for the inculcation of state-dictated norms and values about acceptable social behavior. This takes place both formally through educational media and associated lessons in the classroom—what is taught and whose values such content promotes—and informally through social interaction. Furthermore, in the United States, public schools proclaim non-partisanship yet they contain highly political content and behavior.

Second, schools in the US have been sites of culturecide—literally the killing of culture, including its suppression through coercion, and usually referencing actions taken by a majority group to force the assimilation of a minority—for BIPOC students for generations. In a divisive era of politics, what does it look like to resist ongoing culturecide within the curriculum and the classroom? This article examines the Trump era as a specific temporal moment in order to better understand identity politics in two far Northern California high schools. I argue that while the Trump effect in politics has allowed hostility towards BIPOC people to be expressed more openly in high

schools, at the same time, there are also examples of resistance to culturecide happening within the schools. Language revitalization and continuation of heritage language use are a few of many examples of how BIPOC students and their teachers are speaking up and speaking out to resist culturecide and associated White supremacist ideologies.

I write elsewhere in detail about the specific impact of Yurok language access on young people (Gellman 2023, 2022b). In this article I focus instead on school climate issues in relationship to language and identity politics. The article proceeds as follows: First, I describe the case study settings; Second, I outline the methodology and methods used to guide the research and introduce the case studies. Third, I provide a brief grounding in the literature on nationalism and identity. Fourth, students themselves describe their identity-based experiences in high school during the Trump era. I conclude with an assessment that in the toxic political culture on issues of diversity during and after the Trump presidency, schools have an important role to play in supporting resistance to culturecide for BIPOC youth.

Culturecide and Yurok Language-Learning in Eureka and Hoopa

EHS sits in the middle of a small coastal town of 27,000 inhabitants, the largest urban center in a rural

California county a few hours south of the Oregon border. Demographically, far Northern California is majority White, but the region has a significant Latinx population, people from Asian and Polynesian heritage, and also one of the largest concentrations of Native Americans per capita in the state, including the Karuk, Hupa, Tolowa, Wiyot, and Yurok tribes. Beginning with the Gold Rush of 1848, which brought a massive wave of White prospectors to the area, far Northern California has been transformed by settler colonialism, a process which includes White dispossession of Native American lands, genocide, and culturecide, some of which continues into the present day.

Language repression has been a mainstay of culture-cidal policy throughout the US since the beginning of settler colonialism. This was most visible in Indian boarding schools, where Native children were put into English language immersion and physically punished for speaking Indigenous languages. In the face of such abuse, tremendous language repression ensued. Many far Northern California tribes are making concerted efforts to revitalize Indigenous languages and enact resistance and resilience in the face of ongoing settler colonialism (Bommelyn 2006, Risling Baldy and Begay 2019, Wiyot Tribe 2020, Yurok Tribe 2022).

Language politics continue to play out in educational settings. In 2015, around the same time that an American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) lawsuit over racially-based discrimination by staff towards students was settled with Eureka City Schools (ACLU NorCal 2015), EHS added Yurok language classes to the language elective curriculum. Such a curricular change became an opportunity to look at how cultural content in the classroom impacts students, staff, and teachers from a range of demographic backgrounds, as well the wider community. Joining Spanish and German, Yurok now fulfills the mandatory one-year language requirement for EHS graduation, and also counts toward California's A to G requirements (two years of language) for students that want to be competitive applicants in the University of California or California State University systems. Students and teachers in Yurok III/IV, and Advanced Placement Spanish were interviewed for this study in 2018.

Yurok Teaching and School Climate

James Gensaw, a Yurok tribal member, was the EHS teacher for Yurok levels I, II, and a combined III/IV class

five days a week until summer 2022, when he moved to be the Yurok language teacher at Del Norte High School. Mr. Gensaw is part of a small cohort of approximately 16 Yurok language-keepers, a group of advanced-level Yurok language-speakers. Language-keepers like Mr. Gensaw are active participants in language revitalization efforts by teaching Yurok in spaces like the K-12 system and in community classes. Instrumental in broader regional initiatives—from Yurok culture-focused youth summer camps to annual language institutes—Mr. Gensaw teaches the Yurok language, infused with local history and the current reality of Native communities. By normalizing Yurok language and culture in the school curriculum, his classes challenge conventional victor's-history textbooks and therefore unsettle the predominantly settler-colonial-derived cultural and historical knowledge that many students hold.

When I first formally interviewed Mr. Gensaw in early 2018, we were a year into the Trump presidency, and he had much to say about school climate:

Right before the presidential election, and right after, there were so many negative things going on here at Eureka High School. They call it the 'Trump effect,' and I think it was not just here, it was in all high schools. There was a group of what you would call, I guess like, the good old boys, you know, some people call them hicks, you know, people who wear Wranglers, cowboy boots, and so they were going around threatening different people, you know, it's almost like they had their voice, had their leader, right? You know, 'Trump, President Trump!' and then it's like, 'he can say whatever he wants and get away with it, and so can we!' And so a lot of that was going on, you know, there were some racial slurs made right after the election, were written in the bathrooms, and then during the same time period, a Yurok student in one of my classes was threatened by another student—the student showed him a knife and said, 'I'm going to scalp you!' (Gensaw 2018).

The ongoing and overt acceptance of settler-colonialism as a dominant social practice was clear to Mr. Gensaw and to many others watching the political polarization of the United States after the 2016 election of Donald J. Trump. In many ways, the 2016 election granted White people permission to articulate racist thoughts and act

on them with impunity in the public sphere (Saul 2017). Previously, during the so-called “post-racial” Obama administration, such behaviors were not as overtly accepted in the political mainstream. Many people saw this new comfortability with White supremacy through actions displayed at events such as the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017, or the storming of the Capital building on January 6, 2021. Such philosophies of White dominance have also manifested in educational settings, with high-profile controversies over the teaching of Critical Race Theory and ethnic studies, for example.

Yurok and Spanish at Hoopa Valley High School

In addition to Mr. Gensaw’s Yurok classes, I also worked with Carole Lewis’s Yurok language students at Hoopa¹ Valley High School (HVHS) during the study period 2018-2020. The Hoopa Valley is a majority Native-American community on the Hoopa Valley Indian Reservation, and HVHS is more than 80 percent Native American. Ms. Lewis, a long-time Yurok language teacher and Yurok elder, instructed levels I, II, and a combined III/IV class at HVHS. HVHS also offers instruction in the Hoopa language, and has been at the forefront of culturally relevant curriculum design for Native American students. EHS and HVHS are two of the four high schools in far Northern California where the Yurok language is offered as a world language elective.²

As a way to look at minority language access more broadly, as well as to serve as a control, I included Spanish language classes in the study design, and worked with students and teachers in multiple levels of Spanish classes at both EHS and HVHS during the same time period as the Yurok classes. I also included students and teachers from US History, World History, and Civics classes in the original study, and that data is presented elsewhere (Gellman 2023).

Research Methodology and Methods³

I first met Mr. Gensaw in 2016, when I reached out to the Yurok Tribe’s Education Department, interested in co-creating a research project that could be useful to them in language revitalization efforts and that would utilize my skill set as a political scientist. Collaborative methodology, referring to codesigning and implementing a mutually engaging research puzzle with stakeholders, is the framework used here and described at length elsewhere (Gellman 2021, 2022a, 2023). In this case, collaborative methodology meant working with the Yurok Tribe’s Education Department Director and Yurok Language Program staff to design the research questions and specific research instruments for the study, including qualitative interviews, focus groups, and survey questions.

Collaborative methodology facilitates a research puzzle that addresses real-life issues of interest for people affected by the research themes, and can further scholarly goals as a secondary, rather than a primary, objective. Working with any historically or contemporarily marginalized group demands this kind of sensitivity. By rejecting extractivist frameworks, collaborative methodology attempts to counter neocolonial research models.

After defining the scope and scale of the project with the Yurok Tribe’s Education Department, official research permission was granted from the Yurok Tribal Council. I then obtained Emerson College Institutional Review Board permission.⁴ Following all approvals, I spent multiple two-to-four-week trips in 2017-2020 traveling to California usually two to three times a year to do data collection and to check in with stakeholders. I continue to do annual report-backs to the Yurok Tribal Council and to any schools and districts that are willing to make space for me on their agendas.

This article is based on mixed methods data from

1 While the people and language are spelled Hupa, the Anglicized version of the name, Hoopa, refers to the town, and this has been encoded in the spelling of the school name. I follow local practice in referring to the place and school as Hoopa, but the people and language as Hupa.

2 Del Norte High School and McKinleyville High School are the other two high schools where Yurok is offered.

3 Even fellow methodologists continue to interchangeably use the terms methodology and methods, but these two terms are not the same thing. Methodology refers to an overarching philosophy or framework for a given study, while methods indicate specific data-collection tools.

4 Study #17-063-F-E-6-1 [R3].

EHS and HVHS that draws on 110 surveys,⁵ 80 student interviews, 24 teacher and administrator interviews, 5 focus groups, and 110 classroom observations, plus many hours of informal observations in school campuses and surrounding communities.

While the Spanish and social studies faculty were not included in the collaborative phase of the research design, the research questions resonated with those teachers as well. Overall, I coded hundreds of pages of interview and focus group transcripts manually to identify a range of examples of school climate, and also noted examples of young people speaking up to resist culturecide.

Theorizing Language Rights as Resistance

The right to language is highly political, and in many cases, connected to a host of other political claims. I have written elsewhere about the rights to mother-tongue and heritage-tongue education for minorities in multiple countries (Gellman 2017, 2020). In these cases, cultural rights claims are in no way limited to language itself, as demanding language rights is part of a larger claim to cultural autonomy. In turn, cultural autonomy implies land rights, governance rights, and educational rights, among others. In this way, language rights may begin as simply the right to speak one's heritage tongue, but in fact are part of a greater demand for states to recognize and accommodate specific identities.

Overturing the myth that "Indians are extinct"—a myth that multiple White students admitted they believed before taking Yurok in high school—threatens White supremacy in ways that are deeply unsettling for those who benefit from it. In the United States, homogenization efforts have decimated Indigenous languages, dropping the number of languages spoken at the time of colonial contact from 300 (Cohen 2010) to 169 (Coronel-Molina and McCarty 2016: 5). While roughly fifty of those languages are in California, many have very small numbers of speakers (Hinton 1994) and continue to shrink.

For Spanish language in the United States education system, there are competing tensions. As with Indigenous

language-speakers, there is a clear assimilationist approach by the formal education sector to move Spanish-speakers towards English fluency. In addition, with increasing interest in global communication, students and families—both heritage-speakers but increasingly non-heritage-speakers—are seeking out Spanish as a valuable language skill. The mixed messages sent to young heritage-speakers about the value of Spanish and its utility in their lives can be confusing. In the context of nationalist agendas in the United States, however, the emphasis on English in schooling is in line with other nation-building projects.

Studies of nationalism recognize the central role that language plays in defining 'in' and 'out' group identities. Weber's classic study, *Peasants into Frenchmen* (1976) shows how schools and the military consolidated French identity through language standardization institutionalized through assimilationist values. Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1991) underscores the utility of a shared language for creating a mutually held national identity across large distances through the printing press, the early vehicle for newspapers which were intelligible only to those who had language-assimilated to a given group. More contemporarily, May's work posits that language-based conflicts implicate the limitations of nation-state design, which are geared toward homogenization through a common language and mass education (2012). Stepan, Linz, and Yadav argue that the term "nation-state" is too limited a framework for today's pluriethnic populations, and offer the term "state-nation" to describe contemporary political entities, including the United States (2011: 1-8). Such a terminological reframe allows territorially-bound political entities to be conceptualized in more culturally and linguistically inclusive ways than "nation-state" permits, and may need to be expanded to account for autonomous tribal territories, as political scientist Kessler-Mata describes in *American Indians and the Trouble with Sovereignty* (2017).

Oppressed peoples have long figured out how to speak in covert ways (Risling Baldy 2018, Lara-Cooper and Lara Sr. 2019, Scott 1990), yet those stories don't often penetrate the formal educational curriculum. The 1775 Kumeyaay uprising at the San Diego Mission, for example, shows a hidden transcript of resistance that breaks into the public realm, but children are not taught Indigenous versions of history in the sanitized mission history units required by the State of California (Risling Baldy 2017). Only in 2017 did

⁵ The survey data reinforces themes documented qualitatively in this article, but is excluded here due to space limitations.

a new California history curriculum update the state's mission unit from required to optional status. However, many teachers who taught the unit in previous years continue to include it, even as the controversies over how to teach mission history continue (Keenan 2019). Given that education is such a fundamental contributor to youth identity formation, the way that victors' versions of history are presented as fact should merit significant attention.

It is not only history, but language itself, that plays an oppressive role in many educational settings. In his now classic work on the subject, Nigerian scholar Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o describes how language regimes—which Sonntag and Cardinal take to mean the institutional generation of language hierarchies, policies, and practices in a given state (2015: 6)—shame minority citizens into furthering the interruption of language transmission in their own families and communities (Thiongo 1986). This has been California's story too (Lara-Cooper and Lara Sr. 2019, Valdés et al. 2006). The internalization of ethnic majority values is bound up with culturecide, which in many countries takes place alongside cultural and economic globalization. The remainder of this article draws on students and educator voices to show how school climate was affected during the Trump era, and how language classes have served as a tool to resist White narratives of domination.

Speaking Up in Their Own Words

Marginalized people and their allies have found a range of ways to speak up against racism, sexism, xenophobia, and anti-LGBTQI+ behavior in the aftermath of the 2016 election (Zepeda-Millán and Wallace 2018, Patrón 2021). In this section, I share excerpts of interviews with students in far Northern California about their lived experiences and provide analysis on the central themes. I begin with the voices of Latinx students at EHS:

*Leo*⁶

In 2018, Leo was an enthusiastic senior at EHS, and a food service employee after school and on weekends. Leo grew up speaking Spanish at home and English at school. By 2022, he worked as a manager at a fast-food

restaurant and was taking classes at College of the Redwoods (CR). He related the following story about discrimination in Eureka:

I had an instance where an older male, he looked like he was like in his eighties, I was just, you know, casually walking to work as I do daily, and he pulls over next to me in a pick-up truck and he says, 'you need to go back to Mexico, we don't need you here, stop taking my jobs, go back to your country!' And for a while I was puzzled as to why he would take the time to pull over and say that to me, but I didn't care to give him the satisfaction to explain myself, 'cause I didn't feel like I needed to, because I knew that I wasn't from Mexico, I was born here in the States, so it didn't really hit me until after I thought of the whole situation. It's instances like that where I think that people are very uneducated (Anonymous 2018m).

Though Leo himself is US-born, others in Eureka's Latinx community are not. The larger "it" that hit Leo after this incident was recognition that the driver's insult was directed toward his whole community, not just him as a US-born Mexican American. Leo continues:

Another instance is when we recently had our presidential election [in 2016] and we're going through all of those [political] things, I was just hear[ing] constant really nasty verbal comments about other races, not just my own. And I don't kind of want to throw anybody under the bus, but it was mostly hicks, or I could say White people, that were doing it and it kind of hurt me because prior to that, they were so close to everybody else, and now they're kind of like pointing the finger, like 'okay, you need to go back to where you came from. The United States isn't for you!' It really kind of hurt me as a person 'cause I'm like, before all of this, we were all brothers and sisters. It made me puzzled, because in elementary school and middle school, they were never like that. It was like, they were all still accepting of each other and, you know, all of a sudden, after the election, I guess they showed their true colors—they just needed that platform to show what they truly felt. And for all I know, they could have been feeling that the whole time, they just never spoke up about it (Anonymous 2018m).

⁶ All student names are pseudonyms.

Leo describes how the election of Trump allowed his peers and community members to say things toward him and other BIPOC students that they might have been feeling before 2016, but just didn't say. In this way, the blatant racism of the Trump era also operates like a social betrayal of childhood relationships that Leo viewed as free of such biases. He further comments about the challenges for students to speak up when such views are expressed:

I know a lot of teachers have a zero tolerance about, you know, being very vocal against other races, being racist in general is not an okay thing and a lot of teachers are, you know, putting their foot down and saying, 'Hey, you can voice your opinion, but to an extent. I won't allow you to bash other people based on their background, skin color, sexuality, whatever the case may be. It's not okay.' Whereas students, I personally have always seen people kind of, like, very quiet about it. They haven't really spoken up about it, and the few people that do speak out about it, they're always the ones that get more of the backlash for speaking up about it. I think that that's something that needs to change, because I think that you should be able to speak up regardless of what the situation may be, whether it be bullying or discrimination. I think that people should be able to say, 'Hey, that's not okay, you can't do that and you can't say that!' I think that's just something that needs to change, that people need to speak up more about it, just in general about everything that's going about discrimination and bullying (Anonymous 2018m).

When I asked Leo what it would take for him to speak up more himself, he quickly replied, "Less backlash. If I didn't get as much [backlash] for speaking up, that would be something that motivates me a little more" (Anonymous 2018m). Leo is able to identify the way that discrimination and the need to speak up has shifted in the Trump era. He does speak up, and wants to speak up more, but worries about the repercussions and hopes the school and community will work on creating solutions.

Marta

Marta, a bilingual Mexican American student in AP Spanish, expresses some ambivalence about her and her family's experience speaking Spanish in Eureka.

With my family, we just go to Mexican restaurants. My parents aren't really assimilated yet. Once in a while we go to some type of fast-food restaurant and they still speak Spanish in the restaurant and it's okay. I have to be the translator for them sometimes. That's what happened when I was small. I had to translate for them, but now my dad's learning more and more English. He actually asks me for help on English, so I feel like it's, like, a good thing (Anonymous 2018j).

Many minority students I interviewed described the experience of translating for their parents, which is a common experience in immigrant households around the world, where children are the first in their families to speak both the family language and the new country's majority language, usually learned at school.

When I follow up with a question about if Marta is comfortable using Spanish in public, she responds: "In some stores, yes. In others, not as much because people just look at you. And I feel like that's the case for Hmong speakers as well. Like, we don't know what they're saying so we do the same [we look]. And they just look at us and we're like, 'yeah, we're speaking our language. It's allowed'" (Anonymous 2018j). There is a sense of shared experience across groups here, with Marta identifying Hmong classmates who are also stared at if they speak their language in public spaces, and that she herself looks at people speaking a language she can't understand. Being looked at can come from curiosity, hostility, or something else. Marta is not sure how safe it feels to speak Spanish publicly—it changes based on context.

Donna

Donna identifies as Mexican, with Indigenous roots, and is enrolled in Yurok III at EHS.

She describes that, though she has friends from a variety of backgrounds, some students at EHS are not interested in socializing with her because of her identity. When I ask if she feels accepted for who she is at school, she describes the following:

Some people, they don't like my culture sometimes, so I guess they just are not, I don't know how to put it, they just don't give a chance for people from my culture to express themselves...some people, I won't say their names, they're saying things like, that we

don't belong here, and that this isn't our home country and stuff like that, so we shouldn't be here and all that. Not just for Mexican people, but also for, like, Hmong and other people who aren't like, like, 'go for America,'⁷ I guess (Anonymous 2018k).

When I ask her how she responds to such statements, she replies:

It like, pisses me off and bothers me a lot, but I don't say nothing 'cause, I don't know, I don't want to start anything I guess. And I'm also not very talkative in class. But I talk about it to my friends and my group. That's about it. But people say stuff to others too—like the Hmong people—they be coughing [out insults under their breath] and stuff, but no one says nothing...I don't think the teachers hear it, and I don't tell them because I don't want to start any drama, I guess (Anonymous 2018k).

The theme of not telling a teacher or administrator about racism or discrimination happening among students is consistent across all my fieldwork. BIPOC students regularly say they do not report hostile behavior because they don't want to be seen as tattling and they don't want the stigma or backlash that likely goes with it. They also assert their own strength in being able to shrug it off in public. This is seen in responses from students across a range of backgrounds below.

Additional school climate experiences of EHS and HVHS students

Lara, of Southeast Asian descent, takes Spanish 3 with Mr. Olson. In an interview, she describes how she feels at school and in the wider Eureka community:

Question: Can you tell me how you feel about your identity in day-to-day life?

Answer: I guess, like, here at school or at home, I do feel fine. I just feel like myself. In other public places, depending on the location, I do feel a little bit out of place. I guess, like, when there's—I don't how to explain it—I guess, like, at a restaurant or a public place like a theater or something, I just feel weird because

of things that have been happening on social media and stuff, people saying racial slurs at people—I just feel like I might be attacked in public because of that.

Question: What have people said to you?

Answer: Just the stereotypical, 'are you Chinese?' Or they make fun of the language [imitates gibberish]. Or like 'do you eat this thing?' Or 'oh my gosh, do you eat dogs?' Like that.

Question: But that's not happening in the school?

Answer: Not towards me. And in town I might see it happen towards other people. Like other races too, not just Asian. I just have that feeling that I might be the next person they choose to say those things to. And so like, I do feel a little bit uncomfortable when I have to go outside the house or school. I kind of be cautious, I always try not to draw attention toward myself because I'm usually quiet. I don't really, like, speak to anyone unless I needed to, for assistance or help or anything (Anonymous 2018b).

Aggressions such as calling Asian people “dog-eaters,” or making fun of their language, or the dismissive gesture of lumping all Asian identities together as Chinese took place long before the Trump era. Yet the permissively racist era in United States history, from the 2016 election onward, exacerbates such behaviors. White nationalist contingents and other xenophobic and racist individuals and groups have used Trump's example to justify bolder racist behaviors. In this context, Lara's fear of being targeted is not just hypothetical, but based on real acts of violence that have taken place in communities across the United States and globally.

In Lara's interview, themes of being treated like an outsider are clear. Though Lara later describes how many people in her family identify with Eureka as their home, and went to EHS themselves, they still fear being singled out by racist targeting. And these fears are not arbitrary. She has heard other people harassed, and tries not to draw attention to herself to minimize the possibility of her own targeting.

Similarly, an African American female student described being harassed her first year at EHS, and also her sense of unease as a person of color moving around Eureka's Old Town, where she likes to browse on the days she doesn't have to work after school:

My boyfriend always calls me paranoid for, like, you

⁷ He is referencing “America First,” a policy advocated by Donald Trump that prioritizes the United States over other countries.

know, looking around so skeptically or just, you know, like, getting in the car quicker than he does. And it's just like, okay, I'm African American. I'm a female. I've only taken a few years of mixed martial arts and I'm small. So I'm telling him, 'I don't think you understand that a lot of people don't like me.' I'm not safe the way you are safe (Anonymous 2018d)!

This student makes clear that her physical actions, such as checking her surroundings and moving quickly from place to place, emanate from a fear of being targeted in a way her White boyfriend cannot understand.

Erma, a Sephardic Jew, is taking Spanish I, and addresses both the antisemitism and racism at EHS and in the wider community:

I try not to focus on major things, but I really don't like a lot of the racial comments that people make, 'cause they'll just, like, casually say it and they don't realize what they're saying. They'll be like, 'oh I didn't know that you're that.' Like people will make Hitler jokes sometimes or like last year, there was a kid on campus who drove around with the confederate flag and yelled at me 'get out of our country.' I got, like, really offended about that, but he got, I think, suspended or expelled so it was okay. And I don't like how everyone, like, last year was talking, 'oh, go vote Trump' because they voted him in for the wrong reasons, I think. Like his humor, but that's not even funny. He was just making insensitive comments. I feel like peoples' minds in the United States aren't really in the right place a lot of the time (Anonymous 2018f).

When I ask Erma how common the Hitler jokes or flag incidents are at the high school, she responds:

In the high school, I mean, there are people who make jokes about it [Hitler].... It's not like, trying to be hurtful, it's just like, causal jokes, but it's just not cool. And then around [the] whole community, I would say there's a lot of racism especially if, like, you're going to walk around. There will be, like, homeless guys who just scream random stuff at you. Or like, if I go out to a restaurant, my mom, she kind of looks Hispanic, and the ladies will, like, give her dirty looks sometimes. Or like, there's been a few times we go to the stores and people just come up and say weird stuff about her being Hispanic (Anonymous 2018f).

In the face of these racial and ethnic discriminations, Erma herself has become close friends with a Native American student and participates in the Native American Club. She speaks warmly of the cross-cultural exchange that she enjoys in that space and with her friend. Though her great grandmother was Cherokee, Erma says her family sees that as diluted and they identify much more as Orthodox Jews (Anonymous 2018f).

Jill, a Chinese American EHS senior taking AP Spanish and Civics, speaks Cantonese, Taishanese, English, Spanish, and a little bit of Mandarin. She comments on how teachers manage student bias toward those of different backgrounds in the classroom:

I think the teachers do a good job at it, but the school in general, I guess, doesn't do a lot about it. One time, we had to decorate the hallways as different cities. They did Hong Kong, and it just kind of seemed like a stereotypical racist Chinatown, which is weird because Hong Kong is a big city, really diverse! They did, like, red and it looked like a Chinatown. Everyone was like 'wow, that's so good' and I was like, the only one who knew about Hong Kong culture and I was like, 'no that's not right' (Anonymous 2018h).

As a diverse school with an increasingly non-White population, Jill points to the need to sensitize EHS faculty as well as students. Well-meaning activities can still perpetuate stereotypes and lead to feelings of exclusion.

BIPOC students were not the only ones concerned about climate issues both at school and nationally. A White EHS student in Spanish III commented:

I feel like our president is not really doing what's best for everyone. Just the entire scandal with building a wall—that doesn't seem fair. And what he's trying to do against the immigrants—how he's trying to send people home that have been in this country for over a decade. It seems like he's trying to 'cleanse it' is what I've heard people say, but I don't feel like we need to be cleansed. I feel like the more types of different people we have, the more we can learn and the more we can grow (Anonymous 2018i).

This student expresses appreciation for immigrants and cultural diversity, and also demonstrates awareness of the larger political context in which she lives.

By contrast, another White EHS student, who I

interviewed during his Civics class, took some coaxing to see the politics visible in his own life. Daniel is a hunting enthusiast with a mother who identifies as apolitical (2018c). Below is an interview excerpt that shows how he thinks about politics.

Question: What does democracy mean to you?

Answer: I mean, I don't really worry about all that politics stuff. I mean I don't really know. I try not to really worry about that too much.

Question: But how do you think the state affects you?

Answer: I mean, this state has a lot of strict laws. Their gun laws are very strict. Like, as of next year, you're going to have to buy a forty-dollar card to buy ammunition, and then after that, you can only buy two boxes of ammunition at a time. And you have to register it through some ammunition thing and they're going to, like, track how many boxes you buy in a year and all this stuff. All they want, I think, is your money, and it's just a big waste of time.

Question: Okay, so that's a point of contact with the state. Can you kill whatever animals you want whenever you want?

Answer: Not whenever you want. There's seasons that you can pretty much kill whatever you want but yeah, I have tags so...

Question: So there's the state again. On the one hand, you're not so worried about politics. It is what it is. On the other hand, you've just identified numerous ways in which it affects your own life.

My interview with Daniel turns toward issues of bias on campus. He starts to look away when I ask about issues of prejudice among students and cracks a few jokes to make himself laugh, but then answers directly:

Question: Do you think the campus climate is functioning well here?

Answer: I mean, I wouldn't say anyone hates each other here. There are people who don't associate with other people [across racial and ethnic lines] but I mean, if it comes down to it, I'm sure anyone would have anyone's back here.

Question: Do you think that's true in the larger community as well? Like in Eureka?

Answer: That's a different story (Anonymous 2018c).

While community and campus climates are not the same, they certainly inform each other. For this White

student, school might appear to be a place where people would "have each other's backs," but that feeling was not shared by the majority of BIPOC students I interviewed at EHS.

White students were not the only ones who had little to say about politics. HVHS is a public high school located on the Hoopa Valley Indian Reservation, with the high school on nearly the same footprint as the previous Indian boarding school where many current students' grandparents or great-grandparents were interred. HVHS leads the region in an explicit commitment to culturally relevant curriculum for Native American students (KTIEP n.d., Supahan n.d.), and has been offering both Hupa and Yurok language classes as part of its official curriculum for decades.

At HVHS, some students who identify as Native American were also dismissive of anything political in their daily lives. For example, here is an exchange with Sara, a ninth grader in Yurok I:

Question: What do you think about politics?

Answer: I don't know nothing.

Question: What about tribal politics, water politics?

Answer: I don't really pay attention to that stuff.

Question: Does anyone in your family pay attention to it?

Answer: No, my family's like a go-go-type family. 'Cause it's like, school, [sports] practice, and then dinner, and then we'll go to sleep. So it's just a repeat kind of thing. Then on the weekends we go to games and stuff like that (Anonymous 2018l).

While the student above was clear that her world was focused on sports and family, other students expressed political ideas without labeling them as such. Ray, a Yurok I student at HVHS who identifies as Hupa and Yurok, similarly expressed that he didn't follow politics, although his grandmother would talk to him about things happening on the news (Anonymous 2018a). Yet many of his deeply reflective responses to other questions about how he would change his community if he had a magic wand—to make more housing available, and to provide more healthy resources for young people and more counselors to support students—were highly political even though he didn't label them as such.

School climate extends beyond racial and ethnic discrimination. Students across a broad demographic identify

anti-LGBTQI+ behavior as contributing to hostile school climate. Ella, a White student in the YEAH Club (Youth Educating Against Homophobia) expressed: “A lot of students still remain blind to the club’s existence and queer issues in general. I mean, I think I heard the word ‘faggot’ thrown around in, like, three different classes today, like twelve times in each. Like, it is ridiculous. This campus is really, really hostile” (Anonymous 2018e).

But when asked about racial or ethnic discrimination, Ella commented: “When it comes to race, we actually have a pretty good melting pot here... I don’t feel like racial tensions are as high as they could be. I mean, I do still hear a few slurs thrown around, but that’s generally on the backburner. It’s more so blatant sexism and really bad homophobia is what’s going on” (Anonymous 2018e). Ella points to the relatively tranquil diversity within her classes—White, Hmong, Latinx, African American, exchange students from other countries, and some from backgrounds she isn’t familiar with—as evidence of EHS’s “melting pot.” Ella recognizes that her Whiteness might be influencing which kinds of discrimination she tunes into.

Ella herself is language-hungry, interested in her Welsh roots as well as local languages, which she is exploring in Mr. Gensaw’s Yurok I class. She sums up why language matters for cultural identity: “I guess if I’m going to put [it] into a metaphor, language and culture, they’re like, two rooms right next to each other, and they each got a door between them because learning one literally will, like, open the floodgates to learning the other” (Anonymous 2018e).

Brandi, a Yurok language student, describes how the door between language and culture operates for her in Mr. Gensaw’s classes, where language learning is a vehicle to talk about past and present Indigenous issues.

James [Mr. Gensaw] talked about the massacre during the Gold Rush, and I feel like that opened up people’s eyes about what happened in this area, and the bounty they had on Native Americans to, like, scalp them and stuff like that. It was very eye-opening for me and I hope it was for the other students in the classroom. ‘Cause before the class, I had no idea there was even a massacre in this area. So to have that knowledge and know is way better than not knowing (Anonymous 2018g).

When asked what she has done with the knowledge she gets from studying Yurok, Brandi responds:

I’m way more respectful of my area and every time I go up to Klamath⁸ and enjoy the scenery, I’ll always make sure to leave it the way it was and respect the people that came before me...and it helps me be better...Like if I see something like a racoon, and I know the word for it, I’ll say that word, especially with animals, because James [Mr. Gensaw] would talk about how animals used to talk and used to be like humans and have little stories and stuff. And so it kind of helps you go about daily life and not to be a bad person and just be, like, overall a good person, you know? (Anonymous 2018g).

This example—the Yurok curriculum helping a non-heritage-speaker be more respectful toward the local environment and the traditional owners of the land—is a straightforward argument for curricula that reduce “othering” (Norgaard 2019)—a practice of seeing people different from the self as problematic. The impact need not be dramatic to be profound. Naming a racoon in Yurok reminds Brandi of the stories Mr. Gensaw shares in his class, and with the name comes the values of respect for local culture that translate into more careful and culturally aware behavior.

Tim Olson has been teaching Spanish at EHS since 1996, and was nominated for Humboldt County Teacher of the Year in 2019-2020. A White non-native speaker, Mr. Olson emphasizes vocabulary alongside cultural learning, and talks about immigration issues and other political content in his classes. One day in 2018 while I observed his AP class, students listened to a podcast about Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) policies, and he warned the class in Spanish and English that things could get emotional, as some people might connect more personally to the stories.

Mr. Olson is aware that his students have a range of documentation situations happening in their families, and for some, the lessons might feel painfully personal. Other students might absorb his DACA lesson with little

⁸ Klamath is a small town located 60 miles north of Eureka on the Yurok Indian Reservation.

personal understanding of migration. Though Mr. Olson laments the lack of a Spanish for Spanish-speakers class at EHS, he notes the benefits of classes with a broad range of student backgrounds:

I feel like it makes it a little more real for the kids. I like it when we're talking about DACA and immigration, to have [immigrant-background] kids who they've [White kids] already become friends with right there kind of makes it real. Like I was talking about yesterday in AP, that human-to-human contact, getting to know somebody as a human being really makes it authentic. It's harder to stereotype and that kind of stuff, when you know someone personally (Olson 2018).

The parallels here for students across Yurok and Spanish classes have been clear in the data. For students from heritage-speaking backgrounds in both language classes, the classes are a space of validation of their lived experience and cultural resources. Students from other backgrounds have the opportunity to learn from fellow students and the teacher both the language as well as the cultural and political significance of Native and Latinx identities that would otherwise not be visible in the curriculum. The classes help empower students across demographics to be better equipped to speak up and support peaceful coexistence.

Conclusion: Speaking Up and Reaching for Their Dreams

In this article I have looked at identity politics during the Trump era as they played out in two regional high schools. In the context of racism and discrimination made acceptable to the mainstream public during the Trump presidency, school climate and its effect on young people offers a window into the challenges that lie ahead for pluriethnic democracy. Yurok and Spanish language classes serve as examples of culturally relevant curricula that help students from all backgrounds better connect with local communities and push back against the erasure or misrepresentation young people may be exposed to in previous schooling or other parts of their lives.

The two far Northern California high schools are unique, but they also share characteristics with many schools around the world. Students want to pursue their education and get ahead, and they generally keep quiet

about problems they see because they don't know how to fix them, or because they are scared of being targeted for speaking up. Yet despite a hostile school climate, at EHS, BIPOC students were generally optimists. They did not see obstacles—such as daily exposure to discrimination, lack of economic resources, or mental health problems—which are glaring to the eyes of the researcher, as barriers that would derail their dreams. However, at HVHS, students displayed significantly higher levels of apathy regarding their ability to reach benchmarks they set for themselves. The history of settler colonialism, genocide, and culturecide perpetrated on Native American communities surely factors into their sense of possibility.

Divisive politics and identity-based behaviors are not going away anytime soon. Culturally relevant curricula, including heritage language classes such as Yurok and Spanish, are a means to work towards fostering learning communities that are centered around principles of equity and justice. Such classes can support all students as they navigate complex politicized identities and push back again the institutionalized culturecide still prevalent in formal education.

Note From the Author

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Tiemblo

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Todavía tiemblo al verlos
Con sus pistolas
Y Rifles
Con sus miradas fijas
sus sonrisas siniestras
sus palabras altaneras
y Cuando me gritan
“Alto ahí”
“No te muevas!”

Tiemblo
Al oír sus voces burlescas
De hombres llenos de violencia
Usando sus leyes
Para controlar nuestro ser

Tiemblo
Pero no de miedo
Sino de Rabia
Sino de enojo
Sino de impotencia
Tiemblo sin control y
Alzo mi voz

Como las altas
Montañas de la cordillera

Alzo mi voz
Y zumban los tambores
Entre los árboles gigantes

Y digo en alto
Tu jamás podrás
Controlar mi pensar

Me matarás

Pero nunca
Tendrás mi corazón
Ni mi amor
Ni mi compresión

Con tu bota en mi cuello
respiro lentamente y
Te recuerdo que
yo soy como el viento
Y te susurro
Libertad ! Libertad! Libertad!

Jamás podrás frenar mi furia

Porque soy mujer
Y no parare hasta
Que haya justicia
Para mi
Para ti
Para todas
y
todos

Archiving Feminist Truth in Trump's Wake of Lies

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Special Issue: Teaching in the Wake of Trump

This essay is about an assignment I co-created in 2014, had successfully implemented five times, and then last year (2021) modified into a new version that I called the post-Trump edition. The 2021 edition was very much created in the spirit articulated in the call for this special issue – “Teaching in the Wake of Trump.” Indeed, the first line of the assignment description, reads: “This assignment is to start the documentation process of the Trump presidency from a feminist and queer, trans, people of color (QTPOC) perspective.” In other words, the perspective of many of the people left in Trump's wake of destruction.

He Broke Everything

Trump inherited an unemployment rate of 4.7% and left President Biden and Vice President Harris one at 6.7% (Murray 2021). Trump broke democracy. Rather than a peaceful transition of power that we have all come to take for granted, he actively tried to orchestrate an insurrection and came dangerously close to succeeding. As of this writing, his last White House chief of staff, Mark Meadows, was charged with criminal contempt of Congress for refusing to cooperate with the January 6th commission. Meadows' documents seem to be confirming what we already knew: the administration clearly orchestrated the failed coup d'état (Broadwater and Feuer 2021). He broke the office of the presidency: he was unable to complete his term without being impeached; twice. Trump destroyed civil and legal rights of women/LGBTQ+ folks faster than attorneys could file lawsuits to stop him (Baker 2021). And of course, he let a global pandemic go totally unmanaged, and so militantly politicized that his supporters wear their right to die and infect others along the way with the same pride as their MAGA hats (Baker 2021). While 92%

of Democrats are presently vaccinated, only 56% of Republicans are and we are now on our third Covid variant (Galston 2021).

In addition to material pain and suffering left in his wake, there is also a truth vacuum; a vacuum that I maintain feminists must fill. While Trump was in power, he and his handlers so deeply controlled the narrative that they literally rebranded the meaning of reality. Recall early on when White House counsel Kellyanne Conway with no sense of irony, used the term “alternative facts” to explain away the Trump administration's lies about the inauguration crowd size. Not even a full week as president and it was already official that facts do not matter. It is not surprising then, according to *The Washington Post* Fact Checker team, by the end of his presidency he “accumulated 30,573 untruths ... averaging 21 erroneous claims a day” (Kessler, Rizzo, and Kelly 2021).

Feminists Must Clean Up the Wreckage

As a compassionate human being, it was truly painful to watch the administration as they took pleasure enacting their xenophobic, white supremacist, trans/misogynist, homophobic policies over their four years in power. As a woman, mother, and a Jew, there were many, many days that his attacks felt extremely personal. As a gender, women, and sexuality studies professor who considers herself a social historian, it was a unique sort of horror. I watched every day as he and his minions pulled one block down from reality and replaced it with their own fabricated reinterpretation. Elsewhere I have written and edited about how the Trump administration brought a whole new urgency to GWSS that many of us could have never imagined (Shayne 2020; Baker 2021). Given that I had already thought about this, a lot, I decided I needed to use

my institutional location and clout to try and undo some of the massive damage inflicted by the Trump administration.

I decided to reshape one of my signature assignments in an attempt to redirect the narrative and make truth matter again. I am not a biographer but rather a scholar of social movements. Part of the story that needs to continue be documented regarding this era is the resistance to Trump. Traditional historians will write the history books that hopefully categorize his lies, failures, impeachments, rape and sexual assault accusations (Mindock 2020,) lawsuits, tarnished attorneys (Durkee 2021), and his full wake of reprehensibility. This year however, I worked with my students and librarians to document Trump from an activist perspective.

The Archive and its Founders

In 2015 I co-created the Feminist Community Archive of Washington (FCA-WA) with some librarians and staff at my university: Dave Ellenwood, Denise Hattwig, and Kara Adams. Denise, Dave, one of the students who worked on an early iteration of the assignment, and I have written about the process elsewhere (Shayne et. al 2016). Every year since, students in my class "Histories and Movements of Gender and Sexuality" research local feminist and gender justice organization and we then house the interviews, transcripts, artifacts, photos, etc in this open-access archive. The archive is meant to keep track of the vibrant feminist and gender justice activism in Washington state. Until last year we focused entirely on the Seattle area because students met with all of the organizations in person. The assignment is a massive labor of love that involves much cross-campus collaboration. I work with my Community Based Learning and Research Office (CBLR) to identify organizations that are willing to work with my students. We keep a list, the CBLR office does the initial reaching out, explains the students' timelines, what the organization will gain from the relationship, and finds out who wants to work with us. I always go for some mix of trans rights, environmental justice, reproductive rights, immigrant advocates, sexual assault support, community support, feminist, campus group(s), preferably representing BIPOC communities.

I cannot do the assignment alone. Penelope Wood, the Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies librarian at UWB is always involved, in various ways, depending on the

organizations students are researching and the ways they need assistance. My main co-collaborator on this project is Denise Hattwig, Head of Digital Scholarship at UWB. We have worked on this together from the very beginning. She manages and curates the archive and works with the students on all things technical. This project and archive, simply put, would not exist without her.

Feminist Knowledge Production and Power

Learning about feminist knowledge production is a key component of this assignment. In other words, students learn about power in the academy. As Bonnie Thornton Dill and Marla H. Kohlman note, "the production of knowledge is an academic enterprise and has been controlled and contained within predominantly White, elite, and middle- to upperclass institutional structures" (2012, 163). In our course we understand feminism as an intersectional ideology that challenges women's and nonbinary folks' secondary status as manifest in the economy, politics, popular culture, the family, control over the body, and the like. Women's and non-binary folks' collective and individual autonomy are implicit goals in feminist struggles. Intersectional feminism challenges women's subordinate status as compounded by racism, classism, homophobia, cissexism, and other institutionalized ideologies of power. Thus, if you think about knowledge production from Thornton Dill and Kohlman's perspective, and feminism as we operationalize it in class, it is not surprising that an assignment focused on feminist knowledge production seeks to redistribute the power.

I teach my students that feminist knowledge production, in contrast to elite knowledge production which is the university's default, acknowledges power imbalances in all aspects of scholarship; especially those which result from gender power arrangements. We see power imbalances that result from questions that are asked or not asked in the course of research; subjects pursued or not pursued; curriculum and pedagogy in the classroom; who is presumed to hold credibility and who is not (Gutiérrez y Muhs et. al. 2012; Flores Niemann et. al. 2020)? Power between the researcher and "subject;" the "expert" and lay person. Many of these divisions have since been complicated due to the Trump administration undermining science and truth telling but that unfortunately is subject for another paper. Feminist researchers are additionally

concerned with unreciprocated extraction of intellectual resources when researchers benefit from the communities we research without compensating said communities for their time and efforts. And most relevant to our class, power in archives.

Students learn that while feminists are mindful of these layers of power and we attempt to ask our questions and design our methods in an attempt challenge these inequities, it is not possible to fully eradicate them. That is, we can undermine inequities and attempt to make things more balanced but power runs deep and it will take more than one well-conceived assignment to undo generations of colonial, heteropatriarchal research methods.

We discuss all of this in general terms, narrowing as much as relevant to their own research, and then to the finest of points when we get to who controls narratives and archives. Denise Hattwig explains concepts of metadata – that is, the seemingly small descriptions of the artifacts that end up in the archive, in order to shed light upon how much power students have as knowledge collectors, archivers, and documenters. An example I often give goes something like this. One group might be given a picture of the women they interviewed at a pro-choice march as one of the artifacts to be added to the archive. The students are then required to provide the metadata to describe the picture which will be searchable to the world. Depending on how the archivists see the women in the photo and their presence at the rally they could use a variety of terms. Some archivists might write “Feminazis at pro baby killing march.” Others, more likely the students in our class, “Female presenting people at protest.” “Examples of signs: ‘My body my choice;’ ‘U.S. out of my womb;’ ‘If you are opposed to abortion, don’t have one.’” That is, my students learn that archives are imbued with power and as the archivists they are the ones who hold the power.

Denise and I do not pretend that they should attempt to be neutral because they are not archiving apolitical projects and neutrality is not possible. Rather, we encourage them to add as much detailed description as possible. In the example I gave, the signs are the place to begin. A viewer may then conclude those holding them are “feminazis” because the viewer is anti-choice and does not believe women should be able to publicly demand control and autonomy over our bodies. Or, a viewer may see the pictures and descriptions and come to the conclusion that the women are

activists who were at a pro-choice rally demanding their precarious access to abortion not be further undermined.

The Project, Post Trump Edition

This administration left a wake of broken lives and what feels like broken glass under our bare feet. In 2021 Denise Hattwig, Penelope Wood, and I worked with my students to pick up those shards and repurpose them to tell a different story of the administration.

Under the best of circumstances, it is a very arduous project that I almost did not do, partly because of remote teaching and partly because Trump fostered burn out. But then, I had a realization – we needed to do a post-Trump edition. This would be the first time I was teaching the class post-Trump and I wanted to take the opportunity for us to start documenting the administration through the eyes of activists who organized against him. I truly felt it was my (our) responsibility as feminist social historians, researchers, and archivists.

This iteration of the assignment had three specific learning objectives with an additional activist goal, all of which are shared with the students on the assignment guidelines and first day of class:

1. Learn a history of a specific local organization;
2. Learn the significance of activist archives in committing potentially erased stories to the historical record;
3. Produce feminist knowledge while growing feminist archives;
4. From an activist perspective, the goal is to launch the feminist documentation process of the Trump era.

Last year students were paired with local Indivisible groups (the offshoots of the Pantsuit Nations), mutual aid groups that started because of COVID-19, as well as long standing ones like Food Not Bombs, the Washington Dream Coalition, the Washington State University’s Queer People of Color and Allies Queer Intersections Association, and three campus projects: the Collegiate Community Transitions student organization; the UWB/CC Campus Library Community Reads, and our Gender, Women & Sexuality Studies program which launched two weeks prior to the 2016 election. A team worked closely with Denise to organize the archive into subsections that hadn’t previously existed, create graphics, and other images that make

it more user friendly. One of those students (Jesse Blaire) is presently working with Denise, Penelope, and me on a different iteration of this project (Feminist Archive Exhibits, 2022). And a final group worked to curate the post-Trump special collection.

My students posed the following types of questions to the groups we had selected for them to research:

- Why did we need so many mutual aid organizations in Washington state? How did the Trump government's narrative that COVID-19 was a hoax lead communities to have to meet their own needs? How did Trump's hostility to states with democratic governors like Washington (Brunner, 2020) lead to more mutual aid organizations?
- How did the Trump administration shape the reading choices and conversations of our campus social justice book club?
- How did the Trump administration shape the strategies queer students of color collectives?
- How did the Trump administration lead undocumented youth to raise over five million dollars in COVID-19 relief for Washington state undocumented families (Chang 2020)?
- How did the Trump administration shape the direction of the new Gender, Women & Sexuality Studies program?

The team with perhaps the most public task, and the one most relevant to this special issue of HJSR, Teaching in the Wake of Trump, were the students responsible for creating the narrative explaining this special collection in the archive. In a typical year students submit their top three choices and I assign them to groups based on various factors. In this case I knew I needed at least one student I trusted and had a vested interest in completing this task with the activist commitment it warranted not just as another class assignment. I asked a student - Theao Quinn Klinicke - who was now enrolled in their second class with me if they were willing to work in this group. I knew Theao would be great because we had talked a lot about the Trump administration, our relief he lost the election, and the pain he inflicted on the world, including Theao's own community; Theao is trans/non-binary. And Theao is a serious student and wonderful writer. Two other students I did not know signed up for the group and we all met and discussed the project. I made sure they

understood the seriousness of the task – they were writing public history not just a homework assignment and were they sure this was the group they wanted to be in – and they did. So Theao, Olivia Strigen, and Annabelle Sussman worked together to write a wonderful statement framing the special collection.

The “Post Trump edition” of the Feminist Community Archive of Washington (FCA-WA) is needed to highlight the work of local organizations in response to Trump's many failures to serve the people, record a truthful account of history, and to honor those whose lives were lost or made much worse due to these failures. There are four major areas where these organizations combated his failures: immigration, education, mutual aid, and queer communities. When Trump was first elected there was a large group of privileged people who downplayed the very real threat he posed. They gaslit members of marginalized communities because they could not see how their privilege insulated them from the harmful policies enacted during the Trump administration. This edition of the FCA-WA holds the Trump administration accountable while also giving recognition to the organizations that altered their agenda or were created in response to the Trump administration's criminal negligence.

Just like metadata, the students who wrote this description had the power to frame the contents any way they chose. (Yes, I also had the power to not include it but that would communicate great distrust in the students and disregard their thoughtful work.) There are always students in the class who resent this assignment because it demands so much attention to detail or even hate me because they think I am a “man hater” – last year one even called me that in a homework assignment with his name on it – so identifying the correct students for this group was a serious task and I was quite pleased with the team's work.

Parting Thoughts

Using feminist research methods, speaking to these anti-Trump activists, posing our questions, helps us document the Trump administration as it really happened. An open-access, student filled, feminist archive is a small but powerful way to contribute to the documentation process and to reclaim the reality that he and his administration tarnished with their misogynist infused lies. My students

unearthed reality from this wreckage, one interview, one photo, one artifact, and one transcript at a time.

Trump and his enablers may have broken norms, economies, lives, bodies, and laws, but activists and educators responded with rage and creativity. While Trump and his handlers peddled in alternative facts, feminists marshal integrity, mobilize as researchers, and fill our archives with marginalized communities' truths. Documentation is resistance, and resistance is healing.

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Solidarity Art

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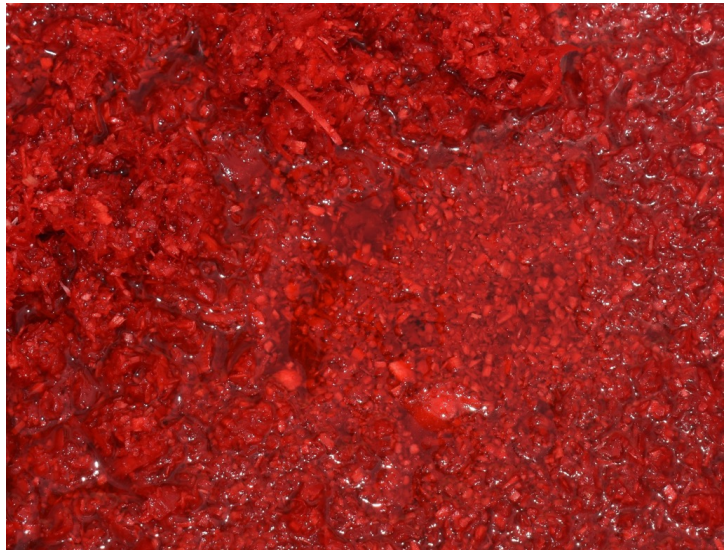
Sawdust in our hands
red beets
coloring it
water dripping
connecting us
to the memories of
thousands of trees
to water traveling
many miles
all turned into
dust.

Memory
connecting us back
to those who have past
connecting us back
to our ancestors.

Rooting us in art
in imagination
in collectivity.

Creating beauty
throughout the world
with ephemeral
sawdust murals
which remain
in our collective memory.

Augmenting our
imagination for a
future based on
Solidarity.



Arte Solidario

Aserrín en nuestras manos
betabel rojo pintandola y el agua
corre entre nuestras manos
corre por nuestras venas

Conectandonos
con la memoria
de miles de árboles

Conectandonos con
nuestro pasado
nuestros ancestros

Recordandonos
de nuestra colectividad
de pensar en comunidad
de nuestro deber
de crear colectivamente

Creando belleza en el mundo
a través del arte efímero
las alfombras colectivas
que quedan en la memoria

Aumentando cada vez más
nuestra imaginación creativa
para un futuro solidario.



The Internal Power of Chican@/Latin@ Youth

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Abstract

This is a qualitative study conducted by two researchers who engaged with Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR). Researchers worked together to illuminate the process youth went through as they engaged in YPAR. Researchers uncovered that youth went through an external process (community awareness, discoveries, and creation) and internal process (internal conflict, discoveries, motivation) as they engaged in YPAR. This study documents how youth empower themselves by engaging in YPAR through the sharing of their *testimonio*, accessing/acknowledging a *nepantlá* state, and finding their internal power through *conocimiento* and reaching a holistic healing space.

Introduction: Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) and *Testimonio*—*Sisters in the Struggle*

The era of Trump and its aftermath exacerbated an atmosphere of hate and self-doubt. The authors of this study thought it was pivotal to share their research because they wanted to remind students of their internal power and to never doubt who they are, and the power they carry within themselves.

The struggle for knowledge, understanding, and acceptance is often troubling for youth. This is especially true for youth who, because of their gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, and/or spoken language identities, face erasure of their identity and dignity—of their being—as they try to accommodate themselves to the standards of an oppressive, racist, heteronormative society that favors privilege and power.

The researchers' interest in this qualitative study comes from their lived experience and connections with students. They collaborated with youth to complete this research project. The two authors of this paper have been working together as researchers and educators since the 1990s to support the facilitation of the youth's cultural wealth that highlight their agency (Yosso 2006) to act in their communities. The authors began collaborating

when they discovered their joint interest focused on social justice, and YPAR pedagogies that focused on guiding youth's self-empowerment. The study consisted of sixteen participants who were Chican@/Latin@ students, eight from a high school and eight from a community college. The researchers presented at their respective locations to encourage engagement. The participants self-selected to participate in these studies. As researchers we helped facilitate the dialogue/*testimonios* and worked with the youth as they questioned, challenged, and resisted their oppression. Through this denunciation process they identified the issues they wanted to begin to confront and deconstruct. The high school youth chose homophobia as a topic to address, while the community college students chose immigration issues. The researchers shared narratives with each other about the transformational acts of Chican@/Latin@ students based on the data collected. The researchers observed that as Chican@/Latin@ students progressed through the YPAR process, they experienced a complicated intellectual/spiritual experience.

The challenge for educators, therefore, is to understand the voices of youth. Who they are, where they come from, what are their dreams, necessities, aspirations, future goals, and what are the issues they face. From these questions, we were able to help them think of how to negotiate

their social milieu. Educators play a major role in encouraging youth to not give up on themselves and learn to identify inequalities. We helped raise their consciousness to make informed life decisions, to make a difference in themselves and their communities. In our work as educators—as their allies—we position youth as holders and producers of knowledge capable of making changes in society (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

The researchers believe the people in their communities including youth are certified organic intellectuals (Levins-Morales, 2001). They believe this because before they read about the process called YPAR, they were already utilizing this critical methodology when working with youth. In the researchers' own words:

YPAR, “felt right”—it was a way to truly acknowledge youths' agency and knowledge. Before we knew about *testimonios* and Chicana feminist theories, we were provided an understanding through Gloria Anzaldúa's nomenclature, we might have called the process “Organizing 101” or another name, yet we were using this genre of practice out of a sense of urgency.

The researchers facilitated and participated in YPAR in two locations, one in a Southern New Mexico high school, and the other in a Northern California Community College. Our purpose was to understand how the YPAR process empowers youth and leads to community transformation. *Testimonio* was used to help illuminate the experience of Chican@/Latin@ students as they engaged in YPAR. In our studies, the process began with youth sharing their *testimonies*, regarding homophobia and anti-immigration policies in hopes of creating healing spaces for the youth and their communities. As the process continued, youth were eventually able to name their world and heighten their voices through their experiences.

The process of youth coming to an understanding of themselves and how they fit in society is complicated. This achievement is made more difficult by digressions at various stages in their lives. By incorporating *testimonio* in the YPAR process, youth are able to express themselves and listen to others—hence, assimilating their agency of being an organic intellectual (Levins-Morales, 2001) and develop the types of political, cultural, and psychological consciousness necessary to thrive in their environments.

A number of scholars have extensively documented how YPAR has been utilized to transform and empower

communities, particularly when working with youth groups. Our study complements their work by documenting how youth empower themselves through the sharing of their *testimonio*, accessing/acknowledging a *nepantlá* state, and finding their internal power through *conocimiento*. We also aim to complement Anzaldúa's work by outlining, naming and documenting the stages youth experienced when engaged in YPAR and *testimonio* in order to enter the fourth space of holistic healing.

The Power of Youth *Testimonio* in Youth Participatory Action Research

To help illuminate the process Chican@/Latin@ students underwent as they engaged in YPAR, it is important to discuss the role of *testimonio*. The YPAR process began with youth sharing their *testimonios* in each of the YPAR settings. *Testimonios* allowing groups from the subaltern to share their stories of urgency, of struggle and passion are, therefore, political in nature (Beverly, 2005; Burciaga, 2007; Burciaga & Tavares, 2006; Cruz, 2006; Delgado Bernal, et al. 2009; Flores & Garcia 2009; Haig-Brown, 2003; Huber, 2009; Irizarry, 2005; Latina Feminist Group, 2001). In our study, the urgencies in youth *testimonios* were of wanting to heal themselves and their communities of homophobia (high school setting) and anti-immigration policies (community college setting).

Keeping close at hand the discussion by various researchers (Beverly, 2005; Burciaga, 2007; Burciaga & Tavares 2006; Cruz 2006; Delgado Bernal, et al. 2009; Flores & Garcia 2009; Haig-Brown 2003; Huber 2009; Irizarry 2005; Latina Feminist Group 2001), *testimonio* is used in this study to document the journey students embarked on as they engaged in YPAR. The inquiry strategy of *testimonio* involved listening to the narration of youths' lives as they went through the YPAR process. In addition, the *testimonios* of the two researchers/adult allies were crucial in helping give names to the processes the youth experienced.

Garcia and Castro (2011) position *testimonios* as liberationist statements, as tools that further encourage *la lucha* (the struggle). Garcia and Castro also comment that *testimonios* are part of the oral history of the Latin@ culture and are a natural way for youth to search for their inner wisdom. The researchers used *testimonios* to document youth feelings and reflections throughout the YPAR

process. The researchers/adult allies realized that youth went through a complicated intellectual process as they engaged in YPAR. Through our grounded use of *testimonio* practice with youth, we have created what Levins-Morales (2001) calls “homemade theory.” Morales describes homemade theory this way:

The intellectual traditions I come from create theory out of shared lives instead of sending away for it. My thinking grew directly out of listening to my own discomforts, finding out who shared them, who validated them, and in exchanging stories about common experiences, finding patterns, systems, explanations of how and why things happened. This is the central process of consciousness raising, of collective *testimonio* (pp. 27-8).

As we embarked on our collective *testimonio* through YPAR, a community consciousness began to surface and we noticed the youth underwent a process in order to achieve their inner wisdom, from which their internal power is derived. Through *testimonio*, subaltern voices surfaced that began to find names in this process.

Youth Participatory Action Research and Chicana Feminist Epistemology

Youth Participatory Action Research, a research approach in which youth gather with their peers and begin to learn about structural oppression, begins with *testimoniari* (the act of testifying) by the youth about their experiences, dialoguing with one another, and reflecting upon their community and world—what Freire (1970) refers to as *concientizacion* and Anzaldúa (2002) as *conocimiento*. Youth then identify an issue arising from their stories that ties the youth in the group together, and once an issue is identified they begin to organize in an attempt to resolve the issue. As they are engaged in this process they are *testimoniando* (the act of testifying with others) about their experience in the social justice movement. In high school, youth decided to reach out to and educate middle school students about homophobia. In the community college, students began to educate their peers about immigrant policies and their rights. For instance, as high school youth engaged in action they reflected on their praxis and adjusted to improve their presentations at the different middle schools. They also reflected upon their overall experience each time they presented at the middle schools.

The YPAR process facilitated individuals coming together as a community, and it is through this process that youth began to experience what Anzaldúa (2002) referred to as *conocimiento*. In this context we engage Chicana feminist epistemology, which is key to understanding how we construct the viewpoint of this study and which guides us in understanding the YPAR process in general. Chicana feminist epistemology, for us, is framed by the discussion presented by Delgado Bernal and Elenes (2011) of Chicana feminist thought and its grounding in the work of Anzaldúa (1987; 2002). We find these concepts of Anzaldúa particularly important: *mestiza* (with its dual motion of the colonizer and the colonized); *nepantlá* (usually translated as “middle space,” or “space between”); *el choque* (shock, or cultural collision); and the path of *conocimiento* (spiritual activism) that leads to what is called the internal power of Chican@/Latin@s. The conceptual framework is derived from Chicana feminist thinking: borderland *concientizacion*, or consciousness-raising from being born/living on the border.

We describe the YPAR consciousness-raising process as having these components, which we will expand on later in the paper: community process, internal cycle, *nepantlá*, confronting *el choque*, and internal cycle of wisdom. These components are not hierarchically, sequentially, or causally ordered, nor are they prescriptive; they are, rather, names for transformative and empowering processes of activity we observed to be happening during the YPAR process. As we researchers clarified this process, we began to see how the activity helped the participants to search within themselves to find their own answers.

Here we briefly describe each component. The community process includes the elements of community awareness, community questioning, and community creation, and is where individuals experience community as they gather together with a common purpose. The internal cycle is composed of internal conflict, internal discoveries, and internal motivation. *El choque* and *nepantlá* are analytic terms we have carried over from Anzaldúa (1987), during which students experience paradigm shifts, liberation, and holistic healing, and the internal cycle of wisdom is when youth reach the ability to be free thinkers who are rooted in self and seekers of their own life’s passion. The internal cycle of wisdom serves as a revolutionary intervention wherein Chican@/Latin@ students recognize

their internal power to bring about change within the educational system and beyond.

In our view, the method of *testimonio* complements the YPAR process as a way of helping give youth the tools to change the oppressions they experience. As the Latina Feminist Group (2001) wrote, *testimoniar* is to *desahogarse* (to unburden oneself, to release one's pain, to let off steam) to sisters about their oppression. In YPAR, youth gather to tell their stories that have been silenced and feel a sense of relief and solidarity with their peers as they begin to listen to each other's stories. Through dialogue, reflection, and inquiry about their lives in the community, youth began to identify issues they believe must be addressed in order to resist and change oppressive systems such as the prison industrial complex, immigration, LGBTQ+ issues, and testing policies (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Duncan-Andrade, 2008; Ginwright, 2008; Akom, 2009).

YPAR connects with *testimonio* because youth voices and experiences are at the center of the education—and resistance—work. Youth begin to listen to each other's stories, they begin to raise their consciousness because they are learning from each other's experience, ideas are beginning to flourish, and they begin to identify the issues tying them together.

This consciousness-raising does not occur by accident, rather it happens to the listeners as they become witnesses to the *testimonios* of their peers. As youth congregate to listen and speak, their consciousness begins to awaken and expand. As they listen to each other a communal *testimonio* takes shape, and youth begin to realize that what they felt and experienced is also experienced by others, a consciousness-expanding realization that they are not the only ones who have been discriminated against for being LGBTQ+ or the only ones fearful because they lack proper immigration documents. Youth then begin to learn from each other on how to deal with the different oppressions they face.

Testimonio gives people who have been marginalized or segregated a voice to document their experiences in a country or community, so they have the power to also produce knowledge. When one gives a *testimonio* the listener creates a relationship with the speaker and this relationship becomes one of denouncer and witness to the urgent "telling to live." *Testimonios* begin to tell a counter-story (Yosso 2006) to the hegemonic documentation of their

history, an experience where those "faces at the bottom of the well" (Bell 1992) can begin to create knowledge from the bottom up (Huber 2009). In our research, during the YPAR process youth began to testify, to denounce their oppression with stories that, although not recalling exact dates of how and when they experienced homophobia or immigrant status of second-class citizenship, were plainly stories of how they *experienced* discrimination. Rigoberta Menchú's (1983) *testimonio* called attention to the ongoing massacre of indigenous people in Guatemala. The youth in our studies called attention to the homophobic and racist experiences they were subjected to because they were Chican@/Latin@ immigrants, and/or part of the LGBTQ+ community.

Anzaldúa's *Conocimiento*

In this study we documented the *testimonio* process that youth went through as they engaged in YPAR. Anzaldúa's (2002) discussion of *conocimiento*, a seven-stage process individuals encounter as they experience mind, body, and spirit of consciousness or awareness, was important in understanding the process youth went through. Anzaldúa (2002) wrote:

The first stages of *conocimiento* illustrate the four directions (south, west, north, east), the next, below and above, and the seventh, the center. They symbolize los siete "ojos de luz" or seven chakras of the energetic dreambody, spirit body (counterpart of the physical body) the seven planes of reality, the stages of alchemical process (negredo, albedo, and rebedo), and the four elements: air, fire, water, and earth (545).

In Anzaldúa's view, the process of *conocimiento* is not linear, and, as we mentioned earlier, the same applies to the youth experience of YPAR and reaching their internal wisdom. Anzaldúa described the process of *conocimiento* as having seven stages:

Together, the seven stages open the senses and enlarge the breadth and depth of consciousness, causing internal shifts and external changes. All seven are present within each stage and they occur concurrently, chronologically or not. Zigzagging from ignorance (*desconocimiento*) to awareness (*conocimiento*), in a day's time you may go through all seven stages though you may dwell in one for months. You are never only in one space (545).

Analyzing the youth *testimonios*, we arrived at the conclusion best described as Anzaldúa's seventh stage, which she names spiritual activism. We saw that youth experienced stages similar to Anzaldúa's *conocimiento*, and crucial for our understanding of the YPAR process for youth were her concepts of *el choque* and *nepantlá*.

Anzaldúa described the seven-stage process as an individual, female, and adult process. The first stage is *el arrebato*, or earthquake, which is an experience so shocking that one becomes open to change. For youth in our studies, this might be the experience of oppression because of their perceived identity. Being open to change, one arrives at the second stage, called *nepantlá*, where one is in transition, in between stories, without anchor, and open to many different possibilities. For the youth, practically, they became in many cases "without a home" either at school or home. But *nepantlá* leads to the third stage, the *Coatlicue* (an Aztec goddess of birth and death) state, during which one experiences, as Anzaldúa said, the paralyzing "Coatlicue depths of despair, self-loathing, and hopelessness" (545), a common experience for youth, but one which may lead them to come together for support. The fourth stage is *el compromiso*, where one overcomes despair and is prepared to act. Here is the point at which the researchers found the youth in our study ready to begin their *testimonio* and the remaining following stages are clearly marked out in our description of the *conocimiento* process. These stages include the fifth, named *Coyolxauhqui*, where one puts oneself back together again, moving from "passivity into agency" (563) and creating the counter-story. The sixth stage Anzaldúa called the "blow up," which is where a new knowledge is created being a *nepantlerá* (which means one is comfortable being in the unknown, in between). The seventh stage is spiritual activism, where one is engaged with others working together in dialogue and reflection in order to transform oneself and others.

Delgado Bernal and Elenes (2011) wrote about how educators theorize Chicana feminist pedagogies and how educators understand Anzaldúa's work. In our case, we also use Anzaldúa's work to better understand youth experiences as they engage in the YPAR process. YPAR facilitates the process of individuals coming together as a community and it is through community that the individuals began to experience some of the stages that Anzaldúa calls *conocimiento*. Dialoguing is part of the process

that helped youth voice what they were experiencing in YPAR. Although we have relied on Anzaldúa's conception of *conocimiento*, we have also used our own nomenclature in naming and documenting the stages youth experienced.

El Choque and Nepantlá

Specific to our naming are Anzaldúa's concepts of *el choque* and *nepantlá*. *El choque* is defined as an internal cultural collision whereby three cultures and their value systems collide, creating, in Anzaldúa's (1987) words,

el choque de un alma atrapado entre el mundo del espíritu y el mundo de la técnica a veces la deja entullada (the shock of a soul caught between the spirit world and the world of technique sometimes leaves one trapped as in a net). Cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems, *la mestiza* undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, and an inner war. Like all people we perceive the version of reality that our culture communicates. The coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference causes *un choque*, a cultural collision (p. 78).

Youth in our two study areas were enmeshed in an intricate *choque* defined by self, *familia*, school, community, social and cultural heritage, added to which was the tremendous weight of the judgment of the dominant heteronormative culture with its strong xenophobic tendencies.

Nepantlá, which Anzaldúa (1987, 79) calls the third space, is how Chican@s/Latin@s, can remedy their internal conflict. In Nahuatl, the Aztec language, *nepantlá* means being in between or in the middle space and is encountered by individuals when they discover their unique *choque*. *Nepantlá* is a unique space where change can occur for Chican@/Latin@ students. *Nepantlá* spirituality is the overlapping of our old and new ways, the embodiment of the ambiguity of our *mestizaje*: a place where the internal borderlands within us collide, creating a cultural collision. This collision represents chaos and tension in the physical world. In contemporary terms, *nepantlá* is the encounter of multiple divergent worldviews also known as transculturation. It is the in-between state of traveling from the present identity into a new identity, but is also a way of preserving one's culture while encountering other cultures. *Nepantlá* is a critical investment of both inherited

and disherited traditions of thought and knowledge. For populations impacted by the historical trauma of colonialism and what some have termed spiritual conquest, one strategy of cultural survival, or decolonization, is the process of transculturation, which in many ways means resisting the mainstream while reinterpreting and redefining cultural difference as a place of power. For many Chican@/Latin@ students, this occurs as they discover the creativity of *nepantlá*.

Once the tensions of *nepantlá* are understood and confronted, the native self is recovered and continuously healed. *Nepantlá* being the place where marginalized populations transform and liberate themselves, it specifically becomes the space where Chican@s/Latin@s make meaning psychologically, spiritually, and politically, so they become agents of change, deciding what works for their culture and negating limited thinking and confusion. They travel through their internal borderlands and consciously make choices about what nurtures their *mestizaje*. As a result, they return to their core that is cradled by their soul and spirit, where they reclaim their inherited power to make decisions for themselves.

We use *nepantlá* as a term to describe how endangered people, cultures, and/or genders engage in resistance strategies of survival due to invasion, conquest, marginalization, or forced acculturation. *In this use nepantlá* describes the larger cultural spaces where psychological congruency happens. The new middle becomes the post-modern paradigm or consciousness rooted in creativity of *nepantlá* whose intent is to heal the open wounds of colonial occupation. Fundamentally, *nepantlá* is the process of developing political, cultural and psychological consciousness as a means to create spaces where individuals and communities can thrive.

An Intellectual and Spiritual Process

Chican@/Latin@ students began the YPAR process as individuals who entered into a community process. This community process was based on respect and communication, was set in motion by mutual membership in a YPAR group. Everyone in the YPAR groups agreed that they wanted to do something to better their community, which they collectively identified as being the greater Chican@/Latin@ community within education (the community college students) and the LGBTQ+

Chican@/Latin@ community (the high school students). They further identified specific local issues that needed to be addressed and developed avenues to focus on them. In the sections that follow, we have organized our data around the several components and we demonstrate how the *testimonios* and actions of youth are part of an ongoing process. The process begins with youth confronting *el choque*, being comfortable, and beginning the process of *nepantlá*. Once youth are engaged in YPAR, they begin the process of *nepantlá*, where they engage in a paradigm shift, liberation and holistic healing. As students engage in YPAR they go through an external (community awareness, discoveries, and creation) and internal process (internal conflict, discoveries, motivation) which leads to a state of holistic healing. Below we explain the process in more detail.

Confronting *El Choque*

The cultural collision is followed by a destruction of dreams or aspirations, which leave the demoralized beings in shock. This creates an overlapping of factors that connect the internal borderlands, i.e., school, home, and society; psychological, spiritual, and political; American, Mexican, and Indigenous. The cultural collision is followed by a destruction of aspirations in which the demoralized being goes into shock because of misconceptions those around them hold about their cultural reality. In the high school and community college settings, youth spoke about the conflicts they were facing between school,

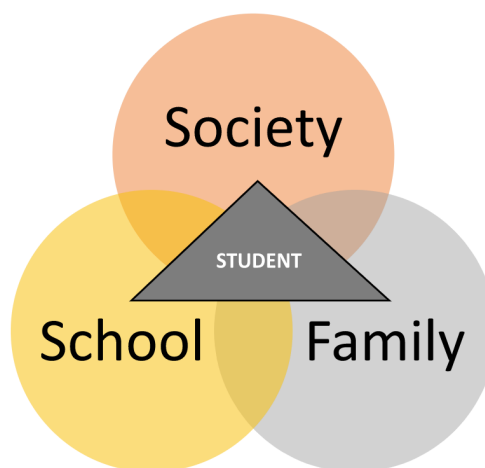


Figure 1

home, church, and societal demands. At school, many students were reprimanded by teachers for not doing their homework. At home, school demands become secondary due to the *familia* role. Students had to share family responsibilities in taking care of younger siblings and sometimes of their ill parents. However, even when school and home were on a collision course students took on their *familia* role with pride, internally aware of the conflict but also internally motivated to be there for their family. For example, Fabiola, a high school sophomore, was expected to take on a *familia* role as her father's caretaker. She noted that after she came home from school she was required to care for her father, who had been disabled in an accident at work. Many times, she had to stay up late with her father when he was in severe pain, which often left her unable to complete schoolwork.

Frida, a community college student, told of her experience of taking on a parent role, which affected both her home and school worlds. At home, because her parents were working, she was responsible for taking care of her younger sister, while she was also expected to serve as the advocate for her younger sister at school. In addition, due to her parent's language barriers, Frida was responsible for attending school meetings and discussing with teachers her sister's academic progress.

In both examples, the youth experienced conflict between home, school, and societal demands. However, in both examples, the internal discoveries allowed students to take on their *familia* role with internal motivation, even when it became evident that schools seem indifferent to the *familia* roles of students. Fabiola's internal motivation moved her to learn about massage, medicinal herbs, and western medicine in order to help her father with pain control. On the other hand, Frida learned parenting skills, including how to navigate the education system in order to advocate for her sister's needs.

Schools—and by extension, societal institutions at large—contributed to the cultural contradictions between the expectations of school, home, and society by not valuing the skills and assets these young women were acquiring. However, the young women's internal motivation helped them manage the contradictions with pride. Many times schoolwork had to wait, but they were committed to helping family to move ahead together, not individually. Fabiola and Frida were motivated to move themselves

ahead educationally when *familia* needs were met. For Fabiola her father was the most important person in her life. Many times she was stressed, but the reality in capitalism is that poor, disabled people cannot afford a twenty-four-hour nurse. Undocumented youth are often paid below poverty level, so families cannot afford a babysitter. Economic hardship is the root cause of Fabiola and Frida having to take on the *familia* roles. The youth were aware of the economic hardship and in a kin family they took on the role with motivation, and understanding the priority to move as a group.

This is important to understand because youth are often unable to identify *el choque* until they undergo a reflective process such as that found in YPAR. Collectively, the youth naturally become part of the complex intellectual and spiritual process of achieving the internal cycle of wisdom. In the course of these studies, the internal cycle of wisdom was achieved as students developed their voice and named the overlapping factors of the silent internal borderlands that produced *el choque*. Unveiling and confronting *el choque* led the students into what Anzaldúa called the third space, *nepantlá*.

Nepantlá

Youth at the high school and community college level became a part of the *nepantlá* process by (a) having a paradigm shift, (b) liberating themselves, and (c) holistic healing of themselves.

Paradigm Shift

Paradigm shift occurs because individuals discover where their identity and cultures intersect or where their identity sometimes clashes with the dominant culture. This discovery then liberates the individual. The paradigm shift makes one not only aware but also comfortable living within the third space, *nepantlá*.

Liberation

Liberation requires individuals to reflect and trust themselves to gain knowledge. By facing oneself and utilizing one's internal power to take action, change occurs. This allows individuals to acquire wisdom. Through this experience of liberation, of awakening, individuals reclaim their spiritual true self, and this reclaiming allows healing to take place.

Holistic Healing

Holistic healing encourages work to begin from the outside in, in order to find one's individual self. This complex intellectual and spiritual process goes deep to the core of the individual's soul of existence, thereby finding the healing space where enlightenment unveils itself while hope emerges in the individual's life. After this complex intellectual and spiritual process that the high school and community college youth experienced, they began to move to a fourth space, a space beyond *nepantlá*, a space of radical transformation we call the internal cycle of wisdom. Once students complete the YPAR process they will have the tools to transform themselves and society where they will be able to create ways where their communities can thrive we call this the fourth space of holistic healing. Below we explain community awareness and the internal conflict process where youth must engage in order to achieve the fourth space of holistic healing. In figure 2, we show the process youth go through when engaged in YPAR in order to achieve a holistic healing space where they are creating spaces for individuals and communities to thrive.



Figure 2

Community Process

In the community process, Rendón's (1994, 2002) validation theory is crucial. Validation is the process by which youth are being supported and confirmed within and outside of schools. Youth felt validated by coming

together to take action. Their peers validated their feelings. As youth heard the *testimonios* of their peers they realized they were not alone, as was discovered when women in the Latina Feminist Group (2001) gathered together to *desahogarse*.

This sense of validation felt by the youth helped them move forward into action. Validation is an important process for youth because they move from individuals to community. The youth, beginning to work together and hearing each other's *testimonios*, began keeping community in mind and as they gathered to work together, they became questioners and creators hoping to transform their communities. Hearing *testimonios* of oppression, the youth wanted to do something to stop it. They asked, "What can we do to change it?" and "How can we change what people think or help people be more open minded?" and came to the conclusion the only way to change or help people understand was through education. The youth, therefore, decided to educate their peers on immigrant and LGBTQ+ fact and myth.

Initially there was little hope for change as they believed that no one would listen. However, because the youth in YPAR were in community, they were constantly *testimoniando* with each other about their thoughts. This constant reflection of thought helped youth support each other to go beyond their fear and immobilization to action. For instance, Luna said, "Why are we doing this, they are not even going to listen to us. Some people are just going to think what they are going to think." Chuy responded, "How do you know? We have to do something before we can say something is useless. We do not really know what will happen." Kata said, "I am scared but I am going to do it. You have to do something in order to know if something works or not." Gabriela said, "I get nervous but we have to do something" (Ruiz 2007a). It was through the *testimonio* of thought that allowed youth to reflect on and rethink their own thoughts. This reflection and action gave youth courage to conduct presentations even though they might be met with hate towards LGBTQ+ and immigrant community.

As adult allies, one of the things the researchers stressed most was unity. It is through unity and solidarity that they would feel courageous when speaking to people who disagree with people being LGBTQ+ or immigrants. One needs courage to be able to engage people

who use hateful and hurtful words to refer to who you are as a human being. Hence, it was through them uniting that helped youth overcome hateful attacks, and instead of becoming angry they engaged people in a dialogue for change and acceptance.

Community Awareness

Community awareness begins with *testimonios*, in which youth talk about themselves to the group. We conducted *testimonios* by having youth tell their stories of the struggles and oppressions they had faced thus far in life and school, which helped to humanize each member of the group. Connections and solutions came later after they heard each other's stories. In this first part of community awareness, through sharing negative and positive experiences, students were able to create community and solidarity with each other. They began to be able to name similar challenges of oppression they faced or had faced, such as sexism, racism, homophobia, and xenophobia and through this find the thread that connected all of them whether they defined themselves as women, men, straight, gay, or Chican@/Latin@. As they began to name their viewpoints from which they experienced their oppression, they began to question each other and research history and current events to honor their shared truth.

Community Questioning

Youth began to deconstruct their oppression through engaging in questioning, after which they began to make connections to history, current events, and other peoples' struggles throughout the country and the world. They also began to question themselves and how they had accepted what others believed of them. In the high school, some LGBTQ+ students shared their experiences of being gay and experiencing homophobia. Not all of the students were openly out in the group. Gabriela, after listening to her peers, said, "Wow, I thought I was the only one who had to deal with my mom telling me it is a sin to be gay. After hearing all of you I don't think it is. I never thought it was because I would always ask myself how could it be if we are told God loves everyone." Kata remembered middle school being tough years and being prone to believing the myths that are told about being gay: "Middle school was tough 'cause you want to be like everyone else but you are not 'cause you begin to have feelings for your same sex,

but you are scared to say anything because everyone else at least openly says it is gross to be gay." Others, like Chuy, remember, "In middle school they would call me '*joto*,' but then others questioned it because I was tough, I did not back down from a fight. And plus, I hung out with girls, and boys always want to be your friend to get to the girls. I didn't really care" (Ruiz 2007b).

As a result of the youths' middle school experiences, they decided to do presentations at the middle school in order to reach out to gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth who might be silenced and suppress their feelings in order to fit in. However, they all said that they would not present to high school students, their peers, because they found them less open-minded than middle school students. Luna said, "When you are in middle school you are a little more open minded but here [at high school] they are ignorant. They will not listen to us." (Ruiz 2007c). The youth would not even consider other high schools in the area because it was in those spaces that they experienced most of the harassment. Gabriela remembers "Last year [at the regular high school], when I was with my girlfriend, they would call us 'fuckin' lesbians.' I would just ignore it, but my girlfriend would get mad, but I did not really care, I just ignored it. I mostly feared for her 'cause she would get mad and tell them off, and you never know if the person might do something" (Ruiz 2007c). It was these uncomfortable memories that made youth want to stay away from the high schools as part of their work, but middle school memories were of finding themselves and still figuring out what to think.

Youth also began to deconstruct the micro-aggressions they were faced with on a day-to-day basis. We use here the formulation of Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2001), who define microaggressions as subtle acts of racism. For instance, when the researchers and youth discussed "I am a culture not a costume," youth began with questions like, "It is Halloween, people are just having fun, aren't they?" and "Why are some people so sensitive?" Discussion elaborated these questions to the point where youth began to ask more pointed questions: "How do you feel when people dress with a Mexican sombrero and a tequila bottle? What image are we receiving of what it means to be Mexican? How do these images affect us? What about how indigenous people are portrayed?" The youth began to see and discuss how these images helped perpetuate a negative view of Chican@s/Latin@s. Then they made

other connections, for example, to being followed in stores. “Why are we followed in stores?” “Why is that such a common story?” It was initially difficult for the youth to recognize these as significant, but by making connections with each other’s lives and with past and current events, students were able to identify microaggressions that prevented them from expressing their realities. They gained a better understanding of immigration and LGBTQ+ policies. Through this process of reflection, youth were able to connect their collective lived experiences. Collectively, they were able to unveil the hidden inequities they had all experienced. And, through questioning each other, they helped solidify and challenge their own as well as other people’s beliefs and values. This created a collective paradigm shift toward shared values and beliefs.

Community Creation

In this stage of the process youth became active community creators. In the process of finding new questions and answers about the world, they were redefining who they were, their belief system and the implications of their thoughts. As a result, they were able to engage with others in dialogical conversations, not debate. According to Copeland (2005), there is a difference between the two. He noted that in a debate there are shared assumptions of truth, right versus wrong and good versus evil, and that there must always be a winner (47). Yet in dialogical conversation there is a respectful engagement where one does not engage the other in an argument to see who is the stronger debater; rather, one engages the other in dialogue to understand why each defends certain ideas and beliefs. Similarly, Freire (1970) believed that thinking is an action, and rethinking recreates a paradigm shift within the self and collectively.

Youth in the community college and high school were engaged in actions of rethinking, but, importantly, also became creatively active in applying their solutions. The high school YPAR group in the Southwest decided to create a Gay/Straight Alliance and give presentations to the local middle schools on homophobia, while the community college students presented to their community college peers, local high school and community on immigrant rights, focusing on AB 540, a California state law that allowed qualified undocumented students to pay in-state tuition instead of out of state tuition, thus

helping make the tuition affordable for working people. Both groups confronted micro- and macro-aggressions to engage in critical dialogues with their respective communities without applying the oppressive mechanisms of debate. Their efforts to initiate dialogue created a transformative change in their communities.

Internal Cycle

In this section, we will discuss the internal cycle and how it affected the youth. In our observations we noted the following three sub-themes: (a) the internal conflict, (b) the internal discoveries, and (c) the internal motivation.

Internal Conflict

We define internal conflict as the connection to the various internalized messages identified through the external cycle. The participants identified, recognized, and understood the internal conflict, which challenged them to look deeper within themselves. In this phase of the cycle, the individual discovers his or her internal strengths.

All the participants reported realizing that they had internalized many messages received from school, family, church, and society (including about immigration policy). These messages created an internal conflict in the participants’ lives. As they reflected upon their experience they explained how various aspects of both school and family expectations have affected their academic success, and they shared their experiences and the messages that they had internalized.

The youth shared a number of experiences that revealed the sense of disempowerment, noting that this was a direct result of the societal messages of inadequacy that shaped the way they thought and felt about themselves through their experiences. Through multiple dialogues, the participants shared messages they had internalized from their school and family experiences, reporting feeling overwhelmed and hopeless since the difficulties they faced were out of their control to change. They expressed feelings of not fitting in, of convincing themselves that in order to be accepted in this society they must behave in a certain way. For instance, in community college, Marcos explained that because of the way you look people judge you, including family and the police department. “I look like a gangbanger. I used to have friends who looked like that too; I got pulled over three times in one week. At

home my parents criticize my hair. They tell me “You look like a pothead; you look like this and that” (Chavez 2010:123).

In high school, youth at first began to doubt if they were truly sinning by being gay. The most common criticisms they received from peers at school and home were religious based. Malin said, “At home I am taken to church to get the lesbian out of me and at school I have to hear God made Adam and Eve not Eve and Eve” (Ruiz 2007c). Youth reported that no criticism made them stop having feelings for girls, but it did profoundly impact their self-worth.

Furthermore, the participants saw that the problems they encountered as Chican@s/Latin@s were often compounded by strong messages from the surrounding society that Chican@s/Latin@s as a community should conform to and accept what is given to them. However, the participants challenged this internalized message, reporting that they understood that by not asking questions or challenging the educational system, they reaped no benefit and their needs were not met; they became excluded and merely existed.

All the participants, whether LGBTQ+ or straight, reported feeling pressure to act differently in order to be accepted. This created an internal conflict or, in Spanish, *un choque*. The participants noted that this internal conflict made them feel as if they were living a split life between their school and family environments. They reported that the internal conflict affected their self-esteem and significantly influenced their emotional lives.

Internal Discoveries

All the participants reported having multiple discoveries at this stage in the process. Understanding the conflict between their school and their family opened their eyes. Participants began to say that they had internal discoveries about themselves. In the community college, Cuatlicue discovered her fears and how to reflect upon them. She stated, “Like the culture here instills fear in you and it tells you that you are wrong. Like when you assert something you know the problem. You know the point front and back.” Zapata agreed and added that from this experience he discovered that, “we are better analyzers; I had an epiphany, but I believe it was a metamorphosis” (Chavez, 2010:127).

In high school, youth began to realize, as Chuy said, “Nothing that my parents or peers at school say or do can take the gay out of me.” Malin said, “My dad kept taking me to church thinking I would change and for the longest I believed I needed to change but now I realize he is the ignorant one that needs to change, not me.” Kata added: “We are surrounded by ignorant people.” (Ruiz 2007d). The students realized that they did not have to change but the people around them did. Those who were intolerant needed to learn to see the beauty in who they were as Chican@/Latin@ youth.

This internal search guided the participants to develop voices of a more heightened consciousness. More significantly, this is where the participants became liberated; they reported feeling empowered to advocate for themselves as well as others. The internal discoveries led the participants to find their internal motivation that helped them continue on their paths and not give up on their dreams.

Internal Motivation

All the participants reported having different situations in their lives that motivated them to continue on their educational journeys. The participants reported that as they better understood the conflict, they were able to shift to their personal internal discoveries. This, in turn, led to a more profound unveiling of the situations in their lives that motivated them to succeed. The internal motivations emerged once the participants shifted from their internal discoveries where they developed voice and consciousness and became liberated. The naming of their internal motivations kept them inspired as they continued to face school and family challenges. Their experiences, feelings and identifying their internal motivations enabled the participants to change.

In the community college group, youth stated what motivated them. Zapata said, “Being undocumented motivated me to continue, because it is the only way to get up the ladder.” Tonantzin noted that her motivation came from “the whole family and traditional roles. I am only seeing these factors because that is pretty much what I am having an issue with.” Frida stated that family does influence her, sometimes in negative ways, but her motivation specifically to stay in school came from her own desire to be a role model to her younger sibling (Chavez 2010:129).

In high school, youth were motivated by their family and dreams. Chuy was motivated by family—specifically his mom—who supported him for who he was. Kata and Luna were motivated by the dream of becoming entrepreneurs of a disco or bar where everyone is allowed. They were motivated by the dream of being together forever. Malin was motivated by being who she was no matter what anyone said, so she worked, went to school, and lived on her own. High school youth were motivated by confronting the dream of the future with “*ganas*” (drive or ambition to achieve a goal). All the high school youth said that although they did not know what they would study, they knew that they needed to go to college; they did have a dream. But they were ready to confront it head on, comfortable in their own skin, proud of being Chican@/Latin@ gay students of the future. This experience of internal motivation resulted in a paradigm shift that enabled the participants to create change.

With this awareness came youths’ abilities to make connections between the different oppressions they experience simultaneously. Beneath their varied experiences with family, school, and society at large (policies directed toward them, peoples’ attitudes toward them in daily life), they were constantly going through an internal process that included the (a) internal conflict (b) internal discoveries (c) internal motivation. The internal process equipped them to be part of the internal cycle of wisdom

Internal Cycle of Wisdom

This is the space of transformation where Chican@/Latin@ youth become free thinkers and have a rooted sense of self while finding their life’s passions. The participants in this study were able to achieve this cycle by going through the complex intellectual and spiritual process of the external and internal cycle, understanding *el choque*, finding *nepantlá*, and finally having the internal cycle of wisdom to freely think for oneself, become rooted in self and begin to find their life’s calling.

When youth began the process of YPAR it was hard for them to think and question. They were accustomed to being told what to do and to follow orders. They also reported feeling invisible in the education system because their voices and the knowledge they had already accrued from the hard tasks of living were not valued or acknowledged. They were not accustomed to being asked

to contribute their thoughts or engage in dialogue. It was through the collective dialogue in the YPAR process that youth began to find their voices and learned to question. The process of *testimonio*, dialogue, reflection, and action helped youth become free thinkers. As free thinkers, they were engaged in dialogue not only with the collective YPAR group but also with family, community, and non-community members.

Youth became rooted in self because they felt comfortable in their own skin. Through the YPAR process and finding *nepantlá*, they were encouraged to decolonize their minds, understand the inequities they confront in institutions, and reclaim their internal borderlands and spirits. As they reclaimed themselves, they redefined the borderlands within themselves with acceptance of their transnational selves. Finally they began to see themselves as change agents who were able to contribute solutions in the very institutions that doubted their capabilities to even successfully contribute, not to mention create sustainable change.

Conclusion

Through the complex intellectual and spiritual process of YPAR, youth were able to dissolve their fears and take risks. They took risks by being honest with themselves and with the process. This enabled them to create action plans to solve the injustices that Chican@/Latin@ youth faced. By developing action plans and taking leadership roles, youth demonstrated compassion for others and passion for their work, revealing to themselves new possibilities for their lives’ paths.

For example, the high school students all reported being gay, lesbian, or bisexual. They experienced homophobic *choques* between home, school, society, and church. Through the process of coming out and being comfortable in their own skin they began to no longer care if school, church, society, or home accepted them. They were able to reclaim themselves as gay, lesbian, and bisexual human beings. Through the collective process of humanizing themselves they became comfortable and confident. As a result, they consciously decided that no one would take their spirituality away. Therefore, they would continue to participate in church youth programs and events. They changed their belief from questioning if they were the problem to understanding that the problem was the

homophobic society. They began to advocate that if church is a place of God, then it would have to accept them because God loved everyone, not just straight people. The high school students took back their right to choose and make decisions for themselves as freethinkers, rooted in self, and found their passion to advocate for gay youth.

At the community college level, three of the students were labeled as AB 540 students due to their immigrant undocumented status. These students experienced *choques* between school, society, and the legal system, but they collectively agreed on and understood the importance of their education. Although excluded from resources such as financial aid because of the AB 540 classification, they decided among themselves that they would not allow this label to deter them from accomplishing their goals and graduating from college. Through the process they were able to face their fear by disclosing their legal status and so were able to create and implement a social network to help each other with books, sharing of information, and other support resources. This allowed the students to become freethinkers, rooted in self, and find their passion to advocate for the immigrant community to create these same social networks they were developing at the community college.

Chican@ /Latin@ youth attain the level of the internal cycle of wisdom when they apply the knowledge they have learned within the complex intellectual and spiritual process of YPAR. Overall, both high school and community college students concluded that the collective process shifted their world paradigm from being invisible to being visible. They noted that because of this process they were now able to recognize the *choque* between the institutions they were a part of. They realized that they were in the middle of institutions that do not communicate to or with one another. They also asserted that they developed solidarity and trust, which enabled them to find their collective voice and their individual life's passion. Collectively, they faced many fears, and this helped them realize they were not alone. This created a sense of struggle whereby the students were no longer afraid to stand up and fight back for their human dignity and being. This process taught them the various levels they must go through before change can occur; it also taught them to be true to themselves. They noted that they left this metamorphosis process with *esperanza* (hope), as visible human beings with the voice

and power to make a difference for future generations of Chican@/Latin@ youth.

Given that we believe that people in communities are certified organic intellectuals, meaning that they are aware that mind, body, and soul operate together and not as separate entities, we especially see that youths' awareness that mind, body, and soul are interconnected enabled them to conduct a more in-depth reflective process in order to transform and heal their communities. YPAR is about youth healing themselves and their communities. Youth engaged in YPAR had as their main purpose to engage their communities. YPAR is a return to ancestral practices that are part of our organic knowledge that we carry inside us. In YPAR, youth are being validated every step of the way as they attempt to heal their communities. Throughout YPAR we shared our *testimonios* with urgency and purpose in order to heal. The *testimonios* helped to validate youth knowledge and work. The validation helped move us forward with a sense that we knew as organic intellectuals what we needed to do in order to heal ourselves and others. This process helped inspire youth to find their internal wisdom. The internal wisdom became their power to continue working endlessly to heal themselves and their community.

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Ethnic Studies Today: Battles and Possibilities

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When California's Governor Gavin Newsom signed AB 1460 into law on August 17, 2020, we cheered.¹ As educators of color who teach in the California State University (CSU) system and as ethnic studies educators, we celebrated the fact that the discipline of ethnic studies was being recognized for the value it brings to all students' lives. AB 1460 requires CSU students to take one 3-credit unit of any qualifying ethnic studies courses. Almost a year later on October 8, 2021, Governor Newsom signed Assembly Bill 101 making California the first state that requires students to take Ethnic Studies to earn a high school diploma. The approved AB 101 legislation requires that by 2025 all high school students take one semester course in Ethnic Studies. Despite these victories—mandated Ethnic Studies in the CSU and in California high schools—the battle continues as the implementation of Ethnic Studies remains contentious. Nonetheless, we are still hopeful in the transformative possibilities of Ethnic Studies in California.

From the demand for inclusion in the 1960s academy to the current fight from exclusion, Ethnic Studies continues to have its detractors. Just as we were reveling in the joyous occasion of the passage of AB 1460, another battle in education was on the horizon: a backlash against Critical Race Theory (CRT). One month after Governor Newsom signed AB 1460, former President Agent Orange (also known as Donald Trump) launched a misinformed

attack on CRT (Cineas 2020). This attack against CRT is an attack on all curriculum that share anti-racist goals such as Ethnic Studies. We have witnessed fascist, right-wing supporters speak out at local schools regarding the teaching of Project 1619 and all subjects regarding race, ethnicity, and sexuality. There were even those who wanted to remove “slavery” from school textbooks and replace it with terms such as “Black immigration” and “involuntary relocation.” These are also the same folks using the term “illegal aliens” in reference to immigrants particularly from Central and South America. The acrimonious battles of how culture, history, and identity are taught was heightened under Agent Orange. After his administration ended, his minions continued the attack. We not only witnessed the attack, but we were on the frontlines in the implementation of Ethnic Studies at our university. Even though AB 1460 had become law, we still had to fight those who opposed it. Much like the backlash against the 1954 Brown versus Board of Education decision, some folks within the CSU and on our campus tried to devise ways to block Ethnic Studies from becoming a requirement.

Implementation of AB1460 at Cal Poly Humboldt

Discussions on how the new Ethnic Studies requirement should be implemented at Cal Poly Humboldt was met with hostility. Meetings were held where faculty from various departments believed they could teach Ethnic Studies with fidelity. Faculty from various departments did not stop to think that Ethnic Studies is a field of study that requires the same depth of knowledge and expertise as any other discipline. Ethnic Studies (which is housed in the Critical Race, Gender & Sexuality Studies and Native

* Authorship is in alphabetical order, authors worked on this article with equal amounts of labor

1 AB 1460 Bill Text: https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201920200AB1460

American Studies Departments at Cal Poly Humboldt) had to stand up and defend their field. There were several points of contention during the implementation process of AB 1460. One was the lack of communication and transparency on behalf of the ASCSU (Academic Senate of the CSU) and the CSU (Chancellor's Office) when it came to discussing, vetting, and approving the core competencies (student learning outcomes) of AB 1460 with Ethnic Studies faculty, collectively represented by the CSUCES (CSU Council on Ethnic Studies). This collaboration was required by the law (AB 1460 Education Code 89032c), yet the Chancellor's Office did not facilitate this process. Instead, they tried to rush the approval of the core competencies one month after the law was passed without any intentional collaboration and input from the CSUCES, and gave false and misleading accounts of shared governance. It was crucial for the representatives of the CSUCES (organized as Native American, Latina/o, African American, and Asian American caucuses) to develop core competencies together, as they are the experts of the field and should be the ones to determine what criteria and learning objectives should be met under this requirement. This sparked a collective resistance by Ethnic Studies faculty represented by the CSUCES to halt this rushed timeline. Together, they organized weekly meetings on Zoom to carefully discuss, debate, and approve core competencies that reflected epistemologies and methodologies of Ethnic Studies and central concepts and themes of each group. Over 100 Ethnic Studies faculty from across the CSU regularly attended these meetings in the span of a month which led to the drafting and approval of a final draft in October 2020. This final draft went beyond simply outlining student learning outcomes; it also strategically included criteria that respects the expertise of Ethnic Studies faculty and protects the autonomy of Ethnic Studies departments on each campus. This meant establishing parameters that emphasized CSU Ethnic Studies graduation requirement courses must be courses that already exist in Ethnic Studies departments (e.g. Native American Studies, Latina/o Studies, African American Studies, Asian American Studies); or be courses that are "proposed, designed and implemented by faculty with expertise in Ethnic Studies (and related disciplines) and be an Ethnic Studies department/unit approved cross-listed course" housed and offered within Ethnic Studies departments (CSUCES).

At Cal Poly Humboldt, Ethnic Studies faculty organized an Ethnic Studies Council with faculty from our two departments to create a campus wide policy to meet the requirements of the law for implementation. The council also partnered with the GEAR and ICC Committees, the Academic Senate, as well as in conversation with Department Chairs. The council worked diligently to review and adapt the criteria from the CSUCES Core Competencies to our campus. Students and faculty of color faced a lot of increased racial hostility from some faculty and administrators during this time, who deemed the Ethnic Studies requirement (and Ethnic Studies departments and faculty overall) as "unnecessary," "expensive," "intrusive," "disruptive," and "misleading." This racial hostility also came in the form of public attacks posted in Zoom chats during virtual Academic Senate meetings. These were primarily directed at students who were advocating for racial justice and Ethnic Studies faculty and allies who they implied were working surreptitiously rather than in concert with university policies to implement the Ethnic Studies requirement. This pushback was expected and not new to Ethnic Studies departments and faculty, who have historically fought for over 50 years to be recognized as a multidisciplinary field and area of study. The pushback at Cal Poly Humboldt revolved around (1) a lack of understanding that Ethnic Studies is a discipline with disciplinary experts; (2) a perceived idea that somehow Ethnic Studies departments will be unfair to other departments that will want to propose courses that meet the AB 1460 requirement; (3) a paternalism suggesting courses proposed outside Ethnic Studies should be approved automatically and be given cross listing designation and a course number from Ethnic Studies departments without the involvement and approval of Ethnic Studies departments; and (4) a suggestion that somehow utilizing this law to support Ethnic Studies growth is "back door" support and preferential treatment of Ethnic Studies departments, not understanding the colonial structures of academia and their continued denial of Ethnic Studies as a legitimate field of knowledge production and teaching. These arguments in opposition to the AB 1460 requirement and its implementation were a pattern observed across CSU campuses. Meeting regularly to report on campus-specific developments around AB 1460 implementation, the CSUCES shared and discussed strategies that worked and organized effectively to

get the support from students, faculty, and community. The Ethnic Studies Council at Cal Poly Humboldt put together an Ethnic Studies Implementation Policy for our campus approved by the Academic Senate in Spring 2021.² The CSUCES Core Competencies were crucial in that it protected the requirement from being managed outside of Ethnic Studies Departments and by non-Ethnic Studies faculty through its criteria stipulating an Ethnic Studies course prefix and for AB 1460 (implemented as an Area F General Education requirement) to be housed in our two Ethnic Studies departments (CRGS and NAS) on campus. Furthermore, we added steps to encourage transparency about qualifications and intent in proposing

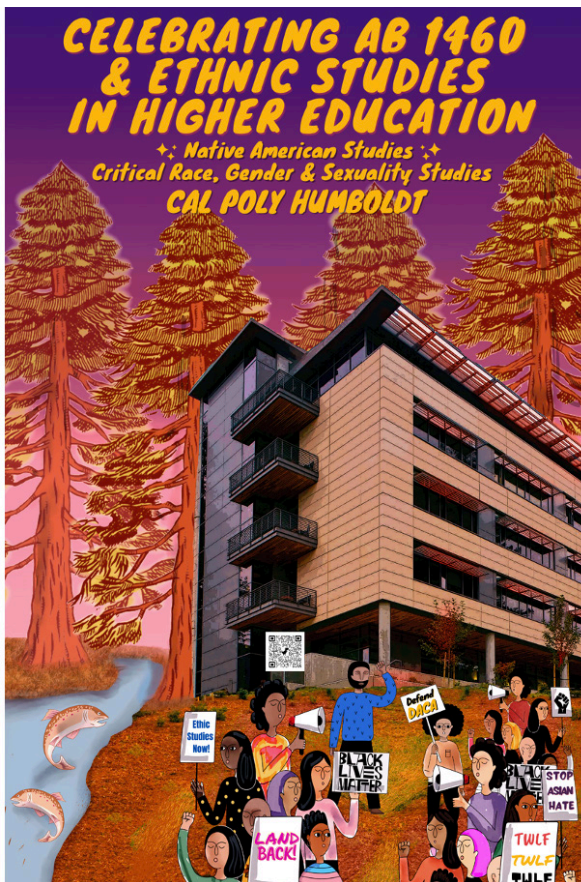


Figure 1: Poster celebrating AB 1460 at Cal Poly Humboldt

² Cal Poly Humboldt Ethnic Studies Implementation Policy: https://academicprograms.humboldt.edu/sites/default/files/proposing_area_f_course.pdf

AB 1460/Area F courses, requiring that proposing faculty meet with Ethnic Studies Department Chairs first to discuss proposed courses before submitting to Curriculog if approved. In the end, CRGS and NAS were able to build and design the implementation of Ethnic Studies. However, challenges remain with ongoing systemic racism and paternalism that continues to undermine Ethnic Studies and its potential for critique and social transformation.

High School Implementation

The implementation of Ethnic Studies in high schools has been a battle due to districts failing to commit to the field of Ethnic Studies. Now that AB 101 has been passed, the battle for its implementation is at the center of curriculum decisions.³ AB 2016 is the California state model curriculum for 9-12 Ethnic Studies. There are at least two divergent perspectives of what will be taught in high school Ethnic Studies. On the one hand, the state model curriculum committee bowed to right-wing political pressure, and as a result produced an Ethnic Studies curriculum that centers a master narrative that has plagued education since its inception in the United States. This master narrative either ignores or marginalizes people of color whose voices, histories, and cultures have made significant contributions to a truly democratic nation. For instance, the state curriculum eliminated critical conversations about Palestine and the creation of Israel. Another example is the state's lack of support in teaching Indigenous knowledge. The lawsuit against In lak'ech and Ashe are such examples. California settled by eliminating Indigenous cultural practices from the model curriculum. The fact that California decided to give into this lawsuit shows the lack of cultural responsiveness they have for African American, Chicana/Latina and Native American students who have fought for a robust Ethnic Studies K-21 curriculum.

Nevertheless, there are those who support the Liberated Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Consortium perspective (Liberated Ethnic Studies 2023). The Liberated Ethnic Studies Model, unlike the state's model

³ AB 101 Bill Text: https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/bill-NavClient.xhtml?bill_id=202120220AB101

curriculum, advocates for a curriculum reminiscent of the 1960s student movement who called for the self-determination and liberation of ethnic groups such as African Americans, Arab Americans, Asian Americans, Native American, and Chicana/Latina. For example, Dr. Theresa Montaño, states that,

As educators, it is our responsibility to do what others will not, to teach truth. The refusal to acknowledge Palestinian history and human rights by those in government and by the media mirror the actions taken by the California Department of Education when it rejected inclusion of Palestine in the California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (Lowenthal Marcus 2022).

Moreover, proponents of authentic Ethnic Studies contend that the state curriculum falls short in teaching the lived experiences of people of color by people of color, thereby marginalizing and devaluing their ontologies and epistemologies. This is coupled with the fact that schools have local control on how they will implement AB 101. The idea of local control is that decision-making will be communal. However, depending on the community's political climate, the curriculum they choose can either support a more liberated curriculum or one that dismisses the founding principles of Ethnic Studies by creating their own version of multicultural education.⁴

After deciding the content of the Ethnic Studies curriculum, another concern will be who will teach it. Some school districts will make sure people who teach Ethnic Studies are qualified by having an undergraduate or MA in Ethnic Studies, while others will allow those with less qualifications, such as just having one or two courses in Ethnic Studies. Some fear that districts will allow their Social Studies teachers to teach Ethnic Studies because it reduces and essentializes the discipline. With the latter, the possibilities of compromising Ethnic Studies and delegitimizing it as a discipline may come into fruition. These varied perspectives—one that values ethnic studies, another that wants to pick and choose what to teach and what to

eliminate, and that does not understand its significance becomes a battleground in each school district.

Ethnic Studies Resistance- A Call to Action

The importance of what we teach in higher education and high school speaks to our role as Ethnic Studies educators in ending the cycle of one-step-forward-two-steps-back in the fight to transform American institutions, specifically education. The discipline of Ethnic studies grew out of the 1960s Civil Rights and student social movements. These movements demanded empowerment and recognition of historically marginalized groups of color. These movements played a central role in radicalizing African Americans, Asian, Chicana/Latina, and Native Americans to effect change in a society that deemed them disposable. Part of their agenda was aimed at education. For too long higher education and K-12, in all disciplines, embraced epistemological frameworks drawn from white thinkers, scholars, and educators. In other words, education was just too white. As a result, the lived experiences, the histories, and culture of groups of color was either objectified or non-existent. Students wanted academia to include their voices, histories, and experience. We as Ethnic Studies educators need to embody a pedagogy of resistance to individualism, spirit murdering curriculum, surviving, and allowing others to define our identities and experience in order to reach joy, and the ability to thrive in solidarity with one another (Tijerina Revilla 2021; Love 2019). Therefore, we as Ethnic Studies educators and scholars need to:

1. Fight the backlash against Ethnic Studies. African American Studies scholar Carol Anderson would call this right-wing resistance against Ethnic Studies “white rage.” In *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide*, Dr. Anderson documents the depths and lengths white people go to in their refusal to follow the constitutional law of desegregation. Whenever African Americans insist on their humanity and rights, white people unleash white rage in their “brutally relentless tactics” by denying Black people their humanity (Anderson 2017).
2. Educators need to use CRT as a framework in building academic curricula, because it will give them the necessary tools needed to transform education that is truly a democratic reality for Chicana/

⁴ Multicultural teaching is centered around surface-level understandings of non-white communities and is essentially a settler-colonial technique of commodified inclusion.

Latinx, Asian, Black, and Native students (Delgado et al. 2017). In addition, drawing on the discipline of Ethnic Studies as well works toward empowering not just African American students, but all students with the knowledge and tools to help transform our world for the better. Critical Race Theory is a call to action because it is asking to detect and unveil racism through practice, policy curriculum, instruction, and funding. Once we detect the racist practices and policies, we need to change it.

3. To this point, another step educators can take towards this transformation is employing Culturally Responsive Teaching (another CRT). This can begin by choosing textbooks and other materials that center the lived experiences, history, and culture of African Americans, Chicana/x/ Latinx, Asian, and Indigenous communities. We use this approach in our own pedagogies. Such an approach is embraced by the authors of *Teaching Black Lives* who write, “From the North to the South, corporate curriculum lies to our students, conceals pain and injustice, masks racism, and demeans our Black students. But it’s not only the curriculum that is traumatizing students” (Watson et al. 2018). It is also who is in front of the classroom and their own miseducation, as well as hostile school climate. As college professors we understand that it is important to cultivate a healthy self-esteem for students of color in K-21 while also teaching students how to be anti-racists.

4. Stop the horizontal hostility. Struggling for resources often divides us, much like the family arguing over late grandma’s estate. Let’s not throw each other under the bus to get the crumbs from the table. Now that Ethnic Studies became law and monies came with the policy, the ugly exchanges and nice/nasty has intensified. Instead, this is the time we come together—in solidarity with all groups of color. We need to build and strengthen each other’s resistance and not destroy one another. Yes, we have differences, but let’s find ways to support each other in all of our unique collective ways of belonging. We need each other.

5. Let’s nurture our spirit, revive our soul, and protect our joy. As Dr. Anita Tijerina Revilla reminds us, we need to be intentional about being Spirit protectors and restorers (Tijerina Revilla 2021). Patricia

Williams coins the term spirit murder when she describes how racism has emotional and spiritual consequences. We have to take care of ourselves in order to teach our students. In other words, our health matters: physically, mentally, and spiritually.

6. Embolden community solidarity. Ethnic Studies educators need to be involved in the community in meaningful ways. This means sincerely asking what our community members need. Now is the time to really connect theory to praxis and act on that! What are the struggles of the people outside of academia? How do they see us? Do they see us as being one of *them*? If not, perhaps it is us that need to adjust. In other words, check yourself first.

Conclusion

Our liberation is tied to ethnic studies. Education is one arena of struggle that must remain steadfast and unshakable. From the Stop W.O.K.E. Act in Florida to the backlash against critical race theory across the nation, there are battles to be fought. However, there are also beautiful possibilities. Keep in mind, that ethnic studies is more than a discipline with methodologies and theories, ethnic studies is our lives. This is a fight for survival for each other, our families, our children, and our communities.

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