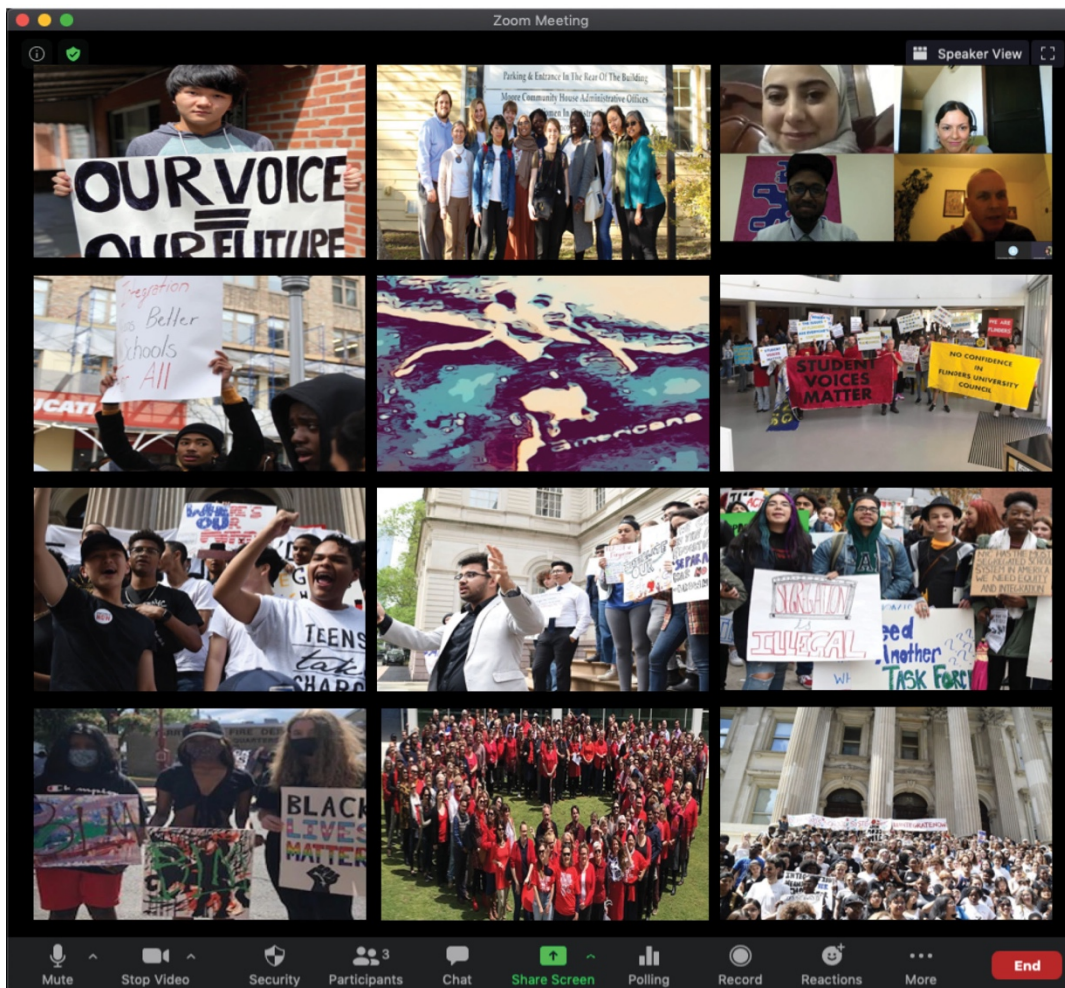# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Introduction

Visions of New Student Activism

by Jaqueline Brady

IMAGES COURTESY OF DULCE MICHELLE, MATT YORK, PREMILLA NADASEN, AIDAN CORNELIUS-BELL, JAQUELINE BRADY AND PIPER A. BELL. ASSEMBLED BY RUBY KEZUR.

For Louis Kampf and all students in movements for a more socially just world.

Your heart is a muscle the size of your fist--Keep on loving, keep on fighting.

—Ramshackle Glory

There may be a time when we are powerless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time when we fail to protest

—Elie Wiesel

This special issue of *Radical Teacher* on New Student Activism has been relatively long and rather tumultuous in the making. Let's rewind to when we first started talking about doing a special issue on this topic back in 2018. At the time, several young student protest stars had risen to the status of internationally famous pop icons. Notable among them were Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani feminist and activist for girls' education; Emma Gonzalez, the Parkland massacre survivor turned anti-gun activist; and Greta Thunberg, the Swedish climate activist. Yousafzai's galvanizing story of being shot by the Taliban for encouraging girls to attend school was being read by third graders; posters depicting Gonzalez along with the slogan *We Call BS* decorated not only the offices of progressive professors but also corporate storefronts; and an international surge in youth activism on social media was being attributed to Thunberg and widely recognized as "the Greta Effect." These student-aged protest celebrities operated in the popular imaginary as hopeful signs that the younger generation was working bravely for social change. But, laudable as their accomplishments are, they were not our inspiration for this issue on new student movements.

At *Radical Teacher*, we know that no single individual can embody the collective resistance that is necessary to combat the destructive structures that control our lives. Only social movements composed of lots of people doing lots and lots of everyday organizing can do that. And so, our hopes were set on what looked like an increase--could it be a movement wave?-- in organized student resistance on university and college campuses across the US. Campuses here seemed to be bubbling, if not roiling, with student protests against aspects of neoliberalism, racism, and sexism. Meanwhile streets in Chile and Hongkong were erupting in student-led pro-democracy and anti-government demonstrations. Student protesters were stirring things up from walk outs to die ins; organizing through hashtag posts on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram; carrying signs and mattresses; using their bodies and words. They were taking aim at the neoliberal policies responsible for student debt, top-down university governance structures, and unethical corporate investments. They were demanding stronger responses to racist incidents and the removal of Confederate symbols and monuments at their schools, along with an end to police brutality in their neighborhoods. And they were working to raise awareness about sexual harassment and castigating higher education for housing a shameful culture of sexual violence and rape.

By their very nature, such student movements are multifaceted, mobile, and morphable, making them difficult to pin down. Their numerous varying actions, however well organized, are often purposely disruptive and their lasting impacts are hard to measure. As a result, they are much harder to capture in the mainstream media than the charismatic, and usually telegenic, individuals who might come to represent resistance. Plus the powerful forces that student movements fight against usually want them out of sight. Still, the groundswell of student movements growing on campuses was impossible to ignore. *The Atlantic Monthly* had noticed this "renaissance in student activism" (Wong) already back in 2015, attributing it to the influence of the Global Occupy Movement, which inspired a series of internationally coordinated protests. By the fall of 2018, Harvard's *Ed. Magazine* reported on "the most forceful surge of youth activism since the 1960s" (Jason). It was in this context of "the new age of student activism" (the declaration by Harvard's *Ed. Magazine*) that we drafted, then circulated, our call for submissions and soon began receiving several of the articles that appear in this issue.

Then we got pummeled by the Covid-19 crisis. Campuses closed down, forcing students to go home and student activists to regroup. For a while, our streets got quiet except for the piercing *wahhhh!* of ambulances transporting those with the deadly virus. We fretted and grieved; "pivoted" to remote learning and online teaching; and adapted to the "new normal" of social distancing, all the while trying to make larger sense of the "rapidly evolving situation" outside our doors. At times, doubt crept in: how relevant are student movements in the midst of a pandemic with colleges deserted by students, faculty, and administration; and streets empty of people? Could this protracted Covid moment herald the end to education as we know it? And if so, what will happen to the kind of student activism that not only shaped our perspectives as radical teachers but also, we believe, improved our institutions of learning, disciplinary fields, and academic departments?

Just as these questions started forming, eroding our confidence in the urgency of producing this issue on New Student Activism, George Floyd was killed by the police in Minneapolis on May 25. The nearly nine-minute video of his murder went viral, showing Floyd handcuffed and lying with his face on the ground, pleading for his breath, life, and ultimately his mother. Almost instantly (and in spite of Covid quarantine restrictions), people across the US and in over 60 countries around the world took to the streets in spectacular displays of opposition to racial violence and police brutality. The movement for Black Lives was reignited, and students were out front. The hard questions they were asking--"Am I next?" "Who do you call when the police murder?" and "How many weren't filmed?"--made it more clear than ever that student activism, on and off campus, was a matter of life and death.

Less than a week later, while we were still processing what sometimes seemed like a tsunami of sad and surreal events, another painful thing happened: we lost our dear

comrade and founding *Radical Teacher* board member Louis Kampf (to non-Covid-related illness). Louis had been in hospice care for some weeks, but the news of his death still hit hard. He had enthusiastically participated in a face-to-face board meeting just before Covid lockdown and had continued to respond to our group in emails filled with political conviction and linguistic wit, his signature combination. We never imagined we would have to say goodbye to Louis so soon or get used to board meetings without his caring and curmudgeonly presence, and we will miss his steady and supportive "solidarity, with a dash of love" (the closing words of one of his final emails to us).

We published Louis' obituary in Volume #117, the most recent issue of our magazine. We now dedicate this volume on student activism to him and reprint his radical Presidential Address to the Modern Language Association (MLA) convention in 1971: "'It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)': Literature and Language in the Academy." We wanted to include Louis' talk, framed here with the words of his fellow founding *Radical Teacher* editorial board members/colleagues/friends Paul Lauter and Dick Ohmann, partly to pay homage to him for his decades of tireless work in so many movements for social justice. But we also thought it particularly fitting to run Louis' speech in this issue about new student activism because it addresses several of the problems that activists on college and university campuses are still contending with today. Already back in 1971, for instance, Louis lambasted an academy devoted to serving the elite few, anticipating neoliberalism's current stranglehold on higher education. He rebukes the academic profession for its irresponsible overproduction of PhDs--for plunking them into a disappearing job market to compete for precious few full-time or tenure-track positions while marking impossible piles of student papers. Louis also smashes the still shockingly beloved model of an academy that secludes itself from the workaday world and its political relations. The disciplines of the humanities, in particular those of literature and modern languages, he argues, should not be conceived of as self-enclosed fields for a privileged professoriate who, in the apt if indelicate parlance of Stanley Aronowitz, think that their shit don't stink. For Louis, who could have been speaking for all of us at *Radical Teacher,* our purpose as educators is not located in "enclaves devoted to separating the business of the intellect from the clamor of the world outside." Instead, worthwhile teaching must be political. Moreover, to make any meaningful change inside the educational institutions where we work, we have to join movements and work for radical change outside of them.

Suffice it to say that during the span of time in which this issue on new student activism was being produced, many of us had to navigate a destabilizing topography. (And this is not even to mention the constantly quaking landscape of the Trump Administration and similar authoritarian regimes elsewhere in the world). The articles that appear on these pages evolved through the long year's cascade of crises. The authors worked to take the changing contexts into consideration while they revised. They did this most clearly in two ways: 1) by speculating on the efficacy of virtual technologies for new methods of meeting, organizing, and consciousness raising; and 2) by touching on Black Lives Matter and the protests raging on the streets since May 25.

Accommodating to shifting circumstances gave us time to compile a more extensive selection of material on New Student Activism. In addition to Louis' MLA Address, we feature seven articles, which vary in approach and subject matter, from an ethnographic study of radical student activist groups in California, to a pedagogical discussion of service learning in Mississippi, to an essay that argues for the importance of internet memes in political consciousness raising and radical teaching, to a narrative essay providing a cautionary tale regarding the destructive potential of Alt-Right counter demonstrators and offering along with it as some protection, a working annotated bibliography on freedom of speech. We also include reviews of Jerusha O'Connor's book *The New Student Activists: The Rise of Neoactivism on College Campuses* and Roderick Ferguson's book *We Demand: The University and Student Protest*. In addition, we have three "Teaching Notes" offering lessons about #MeToo, the student debt crisis, and activist activities for pre-service teachers. And we were able to expand this part of our magazine with a new section of "Activist Notes**"** featuring inspiring contributions from Liz Sanchez, an activist working to change the California State University System, and Sophie Mode, who shares the voices of students from Teens Take Charge (TTC), a New York City public school activist group started by high school students. Teens Take Charge photographer Dulce Michelle also provides us with an accompanying photo series of their demonstrations so that we can see this young group in action, protesting inequity in NYC public schools.

In the process of selecting the range of works presented here, we prioritized submissions that affirmed the voices of student activists, encouraging some authors to make even more space for them. All in all, we hope that you will find this issue offers a thought-provoking arrangement of pieces about new student movements and current activism, with a rich mix of student activist voices. We encourage you to listen closely for the composite conversation that emerges among the different contributions to this volume, for it is raising urgent issues, highlighting tricky tensions, and asking difficult questions.

When we take together all of the different contributions in this issue, some clear themes appear. Here's what we see among the new student activist groups represented in this issue:

They use digital and internet technologies to beneficial effect.

Whether meeting on Zoom, agitating through political memes, or wielding the camera on their smartphones to bear witness to injustice, the new student groups featured in these pages are adept at tech. Although student movements have long used available technologies to mobilize their members and circulate their messages, it is clear that today's internet and digital technologies are more effective for socially distant organizing well beyond the Covid

crisis. With their substantially wider and more instantaneous reach, the technologies being used readily enable student groups on the West coast to partner with groups on the East, and for activists in international student movements across the globe to come together.

They resist hierarchies in their own organizations.

Not unlike 1960s organizations such as Students for a Democratic Society, new activists have internalized the distrust of hierarchical relations, and it shows in the way they organize themselves. Several of the groups discussed here have adopted horizontal participatory methods, intentionally working against the tendency toward hierarchical formation in organizing, which they see as inherently anti-democratic. Their respect for intersectional identities, another through line among these activists, provides a dynamic framework of fluid subject positions that seems more compatible with horizontal approaches and participatory democracy.

They are not afraid of the C words: Care and Caring.

In what appears to be a departure from the anti-bourgeois discourse of self-sacrifice that is familiar to us from the radical student movements of the 1960s New Left, the student groups in this volume attend to their need for self-care. They recognize the detrimental health effects of their activist work as they confront powerful neoliberal administrations and endure intimidating counter attacks from the alt-right. As part of their attention to wellbeing, they prioritize the building of caring relationships within their groups and see their activist work as an act--or actions--of love.

They place importance on the process of cultivating a collective vision.

Several groups here show that co-creating a shared vision is a central step in coming together as activists. From "visioning processes'' conducted by international activists who gather on Zoom to collaborative writing done by students inside prisons, these groups understand the value of building a communal vision for social change and the potential of storytelling for activating the radical imagination. Many groups know the legacies of student activism that precede them and draw on them for inspiration. These collaborative vision building processes bear some semblance to earlier feminist consciousness raising practices, particularly in so far as they help to establish a common discourse. Their purpose, however, seems to be more about unifying members who are already activists than creating awareness that might lead to activism.

Some do and some do not focus on movement building or imagine a revolution as their end goal.

Some groups discussed here follow the pattern of 1980s activists who worked, as our general editor Sarah Chin has pointed out, "in smaller orbits, on specific goals." They go about their routine business of organizing without counting on cultural or political revolutions. Still others, harkening back to the 1960s and earlier, do see their activist work as part of a broad movement toward revolutionary change.

They still disagree as to whether they should work inside or outside of the system they are trying to change.

The new activists here are wrangling over an old question of social justice movements: Is it better to work within the system in order to change it, or must effective resistance come from outside? This fraught question is perhaps best known to us from the Black Integrationists versus Black Separatists debates of the 1970s. (Recall, for instance, James Baldwin's famous essay arguing that Black English is a separate language and that Black children should be taught by Black educators.) A version of this dilemma emerges most noticeably here among the student groups that are fighting neoliberalism at colleges and universities. This is partly because these student activists are embedded in and reliant on the same corporate academic system that they oppose. Some even learned their activism through radical professors like us who protest on campus alongside them. So it is not always clear for activists at colleges and universities if they should (in their own argot) "Play well with others!" or "Fight the power!"

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Nowhere is this inside/outside conundrum more obvious than in the article "We Don't Need Your Permission: The Era of Non Affiliated Student Activism" by Rebecca Dolhinow. Part of a fifteen-year ethnographic study of student activists mostly in the California State University system, Dolhinow's essay looks at how groups position themselves vis-a-vis the organizational structures of colleges and universities. She argues that the groups that elect to operate outside of the college or university system--particularly those that do not gain status as officially affiliated or campus sponsored student groups--have more freedom. Activism in neoliberal campus settings, Dolhinow shows, gets co-opted by corporate administrations who only permit the kinds of student organizing that helps sell the university. Meanwhile, more radical groups are controlled by the administration, who monitor their actions, limiting and surveilling their meeting spaces on campus. While Dolhinow's article makes clear that student groups are safer and more autonomous when they work outside of the system, she suggests that their decision to do so may come with a price on their health. Liz Sanchez builds on this discussion in their Activist Note "The Great Sham of the California State University System."

In a move that we think would satisfy Gerald Graff, we have included an article that "teaches the conflict" presented by this student movement dilemma. Whereas Dolhinow wants non-affiliated student activists fighting neoliberal policies from outside of the system to be heard by university administrators, Aidan Cornelius-Bell and Piper Bell believe that student activists will be more effective if they work from within the system, "sharing the university" as "partners" and "with a seat at the table." In "Partnership as Student Power: Democracy and Governance in a Neoliberal University," they discuss a recent managerialist restructuring at South Australia's Flinders University, arguing that student activism is indeed necessary to resist the corporatization of the university and to change it from a business model focused on marketplace success into one that functions in a democratic manner for the public good. They contend, however, that working within neoliberal structures, as they have done, holds out hopeful possibilities for such a change and is a more relevant form of student activism today than previous kinds of activism that came from outside the university system as part of broader movements for social justice.

In their two-part work "Free Speech and Academic Freedom in the Era of the Alt-Right," Robin Hackett and Javier Rivera demonstrate that student activism on campuses today is not only co-opted by neoliberal administrations. It is also threatened by odious alt-right groups, like Turning Point USA (TPUSA), which have misappropriated claims of freedom of speech and stolen some subversive moves from the playbooks of earlier student movements. The first section of this work, "The Weaponization of Free Speech," tells a harrowing story of how off-campus alt-right activists--in Gorilla costume and using guerilla tactics--crashed a rally sponsored by College Democrats. In the series of events that ensued, a professor's relatively innocuous, albeit appropriately vexed, Facebook post was taken out of context and circulated on alt-right sites, resulting in vicious harassment--including threatening emails and phone calls--against faculty who supported the campus rally.

The authors warn us that hateful groups such as TPUSA are organized and out there, poised to attack personnel and programs, particularly those connected to Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, and Race and Ethnic Studies. (In fact, just recently, one such group made a vile attack at my own college, Zoombombing an LGBTQ+ Anti-Bullying Event that was sponsored by our Student Life Organization.) Hackett and Rivera maintain, however, that teaching and learning about hate speech, so that we may distinguish it from free speech, can help us build "cultures of resistance and resilience in the face of these attacks." To this end, they offer us a chronologically arranged "Annotated Bibliography on Academic Freedom," covering several major works on this topic from the culture wars of the early 90s to the Trump era. They encourage us to add to and share this working bibliography with other educators and students. This contribution to our issue is especially pertinent in the context of Trump's 2019 Executive Order on Campus Free Speech, which pretends to promote free inquiry at institutions, but in implementation will more likely will result in propping up alt-right organizations and conservative watchdog groups.

In his article "Collective Visioning: Igniting the Radical Imagination," activist-scholar Matt York asserts that we have more to learn about activism from social movements on the streets than from courses on the neoliberal campus. Tracing some key antecedents of the recent "transnational wave of revolt," York maps a genealogy of liberatory knowledge co-production emerging among activists within social movements. One of the most salient lessons that results from this history of social movements and knowledge co-production, according to York, concerns emancipatory methods of "collective visioning." These methods are non-hierarchical and, in the author's view, necessary for imagining social change. "We cannot think an end to capitalism," York argues, without such a process of collective visioning because we cannot build a world that we cannot imagine. (This point might explain why so many progressive educators and *Radical Teacher* board members are currently reading Afrofuturist novels.) His article suggests that we may have thrown the baby of the radical imagination out when we got rid of the utopian bath water. And now, in order for ecological and anti-capitalist activists to move forward, we need a hopeful but practical shared vision, grounded in caring relationships, that is constructed collaboratively through horizontal processes gleaned from social movements.

Rhiannon Cates, Benjamin Hall, James Broughton, Andrew Reeves, Faith Hocutt Ringwelski, Kathryn Zaro, Jenna Richards, and Lani Roberts are the authors of the collaboratively written article "'Building that World': Movements of Vision in the Carceral Classroom." They would strongly agree with York that co-creating collective visions of a better future is essential activist work. The eight writers in this collaboration are two teaching assistants and six university students from a writing course taught inside a correctional facility as part of the Inside-Outside Exchange Program, which brings incarcerated students and conventional college students together in carceral classrooms**.** Here, where locked doors, prison walls, and barbed wire demarcate both physical and mental boundaries, the very act of coming together to learn, write, and "think an end to prisons" is already one of courageous intentional resistance. Echoing a quandary similar to that faced by the student activists Dolhinow discusses, these authors ask: "How do we go about creating change and repairing harm caused by institutions from within those very institutions?" They find an answer in their "Writing as Activism" course work, where they see their integrated learning experience and collaborative narrative writing as a loving "practice of post-carceral world-building," part of a student-led prison abolition movement dedicated "to bringing a world beyond prisons into being."

In their essay, "'OK Boomer': Internet Memes as Consciousness Building," Morgan Anderson and Gabriel Keehn encourage us to pay attention to the influence of internet memes in order to see their potential as tools for raising political awareness. The authors point out that while the usefulness of internet technologies and social media for

organizing activists has been widely recognized, the power of internet memes has generally been overlooked, even though memes have become a prevalent form of political communication for young people today. Unpacking the role of the irreverent "OK Boomer" meme, Anderson and Keehn explain that iterations of it are a way for millennials and young people to convey their frustration with the hypocritical Boomer mindset, which deems millennials spoiled, lazy, and immature, even though Boomers are actually the ones culpable for having handed down seemingly insurmountable structural inequalities. On the surface, OK Boomer memes here compare to British punk rock in Dick Hebdige's (2011) description of it as an apparently defiant cultural form that offers only oblique resistance. But the authors of this article see memes as a "proto movement" that presents more direct opposition to hegemony than we initially might expect. They posit that internet memes can function, in the general culture, as "consciousness building work that is a necessary precondition for political organizing" and, in our classes, as radical pedagogical tools that provide effective starting points for teaching about structural power.

Finally, for those of us who see our classes as the principle sites of our social activism, Premilla Nadasen's essay, "Pedagogy and the Politics of Organizing in Mississippi," demonstrates the value of experiential learning that goes beyond the comfort zones of our liberal campuses. Nadasen reflects on lessons learned from teaching "Mississippi Summer," a collaboratively designed community-engagement course. For this course, the author and her Barnard College students traveled to Biloxi, and other areas in Mississippi, to work with the Mississippi Low-Income Child Care Initiative (MLICCI), a local non profit organization that helps underprivileged working mothers. As opposed to many community-based learning experiences that aim to benefit the students involved, Nadasen's course was designed in close partnership with MLICCI to respond to its needs as a community-serving public advocacy organization. At the request of MLICCI, one of the main course objectives was to develop an Index of Women's Economic Security. Nadasen's class succeeded in this goal, but along the way there were some unexpected learning outcomes that were more inspiring than accomplishing a concrete task. Nadasen and her students discovered that communities of grassroots activists, even in the deep red states that have abandoned them, are busy working together to develop networks for collective well-being. The author underscores the significance of this kind of "under the radar" activism, which is based on building caring communal relationships among ordinary people. In this approach to community uplift, Nadasen sees vestiges of the work of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), particularly in their rejection of top down organizing in favor of empowering ordinary people. According to Nadasen, this often-ignored form of activism--this constant and loving relationship building work-- "cultivates leadership," "lays the groundwork for mass protest," and can result in "meaningful and lasting change." Emphasizing collective co-learning processes over individual final products, experiential classes like "Mississippi Summer" are themselves a form of educational activism that counteracts the grade obsessed neoliberal tendency toward personal achievement.

To conclude this introduction to our issue on New Student Activism, we thought it would be good to take a cue from the encouraging activist groups discussed in these pages. Let's try co-creating a new vision of student activism that does not make the mistake of focusing on any one individual activist star. Please suspend, for the sake of this closing exercise, your distrust in Zoom, or similar digital platforms, as capitalist technologies with problems of social equity and privacy. Instead, picture a secure Zoom meeting filled with hundreds of thousands of social activist participants, including full groups and whole movements, who are fighting for social justice and a better world. See Black Lives Matter, Never Again, and #METOO along with all the other well-known new activist movements. But notice also all the local, lesser known, though equally important, new groups such as Teens Take Charge and Students for Quality Education. Please make sure not to overlook the millions of progressive educators using social justice pedagogy. Go ahead and invite all your activist friends and their activist groups to join this imaginary planning meeting on the topic of collaborative wishes for the future. And while we are here, let's call on the angel of history and ask her to forward an invitation to our ancestral groups like SNCC and SDS from the 60s, and the anti-apartheid and AIDS movements from the 1980s. Make sure that Louis Kampf gets the invite too. We need them all to attend so that we can absorb the wisdom of their experience. Times are dark, but this window is big and bright. Your mic is on. Are you ready to contribute?

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RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

"It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)": Literature and Language in the Academy

by Louis Kampf

LOUIS DELIVERS THE MLA PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS AT THE AMERICANA HOTEL IN CHICAGO IN 1971. IMAGE BY JAQUELINE BRADY.

Preface to Louis Kampf's 1971 MLA Address

by Paul Lauter

It's 1968, a lovely year: Martin Luther King, Jr. and Bobby Kennedy are murdered. Rebellions all over America follow King's assassination and help bring the war home. In Vietnam itself, the National Liberation Front and North Vietnamese carry out an offensive over Tet, the Vietnamese New Year, that is terrible in its costs but that reduces to rubble American claims to "progress" in the war. Nevertheless, napalm, agent orange, and anti-personnel bombs continue to rain down from American planes onto Vietnamese rice fields and dikes. Back home, Dr. Benjamin Spock, America's favorite baby doctor, the Rev. William Sloane Coffin of Yale, and three other men are indicted for aiding and abetting draft resistance, which is growing apace. Catholic radicals break into a draft board in Catonsville, MD, take out draft files, and burn them with home-made napalm. Soon after, the mayor of Chicago, Richard Daley, encourages his rarin'-to-go cops to break the heads (and arms and legs) of protesters outside the Democratic National Convention, where Hubert Humphrey is being nominated for president. Humphrey will lose the election to Richard Nixon, later to become the first American president forced to resign. And in late December of that very year, the Modern Language Association (MLA), an organization for professors of literature and languages, arrives in New York for its annual convention at the Hilton and Americana hotels.

Just before the MLA meeting, a group of us radicals, including Dick Ohmann, Florence Howe, Paul Lauter, Elaine Reuben, and, of course, Louis Kampf, hold an open meeting at Columbia to talk about "stirring things up" at the staid MLA. What might we do to respond to the brutal events of 1968? Someone designed a button--"Mother Language Association"--others put together posters like one saying "The Tygers of Wrath are Wiser than the Horses of Instruction." Others still began developing a call to set up a Commission on the Status of Women in the Profession. At the convention, we organized ourselves into a Tactics Committee that met frequently in Ohmann's room at the City Squire and morphed into an on-going Radical Caucus in English and the Modern Languages. We passed out buttons, circulated petitions, and put posters on the hotel walls. In fact, Louis and two others were arrested and put in jail for trying to keep the hotel dicks from tearing down our posters. That led to pickets, protests, and ultimately at the annual business meeting a motion to nominate our jailbird comrade Kampf to the position of MLA second vice-president. He represented the kind of change many of those gathered at the meeting in New York were demanding of their professional association, as well as of their country. From that elected status he would, in the normal course of things, succeed to the presidency in two years. He did. And thus the speech that follows.

"It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)": Literature and Language in the Academy

Reprint of the 1971 MLA Address by Louis Kampf

Things appear to be quiet on the campus. Quiet enough, at the moment, for people to believe that if they only close their eyes long enough, the 1960's will be erased from the book of history. The building occupations, the ghetto uprisings, the protests against the war and repression, women's liberation, the challenges to the curriculum and university governance, all are as the shadows of the burning Vietnamese huts we saw on our TV screens who knows how many years ago. Shut your eyes a bit tighter and even the shadows will disappear. We shall once again pursue our affairs in the soft light of Humanism; the return to normalcy will be complete.

Unfortunately, the desperate look of some job seeker slinking past us in a hallway might remind us of just what that normalcy is. Our departments of language and literature, our institutions, have become enclaves of the comfortable, around which scurry the hopeful, looking for the opening that will allow them to creep inside the walls. Nothing strange here. Aren't our departments, after all, merely images of the larger society? Our cities, as Jules Feiffer reminds us in *Little Murders*, present the spectacle of the well-to-do living in strategically fortified neighborhoods and apartments, fighting off the forays of those who would like to attain the comforts of those inside. Or think of fortress North America, bulging from overproduction, protecting itself from the covetous with all the scientific armor billions of dollars will buy. In the light of the shrinking job market and the over-production of Ph.D.'s, our universities and colleges have become such enclaves. I would like to ask whether education actually goes on in these bastions of normalcy. Or is our departments' main task the selection of winners in the competition for the shrinking number of places inside the enclaves? What better way than that competition to keep the clamor outside the gates?

But the clamor is there. Besides, for many who have gotten one foot inside the gate--never mind the unemployed--the whole business has turned sour. The nasty competition for advancement in the profession is not quite what they expected. The condition of the job market has reminded them that they are indeed part of the market economy, bad investments in human capital development, an unfortunate statistic in the latest report from the Department of Labor. And only a few, they know, will manage to get that second foot inside, into the imagined security of the enclave. Reflecting on such affairs, those petitioning for entry might indeed wonder what their goal has to do with education.

Looking at the demoralized state of our profession, those of us who feel secure in the return to normalcy might also wonder. Consider the condition of North American prose. In the peaceful atmosphere of our classrooms we teach writing, and hold before our students the masterworks of Western prose as models. Yet our teaching seems to have produced no George Jackson's, no Malcolm X's, no Eldridge Cleaver's--all of whom learned their craft in prison. Yet prisons have hardly been quiet enclaves of humanistic

learning. For George Jackson the struggle to learn language was the struggle to attain a sense of his historical situation as a black prisoner, a sense of his worth as a social and political being. Such quests for the social sources of one's own humanity rarely take place in enclaves devoted to separating the business of intellect from the clamor of the world outside. There may be more than one kind of prison.

This truism many have discovered as the value of our enterprise has begun to slide away. Some of those fortunate enough to have penetrated the enclave have begun to think of it as a prison. But why? We can deal with this question by asking ourselves why the profession attracted us in the first place. A cynic might say that there was nothing else to do. This may be the beginning of an answer, but I doubt that mere lack of direction provides an incentive strong enough to explain why so many persist in jumping those hurdles placed in the way of the Ph.D. Every graduate student I have known has looked at the degree program as an inane ordeal; yet until recently, few doubted that the goal of becoming a critic-teacher-scholar made the bitter pill at least palatable. My own experience, I suspect, was not untypical. The impulses which led me to the study of language and literature are far from clear. Yet I am certain that I drifted toward the profession of literature and to the academy with the hope of doing work which would not be alienating. It was wholeness I yearned for: unity of ideological purpose and economic necessity, of leisure and the way I earned my daily bread. It seemed obvious that teaching and writing about literature would not only be enjoyable, but, more nobly, part of the process of creating an adversary culture. Against a world devoid of beauty, torn apart by irrationality, tragically flawed by human limitations, stood the life of the literary critic-teacher-scholar--a life devoted to civilized reflection, to bringing light where there had been ignorance. In short, I felt confident that performing my task as a literary man would improve my own life, that of my students, and humanity in general.

> **It seemed obvious that teaching and writing about literature would not only be enjoyable, but, more nobly, part of the process of creating an adversary culture.**

Such faith has served to justify nearly all teaching and research in the humanities. At some level anyone who comes into our profession believes in the redemptive power of literature, its capacity to ennoble a fallen world. There may be truth in such assertions. There may not. Unfortunately, hardly anyone ever attempts to specify how literature performs its magic act. How, in fact, will its study make for a better world? The politics of this trans- formation are invariably left out. Indeed, faith in literature's dogma of redemption depends on one's willingness--perhaps desire-- to skirt the realm of society, politics, and institutions altogether. For in the work of its major exponents-- Coleridge, Arnold, I. A. Richards--the dogma reduces itself to an assertion of literature's therapeutic power for the individual. In a disordered world, poetry, we have been taught, has the power to impose order on experience, to

resolve contradictions; literature's attribute of imagination, by transcending the realm of social experience, transforms divisive struggle into concord. But literature performs these functions in the private world of our feelings. Its capacity to bring wholeness to our lives depends on its construction of an emotive and intellectual world which exists apart from the everyday, utilitarian one. Matthew Arnold gives the notion its most eloquent expression. The critical enterprise, he tells us, is the search for "a perfection which consists in becoming something rather than in having something, in an inward condition of the mind and spirit, not in an out- ward set of circumstances." Those outside the enclave might, of course, like to *have* something, like a job or tenure, before they turn inward to cultivate perfection. But concern for such externalities comes suspiciously close to betraying the very justification of our critical and pedagogical pursuits.

Arnold's humanistic *rhetoric* has served the profession well. I say rhetoric advisedly. For there is no substantive argument illustrating how the powers of literature (and criticism) lead people to perfection without the mediation of institutions. Yet we tend readily to accept--indeed, wildly applaud--any eloquent variation on *Culture and Anarchy*. The notion of an inward realm of perfection is, of course, deeply embedded in our culture. In the arts it has been given nearly official status by philosophy's creation of an autonomous esthetic faculty. "Everyone," Kant wrote, "must concede that judgment about beauty in which the slightest interest interferes is highly partisan and not a pure judgment of taste." We academics have broadened Kant's notion to include all aspects of our institutional lives. Disinterested judgments, we like to claim, are our professional concern; making them distinguishes us from those caught in the rush of everyday affairs; moreover, their dissemination amongst our peers makes the world, somehow, a more rational, a better place. And so the practical expression of the ideological support we have built for the study of literature has been to substitute thought for action. The very nature of the esthetic faculty seems to legislate such practice.

How consoling. The perversities and contradictions of everyday life dissolve in bottomless seas of thought. A naive spectator from the nonacademic world might wonder just who such practice is available to. Lord Kames, in discussing esthetic judgments, gives us a useful hint: "Those who depend for food on bodily labor," he wrote, "are totally void of taste, of such taste at least as can be of use in the fine arts. This consideration bars the better part of mankind." Kant's disinterested judgments of taste are available only to those who spend most of their time in mental activity--that is, the intelligentsia. Most literary academics might attach a few qualifiers to Lord Kames's remarks--but, I suspect, a very few. After all, our departments are the very enclaves which shield us against the intrusions of partisan demands, those constant assaults on our capacities to make pure judgments of taste. Thinking for a living is what separates us from those clamoring outside the gates who earn their keep by doing physical labor. It is the source of our social superiority; it locates us in a more elevated class within the structure of society; it defines our superiority by our capacity to be disinterested.

But just how disinterested are our judgments? Separating thought from work and action, theory from

practice, and designating thought and theory as superior, intrinsically more noble activities, clearly serves the social interests of those who do intellectual work. There is a lesson to be learned in the political function of ideology by considering that notions like Kant's and Lord Kames's became nearly unquestioned truths for the upper classes at a historical moment--the Enlightenment--when the intelligentsia began tentatively to assume its function within a developing industrial capitalism. To define intellectual activity as superior, as that toward which all activity should strive, and to characterize its highest functions by disinterest--this surely is to formulate a self-serving ideology for people like ourselves. It should hardly come as a surprise that the intelligentsia will generalize its own interests into the interests of humanity: what's good for us is good for everybody, and therefore above class interest or social conflict. Thus the enclave inside which we live pretty well and even enjoy ourselves is really for the benefit of humanity--except most of it has to be kept out.

But then there seems to be the sour taste. The satisfaction just isn't that great. Somehow many of us don't feel so noble. The very arguments we use to support our professional activities turn against us, if looked at from a different perspective. When we insist that literary (or any other) study inside the enclave is separate from political action, we seem to confirm that our professional activities are unrelated to anyone but ourselves and our colleagues. The knowledge produced by scholarship is then related only to other knowledge of a similar sort. Such thoughts undercut the humanistic justification for what we do. Alas, the enterprise begins to sound like a fraud. The assaults during the 1960's on academic pieties made many of our trainees suspect that knowledge is power only for those who have the power to put it to use. Often enough, the suspicions have refused to disappear. And thus the nagging feeling that if humanists are serious about their wares, they must struggle for the power to have them put on the market. Or we can hang on to our self-justifying ideology and relegate literature to an autonomous esthetic realm. But this, one should be clear, is to condemn it to triviality. Or to a game. Which may be fine. But why expect any dean or regent--not to speak of those outside the gates--to help us make a comfortable living for playing a game. Not in this society.

And so to reality. We teach language and literature, whatever our intentions, not in some abstract realm, not in and for themselves, but within institutions. These institutions--grammar schools, colleges, high schools, community colleges, and on to the highest academies-- serve a major function within the political economy. Education, I hardly need point out, is a gigantic industry, and still growing. I do not have the time to elaborate on the industry's means of production, distribution, and consumption, or on the social role it plays. However, the literature on the subject is substantial; and those who wish to inform themselves can readily do so. Here briefly are a few of education's more obvious functions: it generates economic growth and is the major factor in what economists call human capital development; it serves to channel and "differentiate" the labor force, thereby creating the necessary pools of people with the requisite skills; it keeps the young off a labor market which contracts as industrial

technology advances; it serves as the main instrument of social stratification, while trying to convince people that they've had an equal chance to make it to the top. All these functions are generated by the dynamics of industrial capitalism. But what of higher education's most important product--knowledge? As Kenneth Galbraith has admirably illustrated, the industrial state and its member industries are dependent on knowledge and on the skills, habits of mind, and values of a technostructure or intelligentsia. The economy needs research and development so it can expand; expansion demands rationalization of the process of production and consumption; and all depend on personnel with conceptual skills, valuing intellect, showing just enough competitive fervor, competent at solving problems, and submissive to a rationalized routine. Higher education is not the only agency capable of providing these services; nor does it necessarily do so in the most efficient manner possible; but then it does what it does at the taxpayer's expense, rather than industry's--which may be one reason for higher education's phenomenal growth. English does its bit by teaching the skills of writing, organizing reports, critical detachment, and by introducing students to the dominant values of the culture. As for foreign languages, their study serves many of the same functions as that of English. But let me quote from an American Council of Learned Societies report on the need for more foreign language study published in *PMLA* (68, Sept. 1953, 56).

The product of American industry spreads all over the world. Wherever there is a paved road there is an American automobile; American oil is produced wherever there is oil and used wherever oil is used. American banks have branches and connections in every significant foreign city. No region is too remote to be the concern of American diplomacy. And all too frequently American armed forces must ply their trade in lands and among peoples whose very names would have been unknown to an earlier generation.

Resonant sentiments for the last year of the Korean war. The report concludes that "the importance of language study in meeting this situation is clear."

The institutions for which we work exist because they are part of a rationalized arrangement for the profitable use of knowledge. As for our specific jobs, they exist because the knowledge produced and imparted by these institutions has itself been rationalized. The nature of our work, of what we teach and write, was, after all, not fixed at the creation, nor was it determined by a group of educational administrators sitting around a table, but by large historical developments. In the United States, the academic study of English, modern languages, and literature goes back little more than a century; the first Ph.D. in English is no more venerable. Indeed, the division and subdivision of knowledge is one cultural product of industrial capitalism's need for rationalization. And from this need derive professional fields, departments, subfields, periods, courses, degrees. Departments of language and literature exist not because of our students' human needs, not because they represent transcendental categories, not to give play to our curiosity, our need to know, but because they help to rationalize the process of educational consumption and production. As does the MLA. We are members of a modern professional organization with a corporate structure, a large

bureaucracy, appropriately elegant quarters, underpaid secretaries and clerks, a computer, sections, groups, insurance plans, charter flights, competing cliques and individuals trying to hold on to and enlarge their piece of turf. Any professional organization's primary task is to help rationalize its field by putting the official seal on the going standards, creating both formal and informal networks of power, integrating the field into the larger society, and making the distribution of manpower more convenient for employers. The MLA has served the industrial state well enough, though not as well as it might have. How much efficiency can one expect from literary folks, after all.

The nature of our Association points to the contradictions between our humanistic ideology and our practice as professionals. Who are we? And what do we do? We think of ourselves as teachers, as bearers of culture to the young; but what we teach are subjects structured by the rationalization of knowledge. We think of ourselves as scholar-critics making our contribution to the body of useful knowledge, and refining the taste of the general reader; but we write articles and books to get promoted or to sustain our self-respect. A few other scholar-critics might read our productions; some might even review them; still, their destiny is to become items in a bibliography consulted by graduate students suffering through their theses. What does this have to do with criticism as the instrument of perfection?

Which brings me back to why many of us went into the profession in the first place: the promise of unalienating work. That promise has faded for most of us: the young go into the profession with dread; the old can hardly wait for retirement; and those of middle age yearn for sabbaticals. The sourness begins to turn to acid as many recognize—finally--that teaching and writing about language and literature are indeed alienated labor. As with other sectors in the society, control of our work has been wrested from our hands by industrial capitalism, the purpose of our teaching and writing twisted, and therefore made meaningless; consequently, our spiritual lives are given expression during the hours of leisure. We are beings divided between the everyday and the esthetic, between work and play. Indeed, our very roles as critics, teachers, and writers derive from the industrial revolution having made work unbearable, and thereby creating a mass market for leisure, for those literary productions which console us during the hours of escape from work.

There is no escape from such historical imperatives. We may construct ideologies which appear to release us from the bonds of the social system, but our students, departments, schools, and deans will still be there. As will the often intractable subject matter we try to teach. Intractable, because often enough our courses are no more than required obstacles on the way to certification. But more deeply, because in our classrooms we can hardly hope to bridge the gap between our everyday lives and the leisure time we occasionally fill with literature. If we take our work seriously, we would hope that the works studied by our students might weave themselves into the fabric of their ordinary lives. But our culture has saddled them--and us-- with an autonomous esthetic realm. Literature is a diversion, a spectacle. And either our students become voyeurs,

feeding on the experience of others, or they are bored, unmoved as stone. I doubt that we can even begin to rectify this condition unless we make our professional activity part of the wider cultural struggle to unite the realm of esthetics with that of practical activity. No small order. Indeed, such a unification seems to imply nothing short of some form of cultural upheaval. Alas, such revolutions in the relationship of art to life, play to work, do not happen magically; they rarely happen in class- rooms or in the pages of scholarly journals. But the choice is either to join the struggle, or to accept the legacy of industrial capitalism--a legacy where neither work nor play gives us the means to survive as whole human beings.

> *I as well as many other students and teachers--often after periods spent organizing and teaching classes in Freedom Schools in the South, in Free Universities on the home campus, or as part of community projects--rediscovered our subject, and found that the academic isolation of literature was not a law of nature or even a social necessity.*

The struggle to open up the enclave has, of course, been going on all around us. It is part of that history of the 1960's many are trying to forget. I found the struggles of that decade to be exhilarating, and amongst the few reasons for remaining in the profession. I as well as many other students and teachers--often after periods spent organizing and teaching classes in Freedom Schools in the South, in Free Universities on the home campus, or as part of community projects--rediscovered our subject, and found that the academic isolation of literature was not a law of nature or even a social necessity. My comrades and I had a subject to teach once we liberated it from the dogmas of the profession. This we came to understand as we engaged in the practical activity of trying to change the social arrangements which imposed those dogmas. Such activity forced us to reconsider the objectives of our teaching, to question the profession's dearest assumptions, finally to criticize the cultural uses of language and literature itself. And with such questioning and understanding came the confidence--more, the emotional necessity--to transform our professional practice. The forces of insurgency within our society--those who have been trying to knock down the walls--have pointed the way toward a literary and critical practice which goes beyond professional requirements. The writings of Malcolm X, Eldridge Cleaver, and George Jackson, for example, are an intimate part of the movement for black liberation. Such writings are one component of lives engaged in learning and teaching about liberation; of lives spent in political organizing, going to prison, getting shot; of trying to heighten one's own consciousness and that of one's comrades. No doubt, we can work Jackson's *Prison Letters* into the standard curriculum; once there we might locate their essence within several literary traditions, and proceed to analyze their rhetorical devices with the most devoted

care; after such labors we might even adjudge them great works of art, according to the most reputable critical canons. We might. But that's our hang-up. Our activities, though well-intentioned, would miss the point. Within the academic setting we can hardly hope to experience the cultural impact of the *Prison Letters* on the masses of black people. Malcolm X, Eldridge Cleaver, and George Jackson may inspire us to change our literary practice. But their work is not something to be wondered at or fed on in the realm of pure spirit.

There are similar lessons to be learned from the writing and curriculum planning of the women's movement. The objective of female studies is not simply to create one more department or another interdisciplinary grab bag, but to change the consciousness of women. And more. Changing consciousness is seen as part of the struggle to transform male-dominated institutions, and to humanize relationships between the sexes. Consequently, feminist literary criticism has profoundly challenged the notion of literature as a self-enclosed field with a set of autonomous rules. Here the concern of criticism is with what literature does to people's heads; how it serves to fix sexual stereotypes; how it twists the consciousness of women--and how this can be *changed*. The feminist critique challenges us to change the canon of literature, to radically shift our valuations of that canon, and to remember that in the classroom we are men and women affecting the thoughts and feelings of other men and women. In short, feminists do not regard literary study as an activity apart from the general concerns of feminism.

The literary practices of black revolutionaries and of feminists suggest possibilities for our own transformation. Significantly, both movements had to force themselves rather noisily on the profession. Departments of language and literature were hardly playing a vanguard role during the upheavals of the 1960's; neither are they likely to do so today. Yet there are many things we can do (and many places in which to do them) toward initiating or carrying on the tasks of transforming the profession, the society, ourselves. I have time to pick over but a few bare bones. Tactical flesh will have to be added.

1. The MLA. Perhaps it is too much to expect a real transformation here. The monster has been shaken. But its response to every challenge is to create machinery that will absorb the shock--as is the case with the Delegate Assembly. The Association's Sections and Groups reify the structure of the profession; within these fraternal lodges, paternalism can do its benevolent work of promoting the careers of the deserving young. Nearly everyone treats the reading of hundreds of papers as a cynical farce. Yet publicly most are silent for fear of upsetting the routine, or invading anyone's preserve. Indeed, the groups keep increasing, as more and more subspecialties get carved out of the field. Yet the monster can be moved, as well as shaken: the work of the Commission on Women shows us that. We must keep pushing the Association to make it more responsive to the needs of Third World people and of job seekers; to make it support those of its members who are victims of political repression; and, perhaps most important, to make its meetings, journals, and publications vehicles for those intellectual and social movements which are engaged in the strenuous but life-giving pursuit of transforming consciousness, rather than affirming, year after year, issue after issue, what hardly needs to be affirmed.

2. Our Departments. There is the curriculum. In most places it is being changed. But the changes rarely amount to more than a shifting around of authors and books. The new courses should derive not from a different mode of dividing our field, but from human and social need, from the central concerns of the world we live in. Some years ago, depressed by an awareness that our students could see no alternatives--other than dropping out--to spending their lives serving the corporate economy and the war machine, a colleague in linguistics and I began, after much discussion and picking of friendly brains, to teach a course about the intelligentsia's possible roles in social change. Literature was one component of the course, as were history, social theory, group projects, keeping journals, what not. Our students wanted to discover how the culture channels them into destructive and unsatisfying work, and what they could do about it. Working on this course forced us to break out of our specialties, as it forced us out of our individualistic, competitive, and privatized scholarly habits, since we really had to work with groups of students both in the classroom and in the world outside it. In spite of the emotional wrenchings and the inevitable feelings of intellectual insufficiency, the course renewed our sense of the possibilities of intellect, since on occasion we felt ourselves relating knowledge and inquiry to the lives of our students--and ourselves. Teaching the course was an enormously hopeful experience. It also took up endless amounts of time. Thus if younger people are to have the time to explore such possibilities, the policy of publish or perish must be abolished.

3. The Schools We Work In. We should join students and community people in the struggles to transform the schools. For one thing, few of the plans we might have for departmental reform will work, or even take place, unless we change their setting. Can we democratize a department's governance if the administration will not allow it? Can we add experimental courses if our budget has been cut? Can composition courses be made occasions for learning if class size keeps going up? How are we to reward the teacher who really takes risks if the provost can turn down a department's recommendation for tenure? Underlying these facts of departmental life are the political pressures which force schools to serve those with power, rather than the masses of people. Many find it unnerving to work in such institutions. They can quit. But it might be more useful, even interesting, to challenge the powers, and to redirect the purposes served by our schools.

4. The Society. The schools cannot be transformed unless we change the priorities of the society they serve. Given the imperatives of industrial capitalism, this means changing the social system. We can hardly make our departments less competitive, if competitiveness is a necessary survival skill in the larger society. Those who would transform the institutions in which they work must seize control of them. And this can only happen within the context of a wider movement for radical social change. We should become part of such a movement.

Now, you are no doubt aware that involvement in the activities I have suggested puts you in danger of becoming or remaining jobless. Therefore, unionization is a necessity. Many academics choke on that particular horse pill: it comes much too close to unveiling the nature of our activities, and undercutting most humanist pretenses. We sell our labor. We are workers under industrial capitalism. If we understand that, we can understand our alienation, our sense of powerlessness. For teaching we collect wages: that is our basic connection to educational institutions, not the claims of humanist rhetoric. We are, in short, an intellectual proletariat. Consciousness of this condition can lead to self-hatred or cynical careerism. It can also lead to our uniting around the oppression we share with other alienated workers, the better to rid ourselves of the oppressors.

Are any of these changes likely to occur? Or are my suggestions no more than utopian rhapsodies? I have no desire to invite people to place their necks in a noose; nor do I much admire tragic heroes and heroines fighting for an inevitably lost cause. The study of literature has not turned my brain that much. Where the profession and the larger society are heading is not obvious. There have been revolutionary changes in large parts of the world during the past thirty years. As the United States tries to hold on to its empire, it is being shaken by great historical forces. These have, of course, had their effect on the profession, as they have affected our whole culture. The changes in the profession have rarely come from within, but, on the one hand, from the pressure of those who rule, or, on the other, from the masses of people who want their share of our intellectual riches. But the changes have, in fact, occurred. History has provided us with levers. One such is the proletarianization of intellectual workers. The resulting disjunction between what we claim to do and the actualities of teaching, writing for *PMLA*, and coming to conventions like this one makes those actualities nearly unbearable. The problem facing us, I want to stress once more, is where we are to turn after attaining such knowledge. Consciousness about the falsity of one's work and life may lead a member of the intelligentsia to ally himself or herself with the revolutionary forces trying to transform social relations. It may also lead to shoring up one's professional enclave with ever stronger ideological mystifications, or, if necessary, firing the troublesome, or, finally, calling in the police or the troops. If we and the bulk of our colleagues decide to go by this route, we shall not only lock ourselves in a prison, but destroy ourselves, for the profession, as the spectacle of our unemployed students and colleagues vividly shows, has begun to outlive its usefulness to the industrial state.

Let me put speculations about the future aside. History has presented us with options; it has aligned the forces. I have told you that many of us had our sense of purpose--our vocation--renewed by the struggles of the 1960's; we began to feel that our work flowed into and was impelled by the turbulent currents of world history. Those currents flow on; the struggles of the 1960's will continue even if we close our eyes. There are no ways of remaining neutral inside institutions that are partisan. It is up to us to choose which side we are on.

(**Note**: The Presidential address delivered at the 86th Annual Convention of the MLA, in Chicago, 27 December 1971.)

Postscript

by Richard Ohmann

In his MLA address, Louis developed several lines of argument that ran against the standard ideology of literary studies, and represented positions thrashed out in the Radical Caucus and New University Conference. In particular, he challenged the cherished idea that disinterested literature humanizes its devotees and their societies, proposing instead that it does its work only through institutions, and therefore is not disinterested, but always political. He works out this idea in the dignified register of MLA discourse, and in this way distinguishes it from the sometimes-rude critique carried on within the student movement at the time. His other departure from the conventions of MLA presidential rhetoric is to focus on labor, especially the labor of entrants to our profession looking for unalienating labor and finding something very different. This was a startling topic for a presidential address. Possibly those in attendance were chiefly antiwar and otherwise radically involved enough to take Louis as a political guide. If so, what did they hear him advocating, and how did it turn out?

His call for attention to non-canonical texts and voices won the day. It had already gained traction from civil rights and black power activists and from second wave feminism. These movements, especially feminism, established themselves as reputable and influential in the MLA. The literary curriculum changed. MLA programs broke open the canon. Furthermore, Louis' position that writing and reading are charged with political interests became solidly established. His proposals gained wide currency. The profession changed.

What about the four institutional upheavals he called for?

- The MLA: as he said, it was "too much to expect a real transformation here." True, it became more responsive to the needs of women, third world people, and job seekers. But to redirect its energies toward advocacy, struggle, union-like activism was indeed "too much." And the MLA, while still one of the larger professional organizations, is a far smaller part of the academic landscape now than in 1971. Its membership has fallen 25%, while the number of people teaching in

colleges and universities has more than doubled. Louis worked hard to make the organization more progressive. So did the Radical Caucus. Success was uneven and unstable.

- Our Departments, our professional "locals": The progressive work of curriculum and culture Louis wanted for them required an end to "the policy of publish or perish." That did not happen. Instead, departments became channels for the rule of the central administration.

- The Schools We Work In: Louis spoke of political pressures that "force" universities to serve those with power rather than masses of people. The Republican takeover of the last 40 years has made that neoliberal goal national policy.

- The Society: the transformation of our local institutions "can only happen within the context of a wider movement for social change. We should become part of such a movement." Could this, finally, be the time for revolution? "Not in my lifetime," Louis said when I put that question to him 50 years or so ago. He was right.
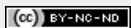
RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

We Don't Need Your Permission: The Era of Non-Affiliated Student Activism

by Rebecca Elizabeth Dolhinow

PHOTO BY LIFE MATTERS, PEXELS.COM

What does it look like when tribes come together to push back? …it's going to be very interesting to see this happen on college campuses. Since the sixties, it's just like, we have pockets of activism, but not revolution.

-Amy, activist with the group

The neoliberal The neoliberal focus on education as a product for sale is commonplace in higher education today. My own institution refers to itself as "the marketplace of ideas." Make no mistake, the stress is on the market in "marketplace": the selection of the most profitable classes is stressed over student interests and educational goals. This move toward education for consumption puts both educators and students in increasingly precarious positions. Faculty become service providers that work to increase the statistics that lead to better funding and enrollments. Students get caught in a system that wants them to be consumers rather than critical thinkers and active stakeholders of their own educations. In response to these changes in higher education, an upsurge in student activism against the corporate university and its agenda has arisen as well as a corresponding crackdown on activism from universities. This article examines the response of student activist groups in California, particularly in the California State University system, to the corporatization of their universities. Drawing on thirteen years of ethnographic research, I use the words and actions of student leaders to discuss the administrative commodification of activism, and the choice of radical student activists to move outside the university system to best confront these issues.

As *Radical Teacher* readers will be aware, the neoliberal corporate university, like any good corporation, is all about control (Bousquet 2008). This exertion of control can be seen in the growth of rules and regulations, the increase in organizational divisions, administrative bloat, and the committee and assessment work these new divisions create for faculty and staff (Ginsberg 2011; Newfield 2016). Most of the changes that accompany the corporatization of the neoliberal university work for better control of employees and students. In this situation, where does radical student activism fit in, if it does at all? And how does such activism evolve in the corporate university in order to stay alive?

The answer the corporate university would offer is nowhere. Student activism is not welcome on campuses, at least if it is student lead and directed. The university is willing to tolerate the soft "activism" it fosters in its own social justice curriculum, but not the kind of activism that the student groups I studied propose and practice (Dolhinow 2017). In order to control student activism, university administrations work hard to enclose or coopt the student activist spaces that threaten them. In response, many radical activist groups, with a deeply analytical understanding of their relationship to the power structure of the corporate university, move off campus to organize and build coalitions.

The student activists in my research are primarily young people of color who find it difficult to identify with the kind of social justice and social change presented in many university-run student spaces on their campuses. (Of the eight students quoted in this article, six are students of color and three identify as gender queer.) These activists find supervised spaces often ignore or offer only superficial analyses of their lived experiences. As a result, they find it easier to create community and support structures outside of traditional campus student organizations. From these outside spaces, they can create activist communities that honor their personal and historical views of social justice organizing. This outside position also allows them a freedom "registered" college and university student groups do not have. At the same time, however, it limits them in terms of campus resources and can lead to blacklisting by administration and faculty who believe they are dangerous if they cannot be held accountable.

The radical student groups fighting for changes at their institutions challenge the system using controversial and militant means. As part of this, they exhibit a willingness to address issues relating to their university that other student groups are not willing to take on for fear of being shut down or made an example of by the administration. They disrupt board of trustees' meetings, rally outside the Chancellor's house, and petition for a vote of no confidence in their university President. This is how one young activist describes his relationship to the President of his institution,

I've gone up to, like, the Board of Trustees and called her [President] shady for, like, the way she pulled off the fee increase… exposing information like that, that wasn't supposed to be, like said out loud and stuff like that … in front of the twenty-three Presidents [of the Cal State System] and…like the Trustees. - Ramon

These student radicals are also more likely to reference oppression and their opposition to hegemonic power structures such as capitalism. In the words of one activist, his group is "very resistance led."

Many of these activists already view themselves as outside the higher education system. This sentiment can be seen here in a passage from a zine produced by one of the groups in this study.

For many young people of color and the poor, public education was an obstacle course; there was zero tolerance for any wrong move, any slip up, any mistake. Our socioeconomic condition only added to the obstacles we faced in the classroom; hunger distracted us, the streets or police killed us. Higher education for us was our ticket out of poverty and up the socioeconomic ladder. When we finally arrived, however, we were given a choice: pay with the money you don't have or go back home. We knew little about the implications and ramifications of the debt we would inquire [sic]. For people of color and the poor, there was no choice. In our attempts to improve our present condition, we signed and sold away our future.

In this passage, a shared understanding of the material relationships between higher education and the oppression of capitalism are clear. This shared understanding is used to both attract new members to the organization and to situate their mutual experiences as already outside a system that

does not serve them. One common idea that unites the radical groups is their deeper understanding of how the corporate university works. At every meeting I attended, and in every group interview I conducted, at least one member linked their work against their corporate university to anti-capitalist work. Many of these radical student activists understand capitalism as the root of their oppressions and share this understanding through their activism on campus and social media.

Why Position is Power

At the heart of my work on student activism is a desire to understand how student activists, and activists more generally, produce the spaces in which they work. While this project developed over the last decade, it became clear to me that the production of autonomous student activist spaces on campuses was in danger, particularly on large state campuses. These spaces, which I term Commons Counter Spaces because they function like commons providing a meeting area for students who share goals, values, and experiences to pool resources and work collectively (Bollier 2014, Dolhinow 2017), proved to be too challenging and unpredictable to the neoliberal university. And so, they had to be controlled. The demise of the Commons Counter Space comes in several forms, devised and implemented by the administrations on the activists' campuses. If Commons Counter Spaces offer students a place to organize their activist campaigns and support each other in their growth as radical activists, then the spaces universities offer in place of Commons Counter Spaces do essentially the opposite (while pretending to do the same).

Many universities in the process of enclosing student activist commons replace them with their own watered down and tame versions of civic or community engagement toward social justice. Within these spaces of activist tourism, universities attempt to control and direct dissent on their campuses while commodifying the elements of social justice for easy consumption and university credit. By the logic of the corporate university, this consumer-friendly version of social justice activism is much more palatable for incoming students, their parents, and funders (Dolhinow 2020). In her work on youth organizing in communities of color, Soo Ah Kwon (2013) argues that youth activism "is implicated in an affirmative governmentality, which posits poor youth of color as potentially worthy subjects of improvement through their participation in community programs aimed at helping them to become better citizen-subjects" (p. 126). The community programs she describes in her ethnographic work do just what the commodified social justice programs and sites of the corporate university do: tame activism and direct youth dissent into actions and avenues deemed harmless to the neoliberal system.

Several of the groups with which I work find the administrative cooptation of social justice spaces creates fewer places on campus in which they feel comfortable, or even safe, organizing and meeting. Two unregistered groups that take part in controversial work questioning the actions and policies of their universities discussed the problems with cross cultural centers. These groups see the recent trend toward consolidating identity-based centers into one space as a move to control their individual centers and separate them from their roots in academic disciplines, which are often seen as more political and harder to control. One group, a chapter of OutSpoken, a state-wide organization that fosters radical activists, named the new cultural center complex on their campus "The Diversity Museum" due to its open layout. The activists in this group feel the space is designed for supervision. They will not meet there because they feel spied on when administrative employees can walk through and overhear their conversations at any time. Similarly, Commit to Campus Justice, whose focus is the elimination of the unjust and racist polices of their university, had this to say about working in campus-based cultural center spaces:

> …what we want most in those meetings is privacy, the privacy to say what we need to without having someone's co-worker or their supervisor or their boss hear. So, when we have been speaking in, like, the cultural centers it's always been hushed, and it's always been a bit more reserved in how we actually go about what we're doing. …that space is not one we feel safe to speak freely in. -Jackson

Commit to Campus Justice and OutSpoken are only two of the half dozen groups that expressed increasing problems finding spaces to organize on campus. The solutions I heard ranged from meeting outdoors on campus far enough away from buildings to not be overheard or in parks or coffee spots near campus. For Commit to Campus Justice other options exist as well but are not easy, as one member explains:

> We never met as a group in one of those spaces [cultural centers or other student union spaces]. It's been someone's dorm, for the most part. I work in a research lab in the [blank] department and I was able to use my lab room for two of our meetings. So, it's really––it's burdensome for the person whose dorm it is, right? And all of their roommates, so we try to find other spaces, but it's not easy and you've got to get a key, you've got to, like, figure it all out each time and you have to tell people where it's going to be, so it's not easy to organize from a logistical perspective. -Greg

Without institutional support and space to gather in person, these student groups look to each other for community and backup. They work as a network to push each other's campaigns and share ideas and strategies. Ron is a student organizer with OutSpoken; he believes broad coalitions across groups are the way forward for radical student activism:

> I would hope that a cohesive coalition across different campuses do exist and [OutSpoken] does have that potential. … I know a lot of people in [OutSpoken] do share how promising it is for them because sometimes they feel very secluded in like in their campuses… And so, I think for a lot of [OutSpoken]… members, seeing people across, like, the state that share the same ideas and share the same work is very helpful to them. That kind of like boosts them to do the work. -Ron

While the most fruitful coalition in which Ron takes part is the OutSpoken network, he also works hard to make contacts and develop relationships with other radical groups in California and beyond. Recently Ron's chapter of OutSpoken was put in contact with a new non-affiliated student organization on the East Coast that is trying to address issues of racism and discrimination they believe their institution downplays while pretending to respond through "diversity" campaigns. These student activists do not believe this is a problem they can take on from within the existing system without the aid of a larger coalition of social activists.

To Register or Not

For OutSpoken, …we didn't want to do a hierarchy. So, when you register you have to have a president, a vice president, and a treasurer. And that seems like a lot of problems especially in our beliefs and our values. How we run OutSpoken, where no one is higher than each other. -Emma

Emma is a current leader in OutSpoken and for her one of the key benefits of their position outside the regulated university system is their ability to avoid the hierarchical forms of organization required by university administrations. As Emma describes, most university systems impose a hierarchical structure on student groups when they require "officers" to be named. According to Emma, in the student organizations on campus that are registered, "[e]ven if you say 'oh, we won't have this a hierarchy' when it comes down to it, it always comes out when someone is like, 'oh well, I'm the President' or 'I run this, and I run that'." OutSpoken understands that power, even in title, changes the relationships between people just as it changes one's vision and experience of the world. Emma expresses here an awareness of the traditional, hierarchical, and often oppressive power relations the corporate university represents and imposes on those that work within it. Emma's chapter of OutSpoken, like others I met, found these power relations offensive and antithetical to the kind of university and society they sought. For them a position outside university affiliation and registered groups is the best possible place from which to work with integrity to oppose the hegemonic systems in which they find themselves every day.

On most campuses, student organizations must be registered with the Division of Student Affairs in order to function legitimately. When I began working with student activists the process of registering as a student group was simple, involving a form with a signature, a basic "constitution" or mission statement, and a letter of support from an advisor. Today, on my campus and many others, the process is fully digitized through an online system that not only intakes the general information on the group and its required hierarchical leadership but also disseminates this information to many offices across campus that previously were not part of the registration process. To continue functioning as a registered group, plan events, reserve rooms, create and post flyers, the same system must be used. This system creates a public event and shares this event with police, fire, and risk management the

moment a group tries to reserve a space. There is no freedom for extemporaneity or last-minute events. Non-campus organizations such as pro-life organizations, religious groups, or environmental groups can just show up and talk about their issues, but registered student groups must go through a long documentation process to have an organized presence on campus. Students and faculty agree these systems, present to some extent on all campuses, have killed the spontaneity in registered student group activism on campus (Dolhinow 2017).

This level of control does not go over well with the more radical groups. In the words of a student that works with Commit to Campus Justice, they are not registered with the university because,

When you become an org…you're much more visible. It's much more difficult to go ahead––you almost have to lay out everything in front of them before you do anything. I mean, not really, but certainly the administration has more access to what you're doing and all those kinds of things, and I don't think that we were feeling really comfortable letting the enemy (laughs) in on what was going on. -Al

The same student explains that, "there are some advantages to being an organized [registered] org, but in many cases, we can use the orgs we do belong to go ahead and get the advantages we need without having to go ahead and expose ourselves to the administration." The advantages to which Al refers range from reserving rooms on campus, using campus printers and caterers, to securing funding for events. When Commit to Campus Justice or OutSpoken organizes events with registered clubs (even in name only) they use relationships with campus allies to access the perks of registration but also continue to avoid exposing themselves and their strategies to the administration. In this way, they retain the freedom to act as they believe necessary.

Diana is a member of OutSpoken who also works in student government, which gives her special insight into student activism and student organizations on her campus. Here she weighs the pros and cons of registering as a student organization with an example she experienced as an OutSpoken member:

Yeah, they [unregistered groups like OutSpoken] can table wherever they want and not have that fear of being suspended. We can sit anywhere on their [university's] grass, pass out flyers. We can post in the restrooms if we want to post our flyers in the restrooms without a fear of getting called in. I know that I think it was last year in the fall [OutSpoken] put up a banner outside of the [blank] Building, and the dean of the college just so happened that she was walking past… and I was there. And, I was doing something [student government] related, and so she knows I am an [OutSpoken] member…And, she said, "You know, I don't mind the banner," she said, "but it can be dangerous if it falls because it's really windy today." And so, I think it's being held with, like, a 2-liter Pepsi bottle or something attached to something, and so I said, "Okay, I understand. I'll contact [OutSpoken] members and let

them know." And, that's it, and so I think that if they would have been registered, they might have done something else and called [Student Affairs] and then sent an email and, you know, I don't know, some type of 'professional threat' is what I call it.

When Diana called the possible disciplinary action a "professional threat," she summed up the neoliberal mentality toward student activism: it must be professionalized to be controlled. She also draws attention to the more casual and lenient relationship administrators can take with unregistered groups.

Coming from the vantage point of a non-registered group gives student activists a flexibility and power that even the administration admires at times. Non-registered groups can say what needs to be said while administrations must censor registered groups and themselves. According to Amy from OutSpoken, this was the case after the election of Donald Trump, when her group put a poster over a school sign: "We covered up that [university name] sign. We didn't get permission from anybody. Did Admin come out? Yeah. Did they sit and look at it? Yes. Did they say, 'Good job.' Yeah." The goals of non-registered groups often align with those of staff in the Division of Student Affairs. Many of the staff in this Division have similar ethnic and cultural backgrounds as well as a history of social justice work or degrees that focus on social justice education. For these staff members, the similarities in their political and personal lives, outside the norms of the corporate university, make groups like OutSpoken natural allies and resources. This can become a very complicated relationship. In Amy's words:

> They would say things like, 'You're saying things that I want to say but I can't.' I literally had like directors from [student center] say things like, you know 'I work for [University President], so I can't say what I really think about xyz.' Yeah, yeah, so, I think in a way some people who work in administration wanted to utilize us.

Amy continues,

> [s]o, I remember one time I got a call from Dr. [X] and she says, 'Tomorrow pro-lifers are coming to campus. Can you help us?' Like, like fucking superheroes (laughs). Like she sounded like a Batman call.

In this case, the administrator was able to use OutSpoken to oppose an undesirable demonstration taking part on campus. Yet, it was only because OutSpoken was not registered that they felt comfortable setting up a counter demonstration without any reservations for the space or prior permissions. The administrator knew only a non-registered group could pull this off. This paradox is one of the most complicated aspects of researching radical student activism. As the neoliberal corporate university expands, it loses tolerance for non-structured and non-supervised forms of resistance. But dissent is sometimes still encouraged because many of the staff and administrators share values of social justice and visions for social change with the very groups they work to control. While Student Affairs Divisions typically do the work of dismantling Commons Counter Spaces, individual staff may be mentors for radical activists. This is why many radical activists bother to work to change to the system: they see the openings.

The history of unregistered student group activism in California is not lost on these activists working to change the system. In the late 60s and early 70s the California State University system was teaming with unaffiliated student activism. The Third World Liberation Front started at San Francisco State as a non-registered coalition demanding equal access to public higher education, more faculty of color, and, most famously, an ethnic studies curriculum. (Only this summer did California finally sign off on an Ethnic Studies graduation requirement.) At the same time at California State University Northridge, then called San Fernando Valley College, there was a series of massive demonstrations by the Alliance for Survival that led to hundreds of student and faculty arrests and culminated in the creation of the first Chicano Studies program in the California State University System. Like their predecessors, the current radical student activists educate their peers on campus, interact with student government and the administration, but they do not formally associate themselves with the university. Greg from Commit to Campus Justice had this to say on the topic:

> I was just watching a documentary about CSUN, the protests in the late sixties…. Why do [they] have Chicano studies there, why do [they] have even a diverse school there? It's because of extreme conflict between non-registered organizations of students, who are extremely grassroots and their administration. So, if we look back today, administrators will say, "I love Chicano studies; I love pan-African studies; these are my favorite things about us. We're such a diverse campus, upward mobility." What did it take to get those? Non-registered student orgs. How are they supporting us? We're a non-registered student org. Wouldn't they want more things like that to come out of the social activities of students? Not really. They're afraid of them.

This knowledge of the history of student activism was fairly common in the non-registered clubs and quite often absent in registered ones. Perhaps this is so because non-registered clubs attract more politicized student activists, who are curious about their choice to work outside the system and look to learn more, whereas campus-based registered groups are discouraged from examining the history of student activism in case it might politicize them in ways that are too challenging to their universities.

Non-Affiliated Student Activism and the Bigger Picture Post COVID19

When campaigns against police brutality have to be facilitated by student groups working outside their own universities, it is clear that the spaces of student activism on campus are severely compromised. If efforts to uncover racist enrollment policies and hold administrators responsible for the development of these policies must be organized off campus, any culture of disagreement, debate, and dissent is under attack. These activities, often central to student activism, are also the basis of critical political thinking. The problem is the discouragement of teaching students how to take action on their political ideas and the insignificant options for action offered on many campuses

(Giroux 2015). Perhaps a hopeful space already exists in the "undercommons" proposed by Moten and Harney (2004), where subaltern ways of thinking and abolitionist politics might be able to rethink this institution in productive new ways. The undercommons is made up of both the space "where the work gets subverted" (p.102) and the community who are "in but not of" that space--in this case, radical student activists and their supporters. In this moment of opportunity, this could mean taking control of online/virtual learning and using the uncertain direction of higher education as an opportunity for dismantling and rebuilding curriculums, pedagogies, and the humanity of education in more equitable ways.

Another possible hopeful solution lies in virtual meeting spaces. The radical groups that already have networks and infrastructure off campus are leading the student activist movement in the California State University system during our current moment of virtual higher education, using zoom organizing to make change *on* campus from *off* campus. OutSpoken, for example, has been organizing virtually to question the response of higher education to the COVID19 pandemic. Each campus OutSpoken chapter holds their own Zoom meetings to survey their colleagues and understand the situation of their student body. They then take this data back to the statewide OutSpoken meetings via Zoom to develop plans for campaigns that facilitate communication with the administration at the state and campus levels. This method is creating strong movement on issues such as fee reimbursement and housing, giving students a voice to communicate with their administrations. The new spaces of virtual student activism that are being produced will be important models for the future of both affiliated and non-affiliated student groups.

Faculty and administrators cannot afford to sit back, admiring the work of student activists and offering advice from their comfy office chairs, whether they are at home or on campus. As Greg from Commit to Campus Justice puts it,

> Yes, faculty need to do a better job…. It's kind of like doctors with our private health care system. You know, fifty-five percent of them want mass public healthcare, what are they doing about it? They feel really comfortable and they have a lot of status as a doctor. They don't really see a reason to make a serious disruption in the system, even if they wanted to change.

If faculty and some administrators really want to see change, more involved support is necessary for student activists such as these.

The current global COVID19 pandemic is changing education as we know it. Many of these changes are onerous and tragic, but they also offer opportunities for positive movement as faculty, staff, and students are all learning how to work and organize from outside the physical university. To build future autonomous commons counter spaces and other anti-capitalist and non-corporate spaces on campuses, we will all need to work together to create spaces to "be-in-common" (Amsler 2017). To effectively draw on the theories of liberatory education that have come before us, we must first be able to share these theories in spaces that also allow us to discuss, practice, and integrate them. To do this faculty and staff may find they have to join student activists and do more work, physically and virtually, from outside, under, or beyond the neoliberal corporate system.

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RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Partnership as Student Power: Democracy and Governance in a Neoliberal University

by Aidan Cornelius-Bell and Piper A. Bell

"STUDENTS VOICES MATTER", FLINDERS UNIVERSITY, MARCH 2019. PHOTO COURTESY OF AUTHORS

Is This University Success?

"… I would like to raise that students should be brought into conversations about the future direction of research – particularly in regard to the Academic Senate terms of reference – as this is our shared future, we would like to be a meaningful part of decisions about it. We desperately want to help shape the future of this institution. But we need meaningful consultation, consideration and respect so that we can build this brighter future together. Students must be allowed to speak. Students must be noticed. We must be consulted. We must be heard. And we must be included in steering this university."

(Cornelius-Bell, 2018: postgraduate student address to Flinders University Senate)

Significant organisational restructuring has taken place at South Australia's Flinders University that has had devastating effects on academic staff and students. This restructuring addresses the strategic plan, "Making a Difference: The 2025 Agenda" (Flinders University, 2016) and was in accordance with "Australia in the Asian Century," recommendations for University ranking improvements (Gillard, 2013). The Flinders University Council restructured staff roles, composition, and foci. A number of staff lost their jobs. At least twenty per cent have been moved to teaching-only roles, termed "teaching specialist." Higher degree research students lost their supervisors. Research in entire discipline areas ceased. In keeping with the neoliberal trend of bloated administrations, however, the University has seen the introduction of outsiders as a new class of management across the institution. This arrival has been evident across the institution's new governance and structure, in a new "college" design. This structure also gave rise to business language in management roles across the University: 'presidents,' 'vice presidents,' 'directors,' and 'executives.'

These changes were designed and orchestrated by the University Council and senior management in near total isolation from staff and students, raising serious questions about democracy and participation in university governance. Determined efforts were indeed made by students and staff to mitigate the drastic changes to the organisational structure. Feedback was provided in earnest, which was seemingly disregarded. Next came union action in the Fair Work Commission[1] to change the course of implementation – a small victory. Yet, just a week later, the University's Senior Executive was found in breach of process and asked to once again "follow the rules."

In addition to the various attempts to provide formal feedback to the University Council, students and staff held several protests.[2] In spectacular fashion, at the December 2018 meeting of the Flinders University Council, 200 staff and students squeezed into the boardroom to protest these hasty decisions and to challenge the managerialist concept of "university success" (Richardson, 2018). Members of the professoriate, in echoes of past democratic Councils, voiced concerns about the dictatorial direction and the impact on procedural fairness, consultation, reputational risks, gaming the research rankings, and, of course, morale (Baum, Davies, & Lack, 2018). Chancellor Stephen Gerlach adamantly disagreed and side-lined the concerns of professors who spoke out. He stated that, while students and staff members present may disagree with the direction and implementation of major changes, the responsibility was his and the Council's alone to "see it in the broader picture":

… this Council has a responsibility, and I am Chancellor and chairman of this Council, so I have that ultimate responsibility and that is to make sure that this University succeeds. … You can disagree with that, but we are the people that have, and carry, that responsibility and I want to be able to look all of you in the face in the future and know that we did the right thing. (Gerlach, 2018: address to Flinders University Council)

The Chancellor's dismissive and isolationist attitude embodies the neoliberal governance structure and has had significant impacts on both staff and students, largely excluded from the decision-making processes that changed the fabric, meaning, and future of the University. For academic staff, this has resulted in a reduced workforce and increased workload, with many roles being casualised. Importantly, academic staff have lost agency and ownership of their important intellectual labor (Zipin, 2019). For students, their roles are now those of 'consumers' within this neoliberal structure. A student-led survey circulated via student Facebook groups during the Flinders University restructure found that "99% of respondents [stated] that there had been no meaningful consultation with students on the previous proposals" and that "14 students reported that they had been told not to speak out about the proposed changes at Flinders by University management" (Say no to Flinders 'Academic Restructuring,' 2018). Reflecting on the shifts in academic roles and work, many postgraduate students hold little hope in attaining the academic careers to which they aspired. More recently, we have seen a further exclusion of students from democratic decision-making nationally: in an online forum at Monash University (July, 2020), students were muted and removed after they queried cuts to university funding and staff, and how teaching online (including from old lecture recordings) during the COVID-19 global pandemic would affect their learning (SBS News Staff). Thus, we ask, who defines "university success" and how might student power shift the conception of university to a new democratic form of governance?

Corporate University Governance in Australia

Much like the corporatization of American and European universities, Australia's university sector has adopted the behaviors and structures of contemporary neoliberal organizations (Marginson & Considine, 2000; Rogers et al., 2020). These moves have been well documented in both the Australian and international context by critical scholars of higher education (For example: Aronowitz & Giroux, 2000,

2000; Giroux, 2002, 2014; Houlbrook, 2019). Since Marginson and Considine's (2000) formative work on Australian University Governance, there have been several continued moves toward neoliberalist corporatized management in Australia. Before exploring those moves further, it is important to paint a brief picture of the origins of the Australian university sector.

Australia's university sector, like all of its institutions, has a colonial history marked with exploitation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Inheriting many of the colonial traits of Australian institutions, the "Australian university" was built on the foundations of the British university systems (Marginson & Considine, 2000). While there is an increasing blurring of those foundations towards neoliberal governance structures, including adopting United States university governance patterns, the fundamentals of Australian university governance and management still follow a British council-senate-faculty layout. Chief among the changes to mimic corporate governance at Flinders University, for example, was a shift from faculties and schools led by a dean, to colleges led by a vice president. These changes to the governance landscape, while seemingly subtle, herald a new discourse around the governance and management of the University (Connell, 2019).

Australian universities share a great deal with the European university sector, and while there are unique hallmarks of immediate colonial history, little of this bears great historical claim on the changing university today; we do not have an established institution to fall back on, and in some senses the Australian university council governance-management-group sees itself as a nimble and adaptable institution with little regard or respect for extant successful structures. We are equally at a disadvantage and advantage because we do not have a way of "doing governance" developed over many years. It is here, though, at Flinders University, that we see the potential for a shift in framing of governance – an opportunity for student engagement, beyond superficiality and representation, towards authentic partnership and democracy in governance structures. If governance, "leadership and management are often seen as *the* key to improving the universities problems" (Marginson & Considine, 2000, pp. 7–8), then we are presented with the opportunity to ask ourselves, what is the role for the student subject of higher education in this setting?

A Shift Towards the Neoliberal University

Ranking systems, vice-chancellors as "CEO-dictators" (Bonnell, 2016), and increasing accountability to funding bodies are endemic in the global higher education landscape. The recent moves by the Australian Federal Coalition Government (the current ruling conservative political party) to instigate teaching-only universities and a shift in the narrative about what makes a university "a university" (Matchett, 2018) further empowers isolationist and dictatorial management. Against this backdrop, the Flinders University Council appears to see no choice but to dictate change to arbitrarily increase research ranking and demonstrate this new conception of "success." Rather than challenging escalating neoliberal policies and asking

important academic questions about what a university is, and its role as a public good (Marginson, 2011), we find ourselves having to buy-in to the rhetoric of market logic at great expense to democratic governance, fair resourcing, and job security. Indeed, "neoliberal managerialism," a reconceptualization of management under a dominant economic rationalist regime, has taken a significant hold of the structure and fabric of universities across Australia as well as higher education internationally (Connell, 2013, 2019; Marginson, 2011). Moreover, the making of neoliberal subjects, the changes to governance, and the dictatorial nature of university councils has wider ranging implications for democratic society.

As *Radical Teacher* issues have discussed, rather than a democratic university that critiques culture and society, the neoliberalised university rushes to support the latest onslaught of public policy changes. Rather than focusing on building stronger and diverse humanities, arts, education, and law departments, the neoliberal university would disable the research done by these academics.[3] Instead of harnessing the knowledge and spirit of the students and academic staff, the neoliberalised university sets a deliberate course against the people that make it, in order to be competitive in a market-society – a battle it is arguably destined to lose. It acts as a privatized body despite its status in Australia as a public institution. It works to shrink those research areas, even when profitable, that encourage critical thinking and democratic participation in society in favour of those areas that fit neatly with political slogans and entice corporate funding. Yet even students and academics within seemingly 'safe' areas have remarkably little power in the direction the university takes. While cancer research, for example, appears a well-funded, publicly supported academic area, the students and staff are often subject to the same barrage of cuts and new classes of management, and they are also unable to provide feedback or influence direction.

> *The neoliberal university sees their subjects – students and academic staff – as individualized, entrepreneurial, and competitive, seeking only to increase their market use-value by following the embodied neoliberal managerialism of their "President" and "Vice President."*

While the neoliberal university presents a version of success in its glossy, commercially marketed exterior, which sees students and staff as empowered to live a "good life" (Gottschall & Saltmarsh, 2017), the shortcomings and undermining of a public good are abundantly clear for those inside. The neoliberal university sees their subjects – students and academic staff – as individualized, entrepreneurial, and competitive, seeking only to increase their market use-value by following the embodied neoliberal managerialism of their "President" and "Vice President."

In a broader higher education context, Brennan (2010) suggests that new glossy "university governance structures" reflect "business acumen" rather than institutional knowledge, and while there has not been a lack of protest from academic staff, they still lose their foothold in positions of governance in favour of those who know "what's right" in the market-economy. Zipin (2019) defines this harmful mode of institutional governance as a Council-Management Governance (CMG). It comprises "an executive level of Council and Senior Management; a line-management chain that extends between executive level and academic labour grounds; and a range of auxiliary offices and actors" (p. 28). For academics in a university context, this structure poses significant consequences relating to agency and ownership of their important intellectual labor, for the CMG is resistant to engaging with grounded academic thought and work.

The departure from a democratic leaning university towards a dictatorial CMG should not be ignored. The New Left student power movements in the 1960s through 1980s had varying successes in opening up the traditional structures of university governance to allow more student and staff participation (Bonnell, 2016; Bourg, 2018; Cockburn, 1969; Connell, 2016; Hastings, 2003). Student power, which at its most basic level refers to the power of

movements. Broadly speaking, neoliberalism has *nearly* successfully erased the democratic management wins of students and staff (Connell, 2016).

If neoliberal universities are incapable of producing graduates who meaningfully participate in democratic life (Brown, 2015), then it is worth turning the looking glass back on universities to see what opportunities exist for learning and active participation in democratic governance. While student determination of the content and structure of their education is not in direct conflict with the aim of a neoliberal university, there is still a clear undermining of student power in governance bodies, especially in direct relation to any student control of curriculum (Marginson & Considine, 2000). However, there is a hopeful opportunity in this space, a partnership between academic and professional staff and students. Incorporating elements of mentoring and training, such partnerships aim for genuine and authentic collaborative "projects," from completion of coursework module to critically informed policy submissions, rather than leaning into the rhetoric of students as consumers of education (Gravett, Kinchin, & Winstone, 2019). In the rhetoric of "graduate careers," partnership might create genuine opportunity for student determination of content, but in *authentic* partnership with university staff

FLINDERS UNIVERSITY PROTEST, 2017. PHOTO COURTESY OF AUTHORS

students to determine the structure and content of their own education, had very real effects on the management of higher education institutions (Cockburn, 1969). Yet, these spaces have, for the most part, since been overrun with all kinds of "corporate experience" embodied in neoliberal managerial trends in universities. From the example in the introduction, and from a growing activist current around the world, we can see this area once again pulsate with opportunity (Marginson & Considine, 2000; Middlehurst, 2013; Shattock, 2013). Harnessing this energy in the context of university subjects is critical to the future success of both the university and democracy.

Democratic Governance in Higher Education

Centralized power in the overwhelming university managerial class structure (Brennan, 2010) in universities has overwritten the small victories of earlier student power

we could start to see a move towards a more democratic student/staff co-governance. Unfortunately, in neoliberal times, the collective power of students remains weakened. The power to determine *their* education now tends to rest in class enrolment numbers and student evaluations of teaching surveys.

Whether students are conceptualized as customers, consumers, stakeholders, or directors (Lizzio & Wilson, 2009) has deep implications for students in terms of governance. The latter terms envision a more authentic partnership approach (Klemenčič, 2012, 2014), while the former fit the neoliberal agenda of "students as consumers," and "defines the value of their role in governance primarily as operationalising the expected transactive rights of maximising satisfaction, ensuring accountability and earning an appropriate return on investment" (Lizzio & Wilson, 2009, p. 70). In this sense, much like class selection and teaching evaluations, the actual metrics of value to the CMG is the number of "bums on seats" and net profit from student enrolments. This perspective reduces possibilities for

students' critical engagement with issues facing their institutions, their social and political lives, and the context of participation in issues of democracy generally. Not only have there been reductions in the number of student positions on university councils and academic boards and senates, reductions and cuts in student unionism, and an undermining of student power as a result of managerialism (Marginson & Considine, 2000), but the democratic potential of participation in *every* university has been undermined. In Australia particularly, many student unions lost their independence, being reabsorbed into universities as associations, run under the banner of "unionism" without any of the power or potential of a real union. This came as a result of Voluntary Student Unionism, a conservative attack to disband student unions in Australia (Barcan, 2011; Rochford, 2006). The limiting of student power, both in the sense of theoretical positioning and "student voice," further aids the banner cause of neoliberalism towards an unquestioning, uncritical public with the sole aim of increasing profit (Harvey, 2005). For a functional democratic society, we must have a citizenry who are "educated, thoughtful, and democratic in sensibility" (Brow, 2015, p. 199). To these ends, there is great need for a university sector that values democratic participation by students and staff in institutional governance. This involvement, however, must be foundationally understood on a basis of respect for student power, positioned through democratic, authentic, and collaborative decision-making.

> ***While there are genuine efforts to challenge what and how content is taught, the neoliberal view of learning promotes individuals flourishing on their own and creating opportunities to profit through entrepreneurial behaviour.***

The influences of neoliberalism in higher education not only manifest as a political struggle, but as a pedagogic one too (Scandrett, 2017). Thus, the vision of a democratic university does not end in governance; it extends into teaching processes and use of resources (Klemenčič, 2014; Planas, Soler, Fullana, Pallisera, & Vilà, 2013). In alignment with the worldview of those under the neoliberal ideology, there are effects upon every aspect of student and staff lives. Certainly, the breeding ground for neoliberal ideologies are not inconsistent with the fabric of some areas of the university where teaching and learning processes have devolved or remained stagnant, visible in the design of teaching programs with top-down and colonial pedagogies (Connell, 2016). While there are genuine efforts to challenge what and how content is taught, the neoliberal view of learning promotes individuals flourishing on their own and creating opportunities to profit through entrepreneurial behaviour. However, it is important to note that alternative teaching strategies, modes of governance, and pathways for curriculum development exist, and are not limited to student "start-ups." We are in an age where collaboration is made ever easier by technologies, where growing diversity is easier to support, and where we have remarkable access to

knowledge. This is truly fertile ground for liberating praxis politically, pedagogically, and societally (Scandrett, 2017). For instance, we have seen the adoption of technology to maintain teaching during the COVID-19 global pandemic. For many, this has resulted in enabling education to continue from home during social distancing; however, for the neoliberal university, it has not just enabled, but *justified* the use of replaying recorded lectures, reducing class times, enlarging class sizes, minimizing student engagement with critical conversation and inquiry through tutorials (Cornelius-Bell & Bell, 2020). Importantly then, these tools ought to be seized for the "public good" and the betterment of our institutions, not to further casualize the workforce, marginalize and sideline students with additional needs, or video record the expertise of senior professors to replay in lieu of their authentic presence.

Acting out Against the Oncoming Cascade

On occasion, students have responded to neoliberal shifts through considered voices. In response to the Flinders University Academic Restructure, the Student Association Education Officer reflected on the lack of due consultative process in the restructure and other neoliberal institutional changes: "University Management have intentionally tried to eliminate student voice from this process. History shows that they consistently rush through these proposals at the most inconvenient of time during the semester for staff and students" (Rayner cited in Hatzi 2017). In the ranks of the restructure protests were many members of the Student Association as well as the student body more broadly. Uniquely, the campaign we organised did not originate in the Student Association, but drew on the strengths of various non-political and political factions of students and staff across the campus. Bringing together this diverse group united under one banner was a good founding step towards *solidarity* we used as a foundation to build a new view for *our* public education.

Conceptualizing neoliberal universities as described thus far has the potential to drain hope for those who hold a view of education for the "public good." It is easy to lose sight of the potential of education when "lost in the forest." A bleak view, as highlighted by Connell (2016), shows us the successful universities that have "wealth skimmed from the corporate economy that has relentlessly degraded the global environment for the rest of humanity" (p. 68). However, Connell also embarks upon building a message of hope and possibility for reconceptualizing the university, pointing out the risks of viewing the past with rose coloured glasses: "[t]here has never been a golden age in universities", and "[w]e will probably need a range of new types of university, as the domain of knowledge becomes more complex" (p. 72). In envisioning a future university for all, then, we must negotiate the shifting space between reflection and action.

At Flinders University, there had been a notable gradual reduction in student positions on University Council and Academic Senate since 2013. Alongside restructuring from Schools and Faculties to monolithic Colleges, the capacity for students to provide input and discussion had been erased

and remnant representation and student "input" were little more than efforts to placate students and meet key performance indicators for student experience. Unfortunately, the real damage of conceptualizing co-governance as simply student experience was the resultant view that students can be wheeled off to conferences, meetings, and media events to give the University a face lift, or to improve the marketing image of the University's provision of a "good life" (For example: Gottschall & Saltmarsh, 2017; Skalicky et al., 2018). Tokenised student experience in leadership also accounted for management's view of student consultation in times of proposed significant changes. Graduate students were rarely consulted on the structural and staffing changes, even where important questions about the impact on colleagues and supervision were being discussed. Access to governing bodies at Flinders University was, in fact, made so difficult that to give a student address to the Academic Senate during the restructure, the significant support of the hamstrung Student Association was required. Even then, an address of only three minutes was allowed to speak on a range of predetermined topics, none of which were to relate to the Academic Restructure. Even following an address to the Vice-Chancellor and many members of senior management, follow up emails remained unanswered. Hence, more new activist movements in response to the changes that threaten all of Australia's public universities are necessary.

In suggesting action, perhaps some of the best-received, coordinated consciousness-raising efforts used digital and social media, marking a difference between student action in 1960 and 2018. Running a series of YouTube[4] videos that collected the real voices of affected students, "vox pops" which had been recorded for over 75 hours on YouTube alone, yielded real awareness of the issues. Word of mouth is a clear tactic for raising awareness around key issues but only as long as students are on campus, thus digital communication is key and employing social media platforms such as Facebook in conjunction with typical consciousness raising efforts can have real effect. There were very few students and staff at Flinders University who were unaware of the "Say NO to Flinders Academic Restructuring" Facebook page. However arbitrary the statistics provided by Facebook are, there was a real connection between the number of individuals reached (over 14,000) and the level of awareness on and off campus. While these efforts may have felt like they achieved little in the scheme of things, particularly in light of the steady forward march of the CMG, there were serious commitments made through the networks established. This suggests that to be effective any new student movement must embrace these types of social media technologies. However, these are victories of engagement, rather than victories of affecting actual change to democratic governance. For this we need a new approach, one other than protests which situate students on the outskirts; instead, they must be partners at the table.

Students as Partners

Student activism at Flinders University has a history as long as the University (Hastings, 2003). Various political and educational issues have been tackled, but one of the longest standing issues for activists at Flinders, as far back as 1967, has been representation of students in topics, courses, and program development. In 1970, the *Empire Times* student magazine, established soon after the University was founded, ran an issue lamenting the lack of student involvement in effective organizational change: "Unfortunately, student involvement at Flinders at present seems to be of the 'turn up, tune in, piss off' variety which very soon leads to alienation of those staff members who do look forward to this kind of unity. The line of "student power" appears to have burnt too brightly and rapidly to sustain itself leaving only the dying embers of a few interested students..." (Empire Times, Issue 2.2, 1970, p. 2). The same issues Flinders University faced then were of course felt again during the 2017-2018 restructure. Once again, huge organisational change was occurring, and despite the best efforts of engaged students and academics, little resulted from collective action against the chancellery, let alone the neoliberal cascade. Just as the 2017-18 period saw a rapid dissipation of student and staff involvement, the 1970's protests similarly fell prey to issues of morale.

The actions of students-as-partners, after the 2018 restructure, appear to be gaining more traction than efforts of the students-as-protestors during the height of the recent restructuring processes. This pivot, from fist-in-air activism to a more critically engaged student body likely could not have happened in any other way. Through traditional activism, new representation structures were won. With students now filling these spaces it is finally possible to commence a new form of student movement, working inside the neoliberal framework (and alongside the neoliberal managers themselves) to create something different, something critical, and something better. While "Students as Partners," in general terms in the higher education context "re-envisions students and staff as active collaborators in teaching and learning" (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017, p. 1), for our purposes the term refers more to a reframing of student away from customer towards a valuable contributor and 'thinker' in the higher education space. We would extend this to think of students as partners in governance and decision-making of the whole institution. Our contention is that in order for students to be meaningfully part of teaching and learning they must also be part of the structural fabric of the institution itself; without this, "Students as Partners" is destined for failure.

Formalised Student Partnership in Australian Higher Education is a relatively new initiative made prominent through a pilot research project at the University of Technology Sydney (Varnham, Olliffe, Waite, & Cahill, 2016). This pilot sought to increase students' engagement in their university through representation, and partnership through engagement: "to encourage engagement, a sincere culture of partnership [with students] must be developed through demonstration by universities and the higher education sector of a commitment to and respect for the [voice of] student[s]" (Varnham et al., 2016, p. 8). This project has now expanded nationally into a "Student Voice Australia" project, though similar initiatives exist globally. Similar to the identification of student unions in partnership with university structures, Velden (2012) highlights "[s]ome

elements of a consumer-related culture appear to be more relevant but the stronger preference of the student voice remains a collegial, partnership-based approach for enhancement of the student experience" (p. 245).

Partnership is now becoming the preferred model of student engagement at Flinders University and is even part of the same strategic plan that oversaw the significant structural changes discussed above, which cites a student-centred ethos that sets out to "empower students as partners" (Flinders University, 2016). Initially, student representatives were stifled and disregarded when speaking to Council. Following the implementation of the new strategic direction, partnership has begun to be legitimised as an objective by the senior management of the University. Dozens of students from across the institution have been involved in partnership collaboration days; staff and students are engaging in building opportunities for authentic collaboration; and student numbers are increasing on academic and professional committees and boards across the institution. The theme of the Flinders' annual "Learning and Teaching" conference week in 2019 was "Students as Partners," whereby students from undergraduate and graduate programs spoke about their collaborations and projects to contribute to, challenge, and change the University. These involved having direct impacts on the betterment of the University *for them*, including projects for advancing wellbeing and access for students, negotiating new entry pathways for new equity groups, and contributing to research outputs as "junior academics." These moves are echoed nationally, with participants in Student Voice and Partnership projects seeing real success in engaging students meaningfully with governance. As a direct result of a student partnership pilot, one Australian university was able to "[establish] student consultation groups, led by students. Seeking timely student feedback (rather than as a last-minute action), student survey results have been taken into consideration with equal weight to requests from staff in terms of university infrastructure, projects and retail strategy" (Louth, Walsh & Goodwin-Smith, 2019, p. 20). While involvement of students in partnership may easily become superficial initiatives, when taken seriously, and when responsibility is delegated to students, real educative opportunities exist. When harnessed critically, these opportunities enable students as legitimate stakeholders, but more importantly as critical agents of positive change through work from "within."

Student partnership is not unproblematic, however. It is based on a core of *engagement* and, if implementors are not careful, it can fall into a mere addition to the student-as-consumer model, become diluted by existing approaches, and erode the possibility for a "radical" new vision through *partnership* (Peters & Mathias, 2018), whereby partnership becomes a way to increase the "value proposition" of students. Student partnership might also be conceived as another way of leaning into students-as-consumers approaches. This forges clear links between education and the neoliberal project whereby "education has proved to be well-suited to the neoliberal project, with its emphases on achievement and its measurement" (Tight, 2019, p. 275). However, if an authentic view of planning, both academic and governance projects, in meaningful collaboration with

students, then student partnership has a real opportunity to succeed as a *counter-narrative* or at least a more inclusive approach to students in the institution than the traditional "neoliberal student subject" (Wijaya Mulya, 2019). This important work needs help: institutions with the opportunity to participate in partnership projects need conscientious academic and professional staff to guide these projects towards a "public good," rather than allowing them to further distort the view of the students who participate in the initiatives.

Again, at Flinders University opportunities for genuine partnership are on the rise. As staff become increasingly aware of the philosophy of student inclusion and student-centred teaching, genuine opportunities for student collaboration, then partnerships arise. These opportunities appear in curriculum design, space and facilities planning, executive committees, and so on. Importantly, designing student partnership opportunities will not happen organically, nor without leadership. Students should push to be reconceptualised as an authentic part of the teaching, learning, and governance processes in higher education institutions. Viewing all students as vital representatives, in learning and teaching processes, and governance with the core view of universities as a "public good," can provide significant opportunities to counter the narrative of education as a for-profit business. Once this fundamental philosophical shift occurs, the new possibilities are endless.

> ***The long game, then, for student partnership must be a progressive passing of the baton between students with rigorous understandings of the governance landscape of the Australian corporate university.***

The long game, then, for student partnership must be a progressive passing of the baton between students with rigorous understandings of the governance landscape of the Australian corporate university. If good academic governance truly is the way to change university practices, surely a good path forward is to not just *include* students, but to actively *prioritise* students' role in governance of contemporary universities. Beyond simply giving power to a privileged minority (or high achieving or political studies students) or enabling a handful of democratically elected "representatives" to rule the nest, our aim, through partnership, should be to truly empower *all* students with a sense of *student power*. Students should also be working within the systems that set the strategic tone for the years to come and build a new vision for the future that does not rely on heavily corporatized models of success. Many students already recognise that success is not tied to financial outcomes or profit, but working to have new frames of success recognised is a significant task, and requires them to critically engage with the inputs and outputs of the institution.

University staff, too, must think bigger. Much of the extant literature pictures student partnership as merely a

new way of thinking about teaching and learning: "involving" students in the creation of curriculum, or "asking" students what they think about decisions relating to the structure or content of their education. This is not the "radical" picture of student power seen by our colleagues in the 1960s; if we really are to see students as "empowered" to tackle issues relating to the structure of universities, shape the content of courses, and make a valuable contribution to the social and political fabric of the nation, we need to work to educate ourselves as critical citizens.

Partnership offers us new opportunities. Through student partnership initiatives at Flinders University, we have seen an increase of students on committees in each of our Colleges. But these opportunities require strategy to be effective. No matter our role in education, if academics critically support students to understand the contemporary socio-political context of the university, and the potential of "student power," the students placed in these positions have a real chance to challenge the status quo in universities. As Brown (2015) asserts, "human capital is distinctly not concerned with acquiring the knowledge and experience needed for intelligent democratic citizenship." Rather, knowledge and training are valued by human capital only for their market use-value. Assuming a partnership approach, citizen students who act as partners in the structure and content of their education then become a slow but deliberate counter-view to students as consumers – a small victory against the neoliberal cascade. Indeed, through involving students in partnership, there are real opportunities to model, support and critically engage students in applying those skills sometimes cited as lacking in the younger generation.

Conclusion

What shape will the university of the future take? There are two very distinct paths. On one side we have a neoliberalised institution that seeks only to enhance the value that might be extracted from its students, workers, research, and community. On the other hand, a university of possibility which includes students and staff in a fundamentally more democratic negotiated process, working towards a shared vision of authentic partnership between the public institutions, students, and citizens. Of course, if we are truly tasked with leaving the public university in better shape than when we found it, then we need to act with a view towards real democratic participation in society and work collaboratively, meaningfully, critically, and democratically within the structures of higher education.

There is a significant need for meaningful public dialogue, lucid conversation, and evidence-based reasoning about the nature and future of universities. The future of education rests with the current and future students of universities around the world. Without developing co-responsibility, authentic collaboration, and meaningful partnership, many opportunities for student and staff critical understanding of society will be lost, and ultimately so may the "public good" of education. If the noble goal of the institution is to make meaningful contributions for the good of humanity, then we need a truly inclusive system of governance and education to be a flagship of what "to do"

in the face of growing damaging moves in education and society generally.

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Notes

[1]The Fair Work Commission is Australia's governmental body that promotes "harmonious, productive, cooperative and compliant workplace relations in Australia." Essentially, it acts as a legal framework to support employer-employee relations.

[2]See the following Facebook posts: https://www.facebook.com/sayNOtoflindersacademicrestructuring/posts/273966063532362

[3]As a recent example, a 2020 Australian Government proposal extols dramatic fee increases to public higher education courses in the Humanities. See: https://ministers.dese.gov.au/tehan/minister-education-dan-tehan-national-press-club-address

[4]Hear the student voices: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ju4Y9J22Zkc

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Free Speech and Academic Freedom in the Era of the Alt-Right

by Robin Hackett and Javier Rivera

IMAGE BY BERMIX STUDIO

The Weaponization of Free Speech

I would rather not call attention to the fact that in November 2016, I commented on a colleague's Facebook post, "it's time for an investigation leading to expulsion." I claim this utterance though and discuss its aftermath because scrutiny of these events clarifies both the nature of current threats facing interdisciplinary programs in women, gender, and sexuality studies, and race and ethnic studies, and the need for faculty and students working in these areas to respond by building upon cultures of resistance and resilience. We also offer an annotated bibliography on the issues of free speech and academic freedom—in the name of which current attacks are being waged—as a resource for those of us involved in efforts to defend ourselves and our programs. We encourage users to consider this a working document; to add annotations and to circulate the material to all members of campus communities as circumstances evolve.

The events leading up to my comment are these: after the November 2016 election, the College Democrats at my university held a rally "in solidarity with all people who are at risk of getting their rights taken away by a Trump presidency, and to ensure that it is known that Trump's hateful rhetoric does not represent our generation" ("Our Power Walk Out and March"). A few counter protesters showed up to this rally, including one in a gorilla suit and another in a Richard Nixon mask—a pair we later identified with the meme *Dicks for Harambe*, though they remained anonymous to the degree that we never knew whether or not they were students or where they were from.

The genealogy of *Dicks for Harambe* begins in May 2016, after a silverback gorilla named Harambe was shot and killed at the Cincinnati zoo to save a child who had fallen into the gorilla enclosure. There was lots of liberal outrage on behalf of Harambe, and against zoo officials, over the shooting. One of the memes produced in the online debate included the phrase "dicks out for Harambe" and a picture of a teenaged boy holding a gun—a.k.a. a "dick" (Hsieh). After the meme went viral, it was, in the words of its creators, "coopted by the racists" (Hsieh). A musical video featuring primate genitalia compared Harambe with Bill Cosby. By the summer before the 2016 election, media by Milo Yiannopoulos among others featured comparisons between Harambe and African Americans in general. At the time of the College Democrat's rally in November, the meme had a solid history of racist and sexist use by right-wing activists. Since then as well, *Dicks for Harambe* has been deployed to harass and threaten: in May of 2017, nooses and bananas with the words "Harambe Bait" inked on them were hung around the campus of American University in Washington D.C. on the same day a black woman took office as the student government president for the first time in the institution's history. The FBI investigated those appearances, which they properly deemed threats (Fortin), though the perpetrators were never caught (Cook).

The racism of *Dicks for Harambe* also builds on the long history of apes as part of Victorian technologies of empire. Britanny Cooper notes that liberal sentiment on behalf of the killed gorilla was grounded in racist ideology about the relative worth of a gorilla and the child, an African American, who had fallen into the gorilla enclosure, and whose African American parents were additionally demonized for their parenting. Even without knowledge of the *Dicks for Harambe* meme, many at the rally in November 2016, as well as those who looked at photos circulated after the fact, recognized the ape incident as a racist slur. The student senate, for instance, responded to Harambe's appearance by unanimously passing a resolution aimed at combating bias incidents (Student Senate Resolution 19).

At the rally, Harambe and Nixon threw pacifiers implying that people in attendance were babies if they took offense to Trump's racist, sexist, and ableist bullying, and they threw bananas amplifying the racist provocation of the ape suit. They also refused to talk to members of the university community who tried to engage them. The silence, the mocking, and the anonymity created by the costumes, especially in the context of school shootings, made people nervous. After the rally, one former Women and Gender Studies faculty member, an African American woman, posted a photograph of the pair with the comment, "somebody knows who these two are," underscoring the threat they represented and suggesting the community should identify and hold them accountable.

In anger and solidarity, I posted my remark and then went about my job as an educator at a mainly white public institution: I wrote to the president of the University asking him to initiate a campus dialog in response to the use of a gorilla suit as racist provocation. The importance for our students of learning about the history of such racist expressions was particularly evident, I noted, during a week that included not only the presence of a person dressed as a gorilla on our campus, but also the firing of public officials in a West Virginia town over a comment comparing Michele Obama to an ape. None of faculty involved in the Facebook exchange took steps to initiate an investigation, false or otherwise, or to get anyone expelled.

Aftermath

Nobody, not even the president, acknowledged the letter I wrote to him or similar letters colleagues wrote. But a screen shot of the Facebook exchange was captured, made into the subject of nearly identical articles in *Campus Reform* (TPUSA's website), *Breitbart*, *The Blaze*, and *True Pundit*. Later, the events as reported by these alt-right sites were repeated by local news outlets both print and radio. The four faculty who had participated in the Facebook exchange—all members of the English department, two also core faculty in WGS--were subjected to a barrage of hateful phone and email messages, including death and rape threats. Fliers that included my picture and the words *Harambe killer* were also posted around the campus accompanied by bananas and pacifiers. A student journalist for the campus newspaper published an interview with Harambe and Nixon, who claimed not to be students at all, but rather community members hiding their identities out of fear of retaliation against themselves and their families.

Student response to these events was overwhelmingly sympathetic to the faculty being targeted. Many expressed

horror at the nature of the attacks and concern for our wellbeing. I assume that on our campus, which includes a mix of conservative and liberal student groups, there was some support for Harambe and Nixon's messaging. But no students I encountered said anything to that effect. Moreover, the strong belief among the faculty who were subjected to attacks is that those who carried them out had planned to provoke, search for, and then disseminate faculty responses to Harambe and Nixon. We discovered later that other universities (Clemson University and University of Massachusetts, Amherst) had already been the subject of reportage about anti-racist responses to appearances by Harambe. Also, the electronic attacks seem to have been carried out by a single non campus-affiliated individual using multiple phone numbers and email addresses. After the police identified and contacted this caller, all electronic threats stopped.

Faculty response was more mixed and more distressing than the student response. The vast majority of my colleagues were sympathetic and helpful. The English department, the Affirmative Action and Equity office, and other university units held forums and panel discussions for faculty and graduate student instructors about how to handle racism, sexism, and homophobia in the classroom. Many of my colleagues also commented that, in the age of social media, my experience could easily have been their own. A few colleagues were angry however. One insisted that Harambe and Nixon, the meme, was not racist. He was also critical about my having brought bad press to the university at a time when the department, and the humanities in general, were already experiencing downward pressure. A few colleagues sent emails chastising me for being ignorant about issues of censorship. A great many of my colleagues, including some who were sympathetic, took the events as reported in *Campus Reform*--specifically the claim that I was trying to get students expelled--as fact, illustrating how vulnerable we all are, even those of us who make careers of reading, writing, and vetting sources of information, to illegitimate news stories. University lawyers treated WGS faculty and staff to a training about the importance of presenting both sides of every issue.

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Beyond campus, I was added to the professor watchlist of faculty considered dangerous by Turning Point USA. This watchlist claims to list faculty who persecute conservative students. Practically, a "dangerous" designation by TPUSA is based on a clear--if capacious--set of criteria, including engagement in scholarship and teaching in women, gender, and sexuality studies, climate science, and/or race and ethnic studies.

TPUSA was founded in 2012 by Charlie Kirk and is funded by big name Republicans including Clarence and Virginia Thomas and the Koch Brothers. The organization holds several national conferences including a young Latino summit and a Young Women's Leadership Summit, which

was sponsored by the NRA in 2018. The Women's Summit is advertised as an alternative to a liberal culture of feminism that Republicans characterize as oppressive. In 2018, at a pro Trump event at the Women's Summit, which included chants of "lock her up," Candace Owens was given a standing ovation for saying that the premise of the "#metoo" movement is that women are weak and inconsequential. TPUSA employs student workers to recruit new members and to inform on faculty who show a so-called liberal bias. TPUSA funds conservative candidates in student government elections and, during the 2016 presidential election, paid students to work for conservative candidates. They are pro-military, pro-police, anti-feminist, anti-Muslim, and anti-Black Lives Matter. The Southern Poverty Law center has documented TPUSA's links to white supremacy. TPUSA has chapters on many campuses, including mine, and is tracked by the AAUP, who reports on their activities on the website *One Faculty One Resistance.* TPUSA's revenue was $70 thousand in 2012; in 2016, it was $8.2 million (Lachlan). Progressive or radical student movements on today's campuses exist despite the concerted efforts of TPUSA and other powerful reactionary forces to make them disappear.

In March of 2019, Trump further elevated the stature of TPUSA by announcing his intention to sign an executive order requiring colleges and universities that get federal research funding to support free speech. Repression of free speech is not a real problem on university campuses. Free speech and academic freedom--related but distinct--are core values of research universities. The right to free speech is, however, a rallying cry for TPUSA and other conservative groups, including legislators, who are increasingly focused on reforming higher education. Loud public assertions that colleges are curtailing the free speech rights of conservative students are--specifically and exclusively--efforts to protect the right to express hatred, including white supremacy, transphobia, antifeminism, antisemitism and Islamophobia. It is ours as scholars, educators, and students to anticipate and handle problems with bias and exclusion on campus by involving one another in robust academic inquiry, not only within individual disciplines, but also about the concepts of academic freedom and freedom of speech as they relate to those disciplines and as they relate to social justice. The answer to hate speech isn't obvious or easy to manage in classrooms full of people for whom school is exactly the right place to expose common sense and ignorance as well as insights and wisdom. But hate speech is a problem that is ours to learn and teach about in nuanced and informed ways.

FOIA'd

Complicating the situation, after the rally where Harambe and Nixon showed up, is that the WGS Department and faculty, a large percentage of us also faculty in English, were served a Freedom of Information Act request by *Campus Reform*. The request was made based on another set of posts on the official WGS Facebook page and related to the College Democrat's rally: WGS staff offered the use of the office and supplies for making posters for the event. This use of materials was cast as partisan activity, which is

disallowed by public institutions. The FOIA request is still outstanding and being negotiated by university lawyers. The request is for all emails of all WGS faculty going back 5 years. University lawyers limited the release to emails containing key words, including Harambe, Nixon, and the names of 2016 presidential candidates. The point of the request is to discover partisan comments made using university servers, computers, and email accounts in order to accuse faculty of using public resources to indoctrinate students, which would constitute legal and ethical violations. *Campus Reform* and TPUSA have the clear goal of trying to get people fired, get programs and departments closed, and universities defunded. So far, the university's lawyers have been sympathetic to individual faculty members involved, but their primary goal is to prevent lawsuits against the University. In pursuit of this goal, WGS faculty were invited to a meeting, the point of which was to educate us on how to speak and teach in nonpartisan ways. It fell to the faculty to try to explain to university lawyers that the discipline has an advocacy component about which it is not possible to be even-handed: there is no reasonable opposing viewpoint to the assertion that women, queers, poor people, immigrants, non-English speakers, and people of color are due dignitary rights and equitable access on campus and beyond.

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The events described here, while profoundly miserable, were also quickly over. The first threats came in before the Thanksgiving break. They had stopped completely at the end of the semester in early December. However, the aftereffects, both good and bad, continue. My fear of renewed attack results in self-censorship in the classroom. Colleagues who witnessed the attacks are similarly wary. All of us expect student reporters recruited by TPUSA to surreptitiously record our classes and circulate gaffs or comments that, taken out of context, appear foolish or politically inflected. I routinely warn graduate students with whom I work to be guarded. TPUSA holds occasional events on campus, which elicit calls for civility from the university administration. After explosive confrontations around one such event, faculty, administrators, and students have worked together to limit contact between those attending TPUSA events and would-be protesters: we organize physically distant counter-events that feature pizza, movies, and programing specifically for students of color, women, and LGBTQ students. Academic units have organized lecture series and discussions around the issue of freedom of speech, including a few events meant to generate broad

campus-wide conversations about P.E. Moskowitz's 2019 book *The Case Against Free Speech: The First Amendment, Fascism, and the Future of Dissent* culminating in a talk by Moskowitz—an event that has had to be postponed because of shutdowns around Covid-19.

For Feminist Faculty and Students in Particular

The attack on colleges and universities in the name of free speech is ours to fight for a lot of reasons. Rightwing efforts to turn campus culture toward political conservatism has been proceeding for the last twenty years and has gotten a boost from the 2016 election (Fischer). These rightwing efforts are in line with the priorities of white supremacy, nationalism, and patriarchy--all systems of inequity that feminist scholars train to understand and address. Our record of success is uneven and requires constant reinvention and efforts at accountability. But these are the goals around which feminist scholarship is organized. We are, as a result, in the crosshairs of conservative efforts to invigorate commitments to white supremacy, nationalism, and patriarchy on campus and beyond.

In addition, feminist scholars have played a role in creating the beast that identity politics has become: a commonsensical tool for college students working to uphold white supremacy. Women's histories of organizing, albeit inspired by African American agitation for abolition and civil rights, learned and taught by feminists over the last forty years, consolidate the logic behind what is now white identity politics. Groups such as TPUSA, and their argument that white conservative students need protections to speak their truths, follow logics taught by feminists. It is worth reminding each other that those of us who know and build our scholarship on this intellectual history have nevertheless not prevented the weaponization of identity politics on campuses. It's magical thinking to imagine that this intellectual history will interrupt white supremacy going forward if we don't rehearse it often, in detail, as writers and teachers, in the contexts of our separate disciplines.

Finally, feminists are particularly vulnerable to accusations that we violate rights to free expression because we are negatively associated with the prescriptive excesses of a short segment in our long history: women's liberationist philosophies of the late 1970s and early 1980s. This negative association is particularly true for lesbians. In the aftermath of the events on my campus, for instance, I suspect that the assumptions of many of my colleagues, including those who were hostile as well as those who were sympathetic, were products of confirmation bias: as a lesbian, I am likely to be interpolated as anti-free speech. The fact that I alone, the lesbian among us, was added to the professor watchlist points to these biases as well. Moreover, since freedom of expression is a seemingly apolitical core value of higher education and democratic society, it is an especially effective cover for homophobia and a seemingly value-neutral way to phrase the explicit goals of advancing white supremacy and patriarchy. The colleague who was most hostile to me during these events (and whose hostility predated them) could, because I'm a

lesbian, credibly accuse me of treachery around censorship without seeming homophobic. In my colleague's remarks, I see the weaponizing of identity politics from within liberal academe, and hence the need to provide more support and protection, especially in times of crisis, to people and programs that study and advance models of critical thought and resistance against social and economic injustices.

Some Conclusions

Freedom of speech has been weaponized against individuals and departments in women, gender, and sexuality studies, and race and ethnic studies. Faculty and students in these fields need to build expertise in the debates about, and differences between, academic freedom, which usefully constrains speech via disciplinary conventions, as Joan Walloch Scott explains, and freedom of speech in the public square. And we need to use this expertise to lead campus dialogs about if and how limits on hate speech can serve academic freedom, the inclusive missions of colleges and universities, as well as the goals of WGS and race and ethnic studies departments. There are purists on the left who make good points about responding to hate speech with more speech and serving the goals of academic freedom and inclusion by developing an ever more robust marketplace of ideas. There is meaningful skepticism about the efficacy of doling out punishments for violations of speech codes. There are robust practical arguments that speech can be carefully limited in the name of inclusion, prevention of dignitary harms, and the pursuit of knowledge on campuses and beyond. Many allies in the effort to create inclusive campus communities that advance knowledge have well-meaning commitments to free speech that obscure the ways in which it is being used specifically to undermine diversity. Most recently, P.E. Moskowitz suggests that we question the line separating acceptable speech and prohibited violence. These arguments about freedom and expression, represented by the annotations below, are nuanced and complex. They engage history, power, and law. Educating ourselves and others requires the ability to cite and explore these arguments in informed and careful ways that are responsive to specific campus communities. That feminists have long been having conversations about the limits of identity politics does not release us from the responsibility to dismantle what others have made of it; instead, it makes us particularly well-suited to do that work.

Finally, understand that *Campus Reform* reporters, funded by TPUSA, are watching and waiting for language and phrases, including mistakes, that can be taken out of context, in order to launch assaults on individuals they can claim are unfairly punishing conservative students. They are working hard to accuse faculty of being forces of indoctrination rather than academic freedom. WGSS and race and ethnic studies departments and personnel are their specific targets. But white supremacy and patriarchy are neither new nor interesting. More interesting and vital are the cultures of resistance and resilience that feminists, especially black and brown feminists, have developed in response—including mass movements for abolition, civil rights, and black lives, as well as solitary acts that have opened access to education and politics for people coming

up behind us. It's ours to facilitate access to education for all by learning and teaching more, and not less, about the histories and logics of free speech and academic freedom. Here we offer an annotated bibliography as one tool among many that feminists and advocates of academic freedom have to work with as we enhance our own cultures of resistance and resilience.

An Annotated Bibliography on Academic Freedom

We offer the following annotated bibliography on the issues of academic freedom and free speech – in the name of which current attacks are being waged – as a resource for teachers and students involved in the effort to defend ourselves and our programs. We encourage users to consider this as a working document; to add annotations and to continue to circulate the material to one another as circumstances evolve. We have opted for a chronological rather than alphabetical arrangement of annotations in order to emphasize that academic freedom exists as a socially situated set of beliefs, institutional practices, and juridical concepts that has evolved through the political correctness debates and culture wars. The chronological arrangement also clarifies consistencies over time. In assaults on academic freedom, scholars of color, women, and/or LGBTQ+ scholars experience academic environments that are disproportionately hostile. Finally, we hope a chronological arrangement of materials can contribute to our ability to anticipate, and thus defend against, assaults on academic freedom and faculty governance that may emerge during the current COVID-19 pandemic and through the growing activism for Black Lives. We offer this annotated bibliography as one tool among many that advocates of academic freedom have to work with as we enhance our own cultures of resistance and resilience.

Lawrence III, Charles R. "If He Hollers Let Him Go: Regulating Racist Speech on Campus." Matsuda, Mari J., Charles R Lawrence III, Richard Delgado, and Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, eds. *Words that Wound: Critical Race Theory, Assaultive Speech, and the First Amendment*. Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1993.

Charles Lawrence III argues that the way in which the discourse on free speech is framed--with the civil libertarian stance on one side, and the anti-racist position on the other--allows space for racists to covertly extol a moral high ground by shrouding bigotry in the right to free speech. Civil libertarians that protect hate speech mark the distinction between it and injurious speech, claiming protections only for the former. Lawrence holds the position that this distinction is not part of the purpose of the First Amendment. Furthermore, he argues that even when hate speech is experienced in a manner that is not face-to-face, it has the potential to injure members of the entire racial group which the hate speech targets.

Regulations limiting free speech on college campuses are often labeled as thought policing by those who oppose such policies. Yet policies rarely extend protections beyond

those against face-to-face bigotry, which is not protected by the First Amendment. Finally, Lawrence urges for power dynamics to be taken into account when discussing injurious speech. He points to the fact that marginalized people in society often experience injurious speech in connection with violence; thus, protections for hate speech encourage the perpetuation of such violence rather than fostering free speech.

Menand, Luke, Ed. *The Future of Academic Freedom*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

This collection opens with a rejection of the claim that multiculturalism and postmodernism pose outsized threats to academic freedom. Instead, Menand argues, an intellectually cosmopolitan university makes a stronger foundation for academic freedom. The position is taken up again by the last contributor, Edward Said, who argues that a remedy for current pressures on academic freedom is for academics to be what he calls "travelers." A traveler is one that goes beyond the constraints of disciplines, and core texts, ideas, and methods. Those who oppose this act of expansion are often accused of politicization, yet those who adhere to the perpetuation of long-held standards could be similarly accused.

Other chapters in the first section explore the philosophical underpinnings of academic freedom. Richard Rorty takes a skeptical position on the role disciplines have in the university, while Thomas Haskell positions his defense of the disciplines, and the professional norms that develop within them, as what allows for academic freedom.

In the second section, contributors discuss regulating hate speech on university campuses. Cass Sunstein evaluates regulations against hate speech in terms of the educational commitments of the institution, arguing that when such regulations further educational commitments, it is justifiable to extend them beyond state regulations. Henry Louis Gates uses the framework of critical race theory to analyze popular understandings of the First Amendment, including those of absolutists, who make an unsubstantiated claim that offensive speech does no harm. Building on arguments made by the contributors to *Words That Wound*—those of Matusda, Lawrence III, and Delgado in particular—Gates explains that injurious speech is often directed at entire groups of people, not individuals, and that racist speech can be viewed as libel.

The final section begins with a chapter by Joan Scott, who argues against a reinvigoration of "values" in the academy as it signals a closed framework. Instead, Scott pushes for an ethical practice dynamic and open to change. Ronald Dworkin argues for a new interpretation of academic freedom that can be used to differentiate between what is, and what is not, covered in its definition.

Doumani, Beshara, ed. *Academic Freedom after September 11*. New York: Zone Books, 2006.

Contributors to this volume examine the state of academic freedom in the immediate years following the September 11 terrorist attacks of 2001, agreeing that since the attacks, institutions of higher education are under increasing systems of surveillance, intervention and control. Doumani highlights the two greatest threats against academic freedom and civil liberties more broadly: the war on terror and a restructuring of academia under a neoliberal logic. The Patriot Act and subsequent regulations are threats to the future of academic freedom: they represent an increase in surveillance and control on everything from borrowed library books, to publications originating in states against which the United States has embargos. In addition, the managerial class created by the growing commercialization of knowledge has opened the university to influence by private advocacy groups. Doumani characterizes this interference as more complex than that of the government in the Cold War era with points of influence that include legislative efforts, funding sources, and fellowship-granting institutions.

Robert Post details the history of academic freedom in the United States, describing academic freedom as relative to research and writing, teaching, and extramural utterance. For Post, professional academic standards and norms regulate principles of academic freedom. In response to this guiding principle, Judith Butler urges for the historicization of professional norms, and their constant reinterpretation. Additionally, Butler argues that this constant reinterpretation is best practiced on a case-by-case basis rather than with blanket moral logics, and in the historically specific present. As opposed to the first two contributors of this section, Philippa Strum argues that academic freedom should be seen as an individual right protected by the First Amendment. Strum supports this position by tracing the history of Supreme Court cases that have protected the academic freedom of faculty members under the logic of free speech. The right has been held up by the rationale of "social benefit," which has thus far only been extended to those at public institutions. While arguing this position, Strum acknowledges the precarity of placing academic freedom under constitutional law.

Section two describes the ways in which attacks on academic freedom have been practiced. Kathleen Frydl argues that the changes in the structure of the university after World War II have coincided with a shift to viewing academic freedom as an individual right to expression rather than a freedom of inquiry. These changes have corresponded with the acceptance by universities of large amounts of money from government and private corporations, which in turn has led to growing pressure by these entities on academic institutions. Frydl encourages a return to an understanding of academic freedom as freedom of inquiry, rather than freedom from restrictions on extramural speech. Amy Newhall uses the lens of language programs to show the ways in which the government and political advocacy groups have long been at odds with the federal need to fulfill demands for language acquisition programs. Finally, Joel Beinin provides an extensive case study detailing much about what previous contributors have highlighted as the threats to academic freedom in post-September 11 United States. Comparing the attacks on Middle Eastern Studies to McCarthyism, Beinin shows how think tanks with connections to the federal government are

increasingly becoming threats to critical academic work on U.S. foreign policy.

Gerstmann, Evan, and Matthew J. Streb, eds. Academic Freedom at the Dawn of a New Century: How Terrorism, Governments, and Culture Wars Impact Free Speech. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006.

This collection contextualizes the topic of academic freedom at the turn of the 21st century in a post-September 11, 2001, United States. In part one, Matthew Streb highlights the increased concern by conservative groups over indoctrination at the hands of "politically correct" faculty. Since the September 11 attacks, Streb argues, these conservative groups have begun to target faculty who criticize U.S. foreign policy. Additionally, Streb argues that increased surveillance afforded to the federal government by the Patriot Act poses as the biggest threat to academic freedom post-September 11. Timothy Shiell argues that a civil libertarian view of academic freedom is the virtuous stance that will allow it to remain a right at academic institutions.

Part Two includes arguments that the status of free speech on campus remains largely protected. Robert O'Neil argues, using unpatriotic speech as the example, that academic freedom has survived post-September 11 assaults due to the experiences fifty years prior during the McCarthy era. In particular, the Supreme Court has defended academic freedom when cases have moved through the judicial system. This optimism is also seen in a chapter by Donald Downs, who argues that academic freedom as free speech has become the norm, and that speech acts seem to be in a position of continued protection. The optimism of both authors remains cautious even as they recognize multiple attempts to undermine academic freedom.

The essays in part three take self-censorship as their lens of analysis. M. Susan Lindee argues that post-September 11 self-censorship is a particular problem in the sciences due to government funding of research. Paul Sniderman discusses two theories about the effectiveness of self-censorship: conformity and authority. Finally, Evan Grestmann addresses less obvious issues of academic freedom such as loyalty oaths, expanding IRBs, and lack of tenure-track positions.

Nelson, Cary. *No University Is an Island: Saving Academic Freedom*. New York: New York University Press, 2010.

Former president of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), Cary Nelson discusses academic freedom in relation to domains beyond the academy, including the legal system, professional norms, technology, and symbolic meanings. Unlike others in the field, Nelson does not explore the philosophical underpinnings of academic freedom. Rather, he discusses what he sees as political threats to academic freedom. The case studies Nelson provides show the ways in which faculty and the AAUP can best resist those threats.

Nelson emphasizes the idea that academic freedom is most important as an aspirational, rather than attainable, goal, ever-changing, and in constant need of reevaluation and updating. He acknowledges the paradox of disciplines: they are a source of faculty agency over research pursuits; at the same time, they promote conformity. Nelson also tackles the idea that shared governance can sustain academic freedom. In order to do so, he argues, it must be restructured and repaired. Nelson enumerates sixteen threats to academic freedom, many of which come from the political Right. These emerging threats include neoliberal and corporatist interests, intervention from advocacy groups, and managerial administrative oversight. About contingent labor, and the casual dismissal or nonrenewal of nontenured faculty, Nelson argues that these practices threaten the future of academic freedom and make the tenure-track position an even greater priority. In succeeding chapters, Nelson uses the Arab-Israeli conflict to critique what he observes as the self-censorship that occurs in university departments; he cautions against the tendency to allow for the intrusion of identity politics into decision making in departments; he argues for alternatives to emergent neoliberal policies in unions. Finally, he draws on his experience as the president of the AAUP to examine its role in negotiating decisions on the defense of academic freedom.

Tsesis, Alexander. "University Hate speech Codes: Burning Crosses on Campus." *Connecticut Law Review* vol. 43 number 2 Dec. 2010. Pp 617-672.

Alexander Tsesis analyzes First Amendment relevance to hate speech codes and compares U.S. approaches to such measures to international ones. Tsesis argues that measures to curtail harmful speech on university campuses serve as a public good and that such speech, symbols, or statements that function to limit intellectual life in academic contexts are not protected by the First Amendment. By analyzing the Supreme Court decision in *Virginia v. Black*, Tsesis asserts that this court decision established precedent for limitations on hateful messages, particularly those that advocate or instigate violence, isolation, or deteriorate the learning environment. *Virginia v. Black* offers no directions in the nuances of seeking punishment, and so university administration should distinguish between university disciplinary action and criminal prosecution.

Waldron, Jeremy. *The Harm of Hate Speech.* Boston: Harvard UP 2012.

Jeremy Waldron describes hate speech laws as favorable forms of legislation. He argues that hate speech is more than a form of expression; it is a message of exclusion and a threat of potential harm through various means. Waldron makes two primary claims: first, our society should accept the premise that inclusiveness is a public good; second, hate speech laws help to confirm membership, and facilitate a sense of belonging, to historically marginalized groups. Belonging protects human dignity, a property of society Waldron argues is fundamental to full social participation. In service to his argument, Waldron discusses

the logic of hate speech laws in both the United States and Europe. He closes with an analysis of how Enlightenment philosophers navigated religious intolerance.

Bilgrami, Akeel, and Jonathan R. Cole, editors. *Who's Afraid of Academic Freedom?* Columbia University Press, 2015.

Essays in this collection discuss academic freedom relative to institutional review boards, special interest advocacy groups, university donors, the Constitution, political boycotts against Israeli occupation, state power in the university setting, and legislative efforts by the United States government. Additionally, the collection includes a survey of faculty members at Columbia University showing that respondents view academic freedom through the lens of free speech, and that institutions place varying levels of importance on fundamental academic values such as academic freedom.

Lieberwitz, Risa L., Rana Jaleel, Tina Kelleher, Joan Wallach Scott, Donna Young, Henry Reichman, Anne Sisson Runyan, and Anita Levy. "The History, Uses, and Abuses of Title IX."
https://www.aaup.org/file/TitleIXreport.pdf

This report by a joint subcommittee of the AAUP's Committee A on Academic Freedom and Tenure, and of the Committee on Women in the Academic Profession, recounts the history of Title IX of the Education Amendment of 1972 in order to explain current tension between academic freedoms, including freedom of speech, and enforcements against sexual assault and harassment. These tensions, they argue, have resulted from a focus on sexual violations, and from a conflation between conduct and speech. The authors are clear that speech can create a hostile environment, and that not all speech is protected. But they argue, as well, that "matters of speech are difficult to negotiate and always require attention to first amendment guarantees and considerations of Academic Freedom" (70). Moreover, current handling of sexual harassment on campuses has been largely given over to administrators in anti-bias offices. This removes the handling of these issues from processes of faculty governance, and from discussions about the difference between harassing speech and prompts for learning. This makes faculty who teach sensitive and uncomfortable material to do with gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity, particularly vulnerable to accusations of harassment.

The authors clarify another hazard of conflating speech and conduct: given the history of racist deployment of sexual assault claims, there is every likelihood that administering rules against harassment will involve disproportionate punishment for men of color, and disproportionate demands that women of color tolerate harassment and hostile environments. Also of note in this context, unlike sexual harassment, racial harassment is rarely addressed in relation to Title IX or titles VI or VII.

Ben-Porath, Sigal, R. *Free Speech on Campus.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017.

Ben-Porath identifies as a stalemate the conflict between, on one hand, people who see

free speech as a value-neutral idea that helps those in power preserve their positions, and on the other, an excess of political correctness that stifles views out of step with social justice ideology. In response, she develops a framework for inclusive freedom that supports connection and belonging among all campus members in service to the goals of high-quality research, democracy, and increased diversity. Dignitary harms block access and target people who are already vulnerable, often in the form of refusals to accept a speaker's knowledge and perspective as valid because their identity as a knower is in question. But rather than curtail speech, which can lead to equivalences-- protections for students of color lead to calls for protections for white students--faculty and administrators should encourage students to accept being intellectually unsafe while protecting dignitary safety. Practically this means a nuanced relational approach that provides ample opportunities for students to develop and express their views, ask questions, and even be rebellious. Students should be supported to develop opportunities for further speech, and to protect dignitary safety by productively responding to speech they find offensive.

Ben-Porath notes that academic missions are well served by limits on speech, including rules against plagiarism and the mischaracterization of results. It is equally reasonable to reject expressions that undermine the equality and dignity of members of campus communities, especially those who belong to vulnerable minority groups. A commitment to free speech that does not account for the impact of voicing hurtful views does not provide a reasonable response to the educational mission of the university.

About controversial speakers, she reminds readers that universities do not invite them; departments and students do. Giving administrators power to regulate speakers and events is to forgo free speech for the sake of administrative order. Calls for civility are equally unproductive. Civility requires too little in that it is based on norms of respectability rather than on substance. It requires too much in that it further marginalizes those whose anger is deemed uncivil and thus unacceptable. Instead, administrators should show an ongoing commitment to deliberate dialog on the importance of free speech, to the protection of all individuals, and to the establishment of an atmosphere where opinions can be debated openly and honestly. Speech delivered only to harm, or with substantial harm to the dignity of a class, deserves reprimand, not in the name of civility, but in the name of inclusivity.

Chemerinsky, Erwin and Howard Gillman. *Free Speech on Campus*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017.

Chemerinsky and Gillman argue that restricting speech is never a productive strategy for advancing social justice.

They frame their argument historically, showing that the supreme court has consistently upheld freedom of expression even when that meant overturning lower courts' decisions. They show that past efforts to restrict even hate speech in the name of mitigating harm to those who have been targeted have always proved regrettable in hindsight. The authors praise students for valuing inclusion and describe concrete steps college and university administrators can and should take to advance inclusion, including addressing the ways in which hate speech and harassment undermine their educational missions. But as knowledge is advanced specifically by the freedom to express unpopular and unfamiliar ideas, campuses must be places where freedom of expression is the highest principle. In response to hate speech, the best response is more speech.

Palfrey, John. Safe Spaces, Brave Spaces: Diversity and Free Expression in Education. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2017.

Palfrey argues that diversity and free expression are mutually supportive concepts, and that a constrained version of free expression on campus does not run afoul of the First Amendment, which already constrains fighting words, hate speech directed at an individual, libel, and obscenity. In the abolition and suffrage movements, those who advocated free expression sought to create change; those who advocated maintaining the status quo sought to limit expression. This is true of the free speech movement in the 1960s, too. In the current period, conservatives advocate for free expression. Nevertheless, it remains the case that freedom of expression, with careful limits against the most dangerous speech at the margins, moves us toward a more tolerant and democratic society that supports the flourishing of citizens, the search for the truth, and the conditions for sound decision making. Hate speech construed as political expression, such as a Nazi march, must be allowed in a town. But on a campus with stated commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusiveness, it can be stopped, as the burden of tolerating hate speech is borne disproportionately by marginalized members of the community. Thus, there is a paradoxical limit to tolerance: the intolerant should not be allowed to dominate by merely calling on the tolerant to tolerate their intolerance.

Markay, Lachlan. "Exclusive: Pro-Trump Group, Turning Point USA, Has Finances Revealed." *Daily Beast*. New York City: IAC. June 28, 2018. https://www.thedailybeast.com/exclusive-pro-trump-group-turning-point-usa-has-finances-revealed

In this article, Markay discusses the conservative group, Turning Point USA, which promotes much of the conservative anxiety about free speech on college campuses. By detailing the group's funding sources during its boom between 2016 and 2017, the article explains how many of the donations come from conservative mega-donor families and GOP politicians. Thus, the article illustrates that GOP intrusion into higher education is not solely legislative: the GOP also contributes to a growing distrust of higher education by bankrolling a group that has access to youth on college and university campuses.

Scott, Joan Wallach. *Knowledge, Power and Academic Freedom.* New York: Columbia University press, 2019.

This collection of essays clarifies the differences between academic freedom and freedom of speech, underlining the importance of the distinction by drawing parallels between the McCarthy and Trump eras. Anti-intellectual sentiment in both eras involves false equivalencies between academic freedom and the First Amendment, resulting in attacks on intellectuals, and research institutions. In these periods, as well, academic critiques from within disciplinary communities have been confounded with political disagreements. These failures erode academic freedom, which she characterizes as an aspirational ideal rather than an achievable goal: disciplinary boundaries and conventions at once protect the production of knowledge from economic and political interests, but also reiterate the biases and inequities of the greater society, including racism, sexism, homophobia, thus limiting the quality and scope of intellectual work. As an ideal, however, academic freedom in service to the production of knowledge for the public good is worth protecting and striving for.

Fischer, Karen. "For a Dissatisfied Public, Colleges' Internal Affairs Become Fair Game. (THE TRENDS REPORT 2019)." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, vol. 65, no. 23, Chronicle of Higher Education, Inc., 2019, p. B6.

Karen Fischer describes the increased legislative intrusion on university campuses as a

type of micromanagement. The increasing costs of education have decreased public confidence in academia and the perceived value of a degree. This has served to fuel an increase in proposed legislation to eliminate speech codes. This effect is especially prominent in conservative attitudes towards higher education. Fischer argues that academics must find new ways to engage with state legislatures, campuses, and the public at large to demystify university process such as shared governance and tenure.

Mangan, Katherine. "Trump Says He'll Sign Order Requiring Colleges to Protect Free Speech." *Chronicle of Higher Education.* March 2, 2019. https://www.chronicle.com/article/Trump-Says-He-ll-Sign-Order/245812?fbclid=IwAR1k7-CJs9jNOuG5azykUgOrxzfjZIma2qpc0it5J9ihRo_LCkBb79zFh2w

This article discusses the fact that Trump has endorsed the idea, even to the point of threatening executive order, that free speech provisions need to be made on college and university campuses that wish to receive federal research grants. Mangan highlights the support for these ideas, and the general attitudes towards higher education, among pro-Trump voters. Finally, Mangan points out that there is little to no evidence that there is a crisis of free speech in higher education.

Moskowitz, P.E. The Case Against Free Speech: The First Amendment, Fascism, and the Future of Dissent. New York: Bold Type Books, 2019.

Moskowitz enters the discussion about the first amendment by changing the subject from free speech itself, to the concept of free speech, arguing that the most important function of the later is as a propaganda tool that serves people and groups with the power to benefit from wielding it, and with control over the means to be heard. Given material barriers to free speech in an unequal world, he argues, there can be no meaningful definition of free speech. Instead, there is a history of the ways in which free speech is being deployed in the United States, from founding moments, to Charlottesville and Standing Rock. Moskowitz tells this history to illustrate the ways in which the concept of free speech has been used to silence critics of racism and capitalism among protesters on and off campus. Ultimately, Moskowitz proposes that activists seek to move the defining line between action and expression in order to advance equality and true civil liberty.

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RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

"Building that World": Movements of Vision in the Carceral Classroom

by Rhiannon M. Cates, Benjamin J. Hall, James Broughton, Andrew Reeves, Faith Hocutt Ringwelski, Kathryn Zaro, Jenna Richards, Lani Roberts

"INSIDE OUT PRISON EXCHANGE", INSIDE-OUT CENTER, PHILADELPHIA, PA

In between drinking soda and eating cream puffs, our class yearbook/zine is passed around amidst the sounds of camaraderie and laughter. Later, our circle of writers will reflect on what this course has meant to each of us, our hearts heavy because most of us may never see one another again, yet hopeful because we know that what we have built is not transitory. During this closing ceremony, I can't help but think about fallen leaves in the prison yard, intercepted by the razor wire to finish their decomposition so unnaturally. Much in the same way, this whole process is unnatural: learning inside prison with college students, forming community in a space that discourages it.

– Ben, inside teaching assistant

Introduction

In the passage above, Ben, a writer, student, teacher, volunteer, and activist in the final year of a 22-year prison sentence at the time this article was written, commemorates the bittersweet end of a university writing class held inside of a carceral facility each spring. This final class is both like and unlike the end of any course, one key difference being that this celebration marks the last time this circle of writers, half residents of the facility, half twice-weekly guests, will be together in this particular way. But as Ben powerfully notes, the meaning and outcome of this course transcend any expiration date. Through bitter reality and brilliant sweetness, we look instead to what we have cultivated as a community of activists and writing students, reflecting on what we feel is set into motion by coming together, so unnaturally, to learn as a community in this kind of place.

First developed and taught as a campus-based course, Portland State University professor Vicki Reitenauer has taught the Women's Studies elective entitled "Writing as Activism"[1] at Columbia River Correctional Facility as an Inside-Out[2] course since 2016. Taught by faculty and instructors trained through the Temple University Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program, Inside-Out classes are integrated higher education courses conducted within correctional facilities through institutional partnerships. Typically, courses designed through the Inside-Out model are composed equally of "inside" students that are residents of the facility and "outside" students from the sponsoring college or university. In the case of Writing as Activism, students convene inside the facility twice a week over the course of a ten-week term. The narrators of this article, Ben and Rhiannon, have served as teaching assistants together for multiple years, participating fully in the course and providing support to our collective cohort from their respective positions inside and outside of the facility.

Creative writing instructor and activist-scholar Clint Smith describes prison classrooms as exceptional, catalyzing "place[s] where social and intellectual community might be restored in a way that reestablishes the agency the institution inherently strips away" (p. 97). Our current carceral world underscores the possibilities of the creative, collaborative, and radical teaching its systems and conditions of harm and constraint call for, designating learning as an inherently "emancipatory endeavor" (p. 97). As writers and co-teachers, we have been profoundly impacted and transformed by this notion of radical potential and by what we have found to be possible in these hours writing, learning, celebrating, mourning, and collaborating within and across the mutually fraught institutions of corrections and higher education. The Problem Statement of the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program identifies that both "[h]igher education and corrections are among the most powerful institutions in the world today. Yet, both have limitations in their ability to foster just and humane societies. Individuals in both systems can often feel alienated, objectified, and pessimistic about the possibility of social change" (Inside-Out Problem Statement, n.d.). Further, as it operates in the United States in particular, incarceration functions to socially separate, disempower, and effectively render the human beings that exist within its institutions as invisible and marked by difference. From our experiences, we believe that institutions of higher education and corrections both exist as places where transformative and liberatory learning, change, and growth are possible, even though the control structures and imbalances of power at play within them inhibit collaboration, critical inquiry, and change.

With our instructor, we have developed a productive scholastic partnership centered on our experiences of this course, and in particular on the potential of the carceral classroom to function as a "space-within-space," a site of what we describe as "post-carceral world-building" (Hall, Cates, & Reitenauer, 2019). In other words, the intentional and collaborative space of an Inside-Out (or likewise integrated) learning community serves as a stage upon which a world beyond prisons, as they currently exist, can be envisioned and rehearsed as students engage their experiences of learning together within prison. We have come to contextualize this practice of world-building across and beyond the institutional, figurative, and very literal boundaries of incarceration through education as a movement of student-driven resistance and change-making.

We were inspired to offer our experiences for this particular issue because we believe that there is profound meaning and possibility in bringing students together within carceral spaces and that a significant outcome of this work is who students become when they emerge from the experience, carrying what they have learned with them into their future interactions, scholarship, and understandings of themselves in relationship to education and activism. As both inside and outside students, we have found that our time working together has "[opened] up the possibility for new arguments that are different" from the understandings of incarceration and justice that some of us, outside students in particular, may have entered the course with (Schaefer Hinck and Scheffels, p. 211). This unique kind of community-based learning functions as "one possible way to reorient the public's perceptions of the incarcerated and the need for increased educational programs in our prison system" by equipping students with their own evidence-based arguments that "empower them to engage in advocacy outside the classroom or prison" (Schaefer Hinck and Scheffels, pp. 211-212).

To the same degree, enacting transformative and liberatory change through carceral education is complicated by the fact that the initial and sustained existence of these opportunities depends wholly on partnerships and accompanying agreements with precisely the institutions, bureaucracies, and systems at the center of this interrogation. With that in mind, we believe that at the heart of our shared resistance is a dedication to confront and unravel that persistent dilemma: how do we go about creating change and repairing harm caused by institutions from within those very institutions? And further, how can we resist replicating or acting as extensions of the ideologies and structures we aspire to replace in that process?

We have come to see our collaborative endeavor of learning and writing within and across the figurative and literal boundaries of incarceration as a student movement that is reinforced by the dedication to social justice and the critical interrogation of power and control explicitly woven into this course. In the following sections and excerpts from student reflections, we locate carceral community-based learning and its possibilities as a practice and ideological facet contributing to larger movements of justice, liberation, and prison abolition.

Our resistance is grounded by an understanding of world-building that conceptualizes hope as a strategy of what we describe as the activist imagination in action (Hall, Cates, & Reitenauer, 2019). As visionary thinking, this notion leverages hope as a critically reflective process that empowers us to "collectively reimagine the future and its possibilities." By also working to evaluate what is missing from the present, this process informs how we conceptualize and work toward bringing desired and (re)imagined futures into being (Jacobs, p. 800; Mathieu, p. 19). This critical framing of hope as a subversive force outlines new cognitive territory to experiment and respond to the world through "dissent, contingency, [and] indeterminacy" as the activist imagination illuminates new possibilities of coexistence, knowledge, and justice (Giroux, p. 63). When these possibilities are enacted, we respond in resistance to the world *as it is,* effectively embodying that future of the world *as it could be*.

In this ongoing practice of cognitive unlearning and revisioning, we work together to grow our understanding of the deeply rooted structures and systems of oppression that support incarceration and are in turn supported by it. With attention to how those systems inform the way each of us have and continue to experience education, we engage in world-building at this scale to dislocate power as it typically operates in the classroom. From the revision of traditional modes of grading to redistribute and foster student agency (Reitenauer, 2017) to a collaboratively cultivated reading list, the structure and curriculum of Writing as Activism are grounded by transformative and liberatory pedagogical practices, in particular those advanced by Paulo Freire (2000), Adrienne Rich (1977), bell hooks (1994, 2003, 2009), and Derrick Jensen (2005). Such pedagogies, as many *Radical Teacher* readers will know, also foster a visionary notion of hope as they work to disrupt and replace oppressive conditions of education by positioning students as agents and authorities of their own learning. This particular course seeks 1) to form an intentional community

of students to examine creative writing and personal narrative as rich, dynamic sources of knowledge, healing, and social change and 2) to identify and resist replicating mechanisms of harm and oppression within and beyond the fraught context of the carceral classroom. Over the ten short weeks of a term, our instructor equips and challenges us to develop, facilitate, and participate in our own writing workshops each week; form and engage in dedicated feedback groups; and create and carry out collaborative activist-writing projects. This year (2019), those projects included a zine to share our work, a letter-writing campaign, a video documenting our course, and an open mic to celebrate and share our words with guests and invited stakeholders from each of the represented educational and correctional institutions as well as our local government.

> *It is our intention to locate our experiences and perceptions of world-building as part of an important movement of student resistance—one that dares to envision, practice, and enact change toward a world without prisons.*

It is our intention to locate our experiences and perceptions of world-building as part of an important movement of student resistance—one that dares to envision, practice, and enact change toward a world without prisons. In the following sections, we introduce this movement in the context of the conditions that call for it, locate writing as a vehicle of world-building and change, and reflect on how this movement of hope is embodied as we each move forward—changed and ignited—from this experience. As eight of the eighteen composing our Spring 2019 cohort, we write to our experiences in that full circle, with the voices of our colleagues not represented here kept close in mind and heart as we proceed in sharing this work. The student reflections brought into conversation with one another here are a powerful collective testament to the transformative possibilities of carceral learning as a critical part of movements related to liberation, education, and justice reform.

Throughout this article, we refer to our co-authors and ourselves as "inside" or "outside" students and teaching assistants when relevant and as based on which moniker applied to each of us at the time this article was written. We use the term "integrated" to intentionally refer to spaces of learning and educational programming shared by incarcerated and non-incarcerated students, regardless of Inside-Out affiliation. Finally, we will reference further reading on relevant critical pedagogies and practices of teaching in carceral contexts that inform and build upon this movement. We offer our experiences and perspectives of this kind of educational programming as students and activists passionate about learning as a dynamic vehicle of social change. We encourage interested instructors and activists to look into ways that this type of movement might be possible within their own communities and institutions, as well as to examine the scholarship of the advocates and practioners that we reference here for more information

about program implementation, best practices, and the larger histories of integrated learning in carceral settings.

"Here Together"

At the heart of our movement is intentional connection and collaboration within prisons in direct response to how they currently exist, imposing difference and distance within and among communities of people. To effectively envision and work to bring a world without prisons into being, we must engage with these institutions, the paradigms and legacies they impose, and the individuals existing within them, within "walls meant to produce silence, not exchanges" (Pompa, p. 264). As demonstrated through the following narratives, the bridging of these walls, the very act of bringing students together within them to connect and engage deeply around the project of learning, can be mutually and profoundly transformative.

By coming together "inside" in this way, students find opportunities to engage that subversive notion of hope as they confront and practice resisting both new and familiar paradigms of power and oppression. Inside-Out founder, director, and educator Lori Pompa (2011) writes of integrated carceral learning:

> Of course, the reality is much more complex: At the end of each session, half the class members exit through the prison gate and the other half are locked inside, once again, in cages. This immutable fact is felt each week by inside and outside students alike. Nonetheless, for the period of time that these two groups become one in the classroom, that distinction fades, allowing individuals to interact with one another in a dignified, empowering, and transformative setting. (p. 267)

To the degree that we bear witness to and are constrained by these carceral conditions, we are also called upon to negotiate a new experience of learning and community. This time in this space lends itself as an opportunity to imagine, write, and work towards something new together, to set this movement into action. As Ben explains in the opening of this article, cultivating community within the carceral space—which is designed to be alienating—feels unnatural because it intentionally disrupts the assumed inevitability of prisons by creating something that doesn't resemble these institutions from right within them.

The following student narratives speak to the power of writing and revisioning a world without prisons and the catalytic possibilities of coming together:

Prison is not a place designed for learning or building connection, rather, it is built on human abjection. What we have created here together undermines the power of this oppressive system. The fact that we can create a world within a world where it's not supposed to continue demonstrates that it can be recreated and continued. We are learning together in a transformative way in a space that was created to discourage learning. Bringing people into the prison is vital because it exposes the fallacy in

the need for prisons to exist. – Ben, inside teaching assistant

It's an inexplicable sensation, stepping foot inside the walls of a prison as a more or less free person. I feel as though I'm trespassing, forcing my way past the threshold of a place that is the reluctant home of hundreds of people. People for whom justice is nothing more than a myth and a deception. People whose freedom has been stripped from them like a ragged and frayed sweater. I'm an uninvited, though invited, guest. I'm to remain a stranger, my name and theirs a secret, held close like a hollow talisman. I'm trespassing the halls of an institution I believe shouldn't exist, should have been burned to its archaic and cold-blooded foundation ideally a century or three ago. I don't belong here any more or any less than the unwilling inhabitants of this place. It seems obvious that prisons themselves are the things that don't belong, rather than the people living inside of them, or out. - Kat, outside student

Writing as Activism is a work of resisting in itself— of the ones in power, the system. Prisons dehumanize us, treat us as monsters, inmates, a number—in fact, we're actually identified as numbers. In class is the only time that we're able to feel what some may call normal and alive—like real people. - Queaz, inside student

How can some students and their instructor try and change the institution of prisons? By the university students walking through those prison gates, by the inside students showing up, and by our instructor promoting this class and co-learning with all of us. We have disrupted the system just by taking this class. We walked through those gates and we all shared our hopes. We formed friendships, showed one another that each of us is worthy to be a human being. We also taught one another that our pasts are not who we will always be. Which is the opposite of what the prison system wants us to think of ourselves. – Faith, outside student

The part you hate isn't when you're on the inside; it's when you're in the middle, the reverberations of hundreds of rattling chain links clanging a perverse doorbell. You open a gate and walk in, but only so far, because there's an identical gate, and the first must shut before the second will open. For a long moment you wait; it's like a foretaste of purgatory (which you didn't used to believe in but maybe there's something to it), and then someone you can't see unlocks the second gate with a loud click, and you have to open it really fast or you're stuck again. Sometimes the stuck part makes your throat contract and your eyes pulse. Did I say you hate that part? You actually kind of love it—the kick of endorphins before being birthed from that razor wired womb into a new self, a temporarily imprisoned self, free to do nothing but talk, write, and be with each other. - Lani, outside student

"With Pen in Hand"

As the foundational practice during our time together in Writing as Activism and in our creative partnership since then, writing grounds and drives our experience of world-building as a movement and mode of activism. We have found writing to be an expansion of that imaginative space of hope, helping us illuminate our senses of ourselves as potential agents of change and allowing us to witness each other doing the same.

Educators engaged in humanities-based teaching in prisons have likewise identified the rich potential of writing as the foundation of a post-carceral world in the ways it provides space for students to grapple with notions of identity, power, trauma and the oppressive systems that structure their lives. Drafting and revising offers new possibilities through "reinterpretations of past histories and hopes for the future" on the page (Larson, p. 111; Smith, p. 96; Berry, p. 44). Smith (2017) emphasizes the meaningful potential of teaching and learning writing in prisons:

> Education can and should be a means by which we liberate ourselves from the myth that we are unable to move beyond the social constructs of the world as they currently exist. It should also be a means by which we engage in the emancipatory power of empathy and disabuse ourselves of the notion that the nature of our experiences are singularly our own and unrelated to anyone else's. (p. 85)

The following excerpts demonstrate the range of students' dynamic experiences and how we emerged as a critically hopeful movement of world-builders through a shared practice of writing:

> There is power in the creative written word. Even if the prisoner remains inside or is executed by the state, his writing can still be circulated and spark social change or awareness. As Ira Wells points out: "Where the modern carceral state seeks to conceal its soul-destroying technologies of punishment behind prison walls, the subversive power of prison literature resides precisely in its ability to expose the ways in which the 'disciplinary' logic of the prison extends outward and pervades institutional contexts on the 'outside'" (Wells, p. 481). Creating a space where prisoners and outside folks write together is vital and is a subversive way of nonviolent resistance that keeps one engaged in the struggle. We each come into class as experts of our own experience and authors of our own education, individually and collectively. The power of our written narratives weaves together, sewing a fabric of community that others will add onto in other spaces as each of us move through the world, no longer together but never really apart, in this way, carrying this experience with us. – Ben, inside teaching assistant

> I realized one thing immediately: the purpose of our class was not to prepare us to garner support for any certain cause; rather it was to allow us to come to the table and just write. We wrote about personal things, inanimate things, abstract and specific things, anything at all! I then came to realize that my understanding of activism was perhaps too textbook. Where does activism even start? This class made me recognize that, for me, finding and being able to share my authentic voice is necessary to then go forth and do whatever activism I choose to do. What a gift this class provided in offering a space, the same, shared space, to us, incarcerated and not, to sit and write. To struggle with ourselves and our experiences, to try to recognize and share what's genuine, and to ultimately advocate for ourselves and whatever else deserves support and attention.

> - Jenna, outside student

> So much has changed for me. I've never thought of myself as an activist, but I've always felt that way; for as long as I can remember, I've wanted to live in a better world. I would watch Star Trek as a young child and see a multi-international and dual-gendered crew of many races getting along for the common good and betterment of humanity. I look at us here in the 21st century and clearly see that we are not anywhere close to being on track to what this show is predicting will happen. Is it crazy that I want a Star Trek future for humanity? In the 24th and 25th centuries, Earth is a paradise. There's no war, pollution, God, crime, money, or illness. We've moved out into the solar system; there's enough clean air, space, food, healthcare, and love for all of us on every planet. I want us to do more than just live; I want humanity to thrive and make its mark in history for the whole universe to see. A lot has changed, but not enough for the good. I never thought of writing as activism, but that's what Gene Roddenberry was doing when he wrote Star Trek. So I've been an activist for a long time and never knew it. This was such a wonderful revelation to discover within myself. - Turbo, inside student

> When we were together the walls of the prison faded away. This was our class, where we were all free to say and think what we felt. University students, incarcerated students, and an instructor co-learning and co-existing for two hours twice a week. We formed a bond that allowed us to be vulnerable and share our writing with one another. Sometimes we cried, other times we laughed, but we always encouraged each other to keep writing. This was our beautiful reality: writing, honesty, and friendship. This experience has left hope in all of our hearts that one day the system of oppression that is prison will one day crumble. – Faith, outside student

"The World as it Could Be"

The impact of this experience, rooted in writing and imagination, grows in our memories, our revelations, and our grief as we move forward—no longer together but never alone in the ways we carry all parts of this experience with us into our writing, our interactions, and our futures. In the deeply felt and imperceptible ways we have been changed,

and how that change informs our experience of the world as it currently is (and as we have envisioned and known it to be instead), is where we can find what's real and what is possible through this movement, where we can "begin to make the walls that we construct between us—so dramatically and tragically manifest in our prison walls—more and more permeable and, eventually, extinct" (Pompa, p. 271).

As Ben describes in his memory of that last day of class, the impact of coming together as we have in this space signals that this experience is anything but transitory. Significantly, to us it also indicates these outcomes are possible in every prison classroom, every place like this where people manage to come together to think, learn, and change across difference and distance. Smith relates the transcendent profundity of his own experience leading and learning alongside a group of incarcerated writing students: "all these moments, this growing movement, create something that cannot be confined by space or time or walls or bars, [...] something much, much bigger than all of us" (Smith, p. 90). As we venture into new worlds and ways of being, what we have felt as students of this experience and what we have practiced in both thought and action blooms from a prison classroom into a future ever unfolding. We are carried forward by this movement and momentum of hope, trusting its possibility as we continue to witness, echo, and learn from other activists and movements dedicated to a future beyond prisons. In turn, we carry this movement forward in hope, trusting each other with the creation and care of this future world we so deeply desire. These final narratives exemplify how this movement of vision, part of larger momentums and movements driven by communities impacted by incarceration, brings the world we have practiced together, a world beyond prisons, education, and ourselves as we have been, into the future as we will be:

Stepping foot inside of a prison as a more or less free person forces me to acknowledge the very real fact that I'm not "good" in the eyes of the powers that be, I'm simply white and I've never been caught, I'm an example of privilege. More importantly, upon stepping foot inside the walls of a prison as a more or less free person, I'm brought to the realization that I'm profoundly grateful to be here, to have been invited into this space, to become a witness, to meet and to learn from and to grow with people who have had less luck than myself, people who have become victims of the very system that is supposed to protect and serve. People whose stories are screaming and scratching in their bodies to be heard in every corner of this godforsaken land of the free and home of the brave. – Kat, outside student

I never would've thought about going to school because systematically I've been taught that I'm not good nor smart enough to attend college. This class has given me the chance to realize I'm much better, much more than just an inmate, a prisoner. What I've experienced is life changing; I now know that I'm able to

succeed in a classroom. Not only am I able to, but I like and want to be. I've lived a life of crime for as long as I could remember, only because I was brainwashed to think not only me, but people of color and people from low-income communities could never be anything more than crooks, pimps, drug dealers, robbers. After experiencing this class, I've come to realize I'm none of those things—I was only playing the hand I was dealt. I was playing into the hands of the ones in power—but no longer. I now have an understanding that I'm much more than what the system paints me as and I can now teach my daughter to be the best that she can be. There's no limits for her. From me being awakened by this class, I can make sure my daughter never sleeps on who she is, nor what she can be in life! – Queaz, inside student

Seeing the world the way it is, I thought I was alone, hiding in the closet: "I'll come out when the world's better!" Even locked up—still in that closet. I take a couple of Inside-Out classes looking for some intellectual stimulation, and wow, did I find it, and so much more. I found energetic people of like mind and I can't get enough of them. They inspire so much hope for the future in me. I'm happy and proud to be a part of our circle. The most important thing I learned is that I can't hide in the closet anymore, waiting for the world to change. I must add my voice to the collective, with pen in hand. I must write to be the change I want for my world. I will give up my black pen when you pry it from my cold dead fingers. Live long and prosper. – Turbo, inside student

As many of us are activated it forever changes the way we interact in the world—how we vote or how we listen to news about crime and the very way in which we view what crime is and who gets to say. We are building the world as it could be. Together we get to be what we want to see in the world. Clearly we cannot boast in tearing down the prison, however, I am convinced that the way to resist and replace the carceral state has little to do with beginning to tear down, but rather building. Just as it is unnatural for those fallen leaves to continue their death process stuck to a piece of steel razor wire, prison is unnatural, and this is exposed each time we come together to write as a form of activism and resistance, all the while well on our way to replacing an oppressive structure, building that world. – Ben, inside teaching assistant

Ben's closing words underscore both the urgency and opportunity of this work, reminding us of the entrenched and multifaceted nature of incarceration and the Prison Industrial Complex and the critical, multidimensional approaches movements of resistance and abolition require. From our experiences as students and activists, we locate the collaborative and learning-centered practices of (en)vision(ing) and resistance we've examined here as one dimension of a larger and dynamically growing movement dedicated to resisting, replacing, and healing harms inflicted

by incarceration. We present this article as an invitation and call to action for radical teachers of all kinds to consider the ways in which their teaching, learning, and scholarship can contribute to and benefit from visionary practices of world-building such as ours that dare to hope, learn, and build across and beyond the many kinds of walls that work to keep us apart.[3]

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Notes

[1] To receive the syllabus or other materials from this course, contact instructor Vicki Reitenauer at vicr@pdx.edu.

[2] Temple University's Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program supports faculty members to offer courses inside correctional facilities in which half of the students are incarcerated at the facility and half of the students enter the facility from the sponsoring college/university for integrated class sessions. For more information, see http://www.insideoutcenter.org/.

[3] The authors of this article represent the Portland State University Spring 2019 cohort of Writing as Activism at Columbia River Correctional Institution. We dedicate this article to our instructor, inspiration, and accomplice in change-making Vicki Reitenauer, and to writers, activists, and students of all kinds engaging in movements of vision and hope around the world. We are deeply grateful to the staff at Columbia River Correctional Institution and of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Portland State University for their ongoing partnership and support of this course.

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Collective Visioning: Igniting the Radical Imagination

by Matt York

PHOTO BY SIDES IMAGER FROM PEXELS.COM

ΕΙΜΑΣΤΕ ΕΙΚΟΝΑ ΑΠΟ ΤΟ ΜΕΛΛΟΝ (We are an image from the future)

– Graffiti from the 2008 Greek riots

These are dark times. As we witness the ascent of a new global axis of authoritarian capitalism and a resurgence of xenophobic nationalisms, of racism, of anti-feminist movements, of the purposeful undermining of existing democratic systems, and of the ongoing destruction of the very ecosystems upon which we depend for life itself, we might be forgiven for feeling a sense of collective despair. This experience of overwhelm is further compounded by the disorienting effects of the media saturation in which we find ourselves increasingly immersed. And to make matters worse, the neoliberal subversion of universities worldwide has significantly decreased the spaces that once produced the liberatory political ideas we might have used to lead us out of these crises. In response, movements are increasingly reverting to methods of *Collective Visioning* – group processes of knowledge co-production that have been developed on the streets in order to co-imagine radical social change. From Tahrir Square in Cairo, to Zuccotti Park in New York, and from Rojova in northern Syria, to the Gilets Jaunes in France, such participatory methods have been used as tools for collaboration and collective action.

These kinds of horizontal participatory methods for co-learning have played a central role in my own experience as an activist and more recently in my own research and teaching within the university. Such methodologies provide opportunities for us to reappraise our usual hierarchical teacher/student roles and relations, making the case that we can collectively learn much more from *within* our movements than anyone might hope to teach the movements from *outside*. I propose that the forms of knowledge co-production used by the movements that I discuss in this article, and the method of *collective visioning* in particular, offer real potential for unleashing a much-needed radical imagination to meet the times we are living in– both inside and outside the university.

Movements in Movement

Over the past decade, the world has seen an almost perpetual wave of movements circulating the globe focused on challenging multiple forms of domination and oppression, and transforming the constantly evolving capitalist world system. On January 4th 2011, 26-year-old Tunisian street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi died from self-immolation in response to ongoing police harassment, leading to massive protests across the country. By January 14th, Tunisian dictator Ben Ali had been forced from power and fled the country. Inspired by this spontaneous uprising (and similarly animated by the death of a young man, Khaled Said, who had been beaten to death by police just weeks previously), Tahrir Square in Cairo was occupied on January 25th by Egyptian protestors who once again ousted the dictator (this time Mubarak) just 18 days later. Over the course of the following months, the Arab Spring wave of leaderless, remarkably non-violent, and deeply democratic uprisings spread throughout the region to countries including Libya, Syria, Yemen, Kuwait, Sudan, Omar, and Morocco. On May 15th 2011, on the other side of the Mediterranean in various cities and towns across Spain, protests inspired by the *Real Democracy Now* manifesto mobilised tens of thousands of people under the slogan "We are not products in the hands of bankers and politicians." Taking inspiration from the Arab Spring, these *Indignados* similarly occupied the Square in Puerta del Sol, protesting high unemployment rates, welfare cuts, capitalism, banks, and political corruption.

Across the Atlantic on September 17th 2011, thousands of demonstrators marched through the financial district of New York and set up a protest camp in Zuccotti Park in order to Occupy Wall Street. The occupiers coined the slogan "We are the 99%," and within one month the Global Occupy Movement had spread to over 951 cities across 82 countries (Adam 2011). On October 15th 2011, this new global movement participated in the Global Day of Action launched by the Spanish *Indignados*–closing the circle on the transnational wave of revolt and ensuring months (and in some cases years) of continued internationally coordinated protest. The influence and accumulated knowledge of this movement wave continues to be seen in contemporary struggles adopting similar organizing structures and tactics: the Rojova revolution in northern Syria attempting to build a Democratic Confederalism inspired by the Social Ecology of Murray Bookchin (Hunt 2019); the Second Spring of 2019 in Sudan and Algeria bringing down the long-term dictators Omar al Bashir and Bouteflika respectively (Savran 2019); the leaderless "assembly of assemblies" of the Gilets Jaunes in France (Goanec 2019); the popular uprising and occupying of squares in Beirut, Lebanon (Azhari 2019); the horizontally organised, highly adaptable protests we have seen in Hong Kong (McNicholas 2019) and in multiple other locations globally. The strength of these movements can be found in their "constellation of non-hierarchical alliances" animated via a post-ideological anarchism that rejects sectarianism and reshapes dissent in order to meet contemporary challenges (Curran 2006, 67). They adopt the praxes of horizontalism, direct action, anti-authoritarianism, decentralisation, anti-capitalism, and mutual aid—providing locally grounded, adaptable and effective opposition to the constantly evolving hierarchical institutional structures of contemporary global capitalism.

In the years following the 2011 revolutionary wave, however, we have also witnessed an active backlash of authoritarian politics in which there has been a resurgence of xenophobic nationalisms, racism, anti-feminist movements, and the purposeful undermining of existing democratic systems. The Arab Spring was quickly followed by a counter-movement towards authoritarian regimes. Many of the radical left governments of Latin America have either failed or been overthrown one by one, replaced by right wing authoritarian strong men such as Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil. A similar wave of reactionary right wing actors can be seen across Asia such as Narendra Modi in India, Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, and the military dictatorship in Thailand. We can also clearly see a similar rebound towards authoritarianism in countries across Africa south of the equator. The election of Donald Trump in the US, Boris Johnson in the UK, and the electoral successes of right wing

parties across Europe complete this picture of a globalised network of authoritarian capitalism that is no longer concerned with adhering to the image of a progressive neoliberalism and openly aligning to far right politics. But perhaps most worrying of all, these developments are increasingly accepted and tolerated as a legitimate form of governance by many of those who are oppressed.

It is hard not to become disoriented, overwhelmed, and ultimately despondent when confronting the sheer scale of the political, social, and ecological devastation we are witnessing at this crucial point in human history. And as Tom, a Canadian activist and collective visioning participant, points out:

> There are a lot of people who say that it's easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism and I think that means that their world-view has been so thoroughly dominated by capitalism that this really is the case. For some reason, idealism and utopianism are framed as a bad thing. The declaration that we cannot think an end to capitalism is not just defeatist – it shows that a lot of the leftist tradition has failed and it's done.

What is clear, however, is that these most recent manifestations of the ongoing, continuously morphing "movement of movements" offer an opportunity for imagining and actualizing an alternative trajectory to that of global capitalism by working to deliver environmental sustainability, equality of access to resources and opportunities, restorative and redistributive justice, and genuine participatory democracy.

Challenging Hegemony

There is a pressing need for a framework of plurality within the current movement wave because it is populated by interconnected organisations with a diverse array of ideologies, methodologies, identities, and cultural norms. This movement wave must act to avoid the dominations and hierarchies of previous structures, resist co-option and subversion by capitalist forces, maintain its constituent diversity, and yet allow for the construction of a cohesive collective identity. But how can we achieve this? This article argues that in order for such a framework to be imagined, nurtured, and sustained, any efforts towards it must be augmented by the voices of activists on the ground – a process of knowledge co-production requiring both theory informing practice *and* practice informing theory.

Of course, adopting such an approach does not come without challenges. The effects of neoliberal capitalism over previous decades have reached such pandemic proportions that it is often not consciously recognised as an ideology, but accepted on faith as a natural and self-evident universal. In a similar process to that through which social movements themselves are in danger of co-option and subversion by hegemonic capitalism, the rapid expansion of what Slaughter and Rhoades (2009) call "academic capitalism" has resulted in an increased focus on resource and finance generating activities within universities—resulting in the narrowing of academic practices in order to align with institutional market-like behaviour. The ascendency of the new working class following World War II and subsequent increased access to a university education for working-class people led to the eruption of anti-imperialist student movements throughout the world in the late 1960s (Katsiaficas 1987). These revolutionary student movements were met with intense violent repression. And yet, a far more efficient and thorough counter-revolutionary tactic has proved to be that of the neoliberal subversion of university education. Still, among a significant number of academics and scholar-activists, many whose ideas have appeared on the pages of this magazine, there remains a persistent and ongoing process of resistance to the contemporary neoliberal university. Through disorienting and uprooting "epistemic certainties" (Holmes 2007, 41), they work to subvert the current hegemony and affect the unconscious dynamics of the new order. An increasing number of experiments in solidarity, participation, and opening of academic spaces aims to reconstitute free collective inquiry as a primary function of our centers for learning. Ultimately, the question of whether educators are able to contribute to social transformation and/or resistance to oppression will depend on the degree of "experiential connection" (Glick Schiller 2011, 163) we can develop and the embeddedness we can cultivate, attuning to the daily experience of people struggling against oppression. It will therefore be essential for us to cultivate practices that reflect and support this entangled relationality—that we are all in this together.

Co-Research: Empowering Constituent Imagination

Social movements provide a rich source of knowledge about forms of oppression and injustice, revealing uneven social relations while offering possibilities for agency. Often, the knowledge produced via social movements challenges those holding power, and society itself. It is, however, a relatively recent development for social movements to be explicitly recognised by the academy as producers of knowledge, despite their lead role in shaping a number of academic disciplines including women's studies, black and post-colonial studies, peace studies, queer studies, and others (Chesters 2012, 153).

The idea of knowledge co-production with social movement activists can be traced back at least to Karl Marx. In 1880, Marx designed a questionnaire in order to ignite an inquiry into the conditions of the French proletariat. Rather than merely attempting to extract useful information, the questionnaire, entitled "A Workers' Inquiry" (La Revue Socialiste 1880), aimed at analysing the characteristics of exploitation itself and encouraged workers to think about oppositional modes against their own exploitation–a process oriented towards encouraging the critical reflection of workers themselves in a process of knowledge co-production (Malo de Molina 2004a, 8). The agency of such a process could then be evidenced in the early twentieth century with the working-class appropriation of both anarchist and Marxist theory informing new models of direct democracy.

In the 1960s, Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology grew out of the anti-imperialist and anti-colonial revolutionary movements. While closely associated

with Latin America and Freirian popular education, experimentation with PAR in support of social organising was also prevalent in South Asia and a number of African countries, empowering social struggles in rural areas and supporting the emergence of strong *campesino* movements. A lineage of leading militant figures involved in this proliferation of PAR in the Global South includes Fals Borda in Colombia, Mohammed Anisar Rahman in Bangladesh, and Sithembiso Nyoni in Zimbabwe. By the late 1960s, PAR had reached Europe and North America where experiments with it aimed at the empowerment of marginalised urban communities (Malo de Molina 2004b). On the cusp between this movement and a reimagining of the workers enquiries first used by Marx was the *Operaismo* or Autonomist Marxist Workerism in Italy. The *Operaismo* developed new analytical tools in order to search for resistance against the new forms of capitalist organisation at the time. Grounded in workers' autonomy, the co-enquiries focused on the form and content of workers self-activity (Woodcock 2014, 499). This Italian Autonomism became a major influence on the work of Hardt and Negri (2001; 2005; 2011; 2017) and in turn upon militant research collectives arising through the "revolt of Argentina" or *Argentinazo* from 2001 onwards. Another example of such PAR inspired processes were the Wages for Housework campaigns which began in the early 1970s, also in Italy. The emerging struggles and debates within this feminist movement informed the pamphlet *The Power of Women and the Subversion of Community* (Dalla Costa and James 1971), which in turn served as a catalyst for the Wages for Housework campaign to extend into a global feminist social movement.

Through the final decades of the twentieth century to the present day, a new wave of social movement mobilisation offering resistance to neoliberal globalisation and a critique of its inherent limitations and inequalities has continued this tradition. The subsequent development of group-inquiry practices in social movement activism during this period, from the Zapatista inspired *encuentros* to the dialogical spaces of the World Social Forum, have represented a "qualitative shift" in the methodologies of global social movements (Chesters 2012, 154)–operationalising their "epistemic diversity" in the pursuit of an emancipatory "cosmopolitan ecology of knowledges" (Santos, Nunes and Meneses 2008, xlv-xlvii). Ultimately, for radical social change to be realised not through taking power, but through making/transforming power, the activation of what Negri (2007) calls "constituent imagination"–a collective vision that prefigures the new society in the here-and-now–is necessary at both local and global levels.

An example of this process can be found in *Colectivo Situaciones*–an Argentinian research militancy collective that assembled at the heights of the Argentinian crisis of neoliberalism in the 1990s and the beginning of the new millennium. The methodological approach developed by *Colectivo Situaciones* grew from the need to create links between the academic community and the new forms of political involvement emerging in response to the country's political, social, and economic challenges. The collective utilised their approach with a number of these activist groups, including: HIJOS–a group formed by the children of the disappeared; MoCaSE–a *campesino* (peasant farmer) group; MTD of Solano–an unemployed workers movement; *Grupo de Arte Callejero*–a street art activist group; former political prisoners of Néstor Kirchner's government; and a number of other activist groups in Argentina, Bolivia, Uruguay, and Mexico (Touza and Holdren 2007, 77). The co-learning interventions/collaborations undertaken between these groups and *Colectivo Situaciones* became known as *experiencias*, translated as experience/experiment.

Colectivo Situaciones (2007, 74) describe their methodology as a "double movement" of (1) creating ways of being activists that escape the political certainties constructed a priori, through approaching politics *as* learning, while (2) simultaneously inventing new forms of theorising outside of conventional academic procedures–displacing the usual researcher/object and student/teacher bi-polarity in favour of a more subjective/inter-subjective methodological approach. Rather than a process in which an academic does research *on* (or even *with*) subjects, this methodology aims at an encounter that produces *new* subjects and *new* inter-subjectivities. Such an approach aims at the construction of a "new perception" with the educator/researcher facilitating, nurturing, and empowering a new sociability within the group. The primary work of the facilitator then is not to configure a center that "thinks radical practices" but to find ways of relating to the multiplicity — "elaborating a common plane" or a new *common*. And it was one such process, facilitated in part by *Colectivo Situaciones*, which prefigured the *Argentinazo* – the period of radical social change that took place in Argentina during December 2001. Rallying behind the motto: *Que se vayan todos!* (All of them must go!) the scale and power of the movement eventually led to the resignation of then president Fernando de la Rúa. And so we can see that the academy, and particularly the social sciences, have experienced their greatest creative moments during such periods of engagement with the knowledge produced by social movements (Cox 2014, 966-967). And in processes reflecting the movement waves experienced at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, and in the 1960s, our latest wave of social movement mobilisation is already engaging in dialogues that are generating new knowledges, new theories, and new pedagogies.

The Collective Visioning Process: Imagining New Worlds

A recent study with activists across Europe found that although the utopian imagination was considered to be a central aspect of their struggles, processes which harnessed this collective imaginary were rarely used as a method for designing strategy and tactics (Pötz 2019). By way of response to this apparent deficit, I recently facilitated the *(R)evolutionary Love Collective Visioning Project* based on participatory methods used within the global Occupy movement as a tool for collaboration and collective action.[1] In line with the growing tendency in contemporary left thinking to critique the notion of us ever arriving at a point of revolutionary closure, the project questioned the perceived antinomy of revolutionary and evolutionary concepts of radical social change. We proposed *(r)evolution*

as an alternative model. Our process explored how social reproduction is firmly grounded in loving-caring relations, and how such relations therefore offer a stream of continuation from the old society to the new.

The approach involved a group process of intentionally generating a vision that was unapologetically utopian while remaining grounded in grassroots struggle, and that prepared strategy for then prefiguring the collective vision in the here-and-now. And in alignment with the new forms of knowledge co-production explored in the previous section, our collective visioning aimed to reveal glimpses of future world(s) – of the seeds of liberation already existing in the present. Or as one of the activists involved described it:

> It's a valuable, and ancient, practice... When we're engaged in activism in our present culture of needing to do something to feel worthy and valued, it takes a lot to just sit and access a process of stilling our minds – allowing a collective consciousness to come through that isn't limited so much by our rational thinking. To be able to find solutions that we couldn't otherwise imagine. There is something to be said for people from around the world just coming together to share a vision of what could be possible – it's a beautiful thing. (Alice, UK)

projects. Sixty percent of us were women. And a specific and sustained effort was made to deliver a proportionate representation of activists from the global South and North in order to encourage what Santos, Nunes, and Meneses (2008, xiv) call a "cosmopolitan ecology of knowledges."

The point of entry for the co-inquiry was a website that acted as an ever-evolving online hub that allowed for (1) the curation of relevant content/resources relating to our collective vision, (2) the sharing of publications emerging from the process, and (3) the facilitation of an open and interactive space for the process of co-imagination. Through a curation process of assembling relevant literature, videos, and other links, the website was able to ground and familiarise the visitor/participant in a specific frame of theory and praxis. Furthermore, a virtual discussion hub was designed to facilitate a safe and open space through which an online community of activists participated in the collective visioning process through a series of discussion threads aligned with its core themes: *theory, praxis,* and *utopia*. This allowed for a collaborative, participant-led co-inquiry grounded in and extending the project's theoretical framework. But in order to achieve a truly *collective* visioning process, we felt that further exploration and
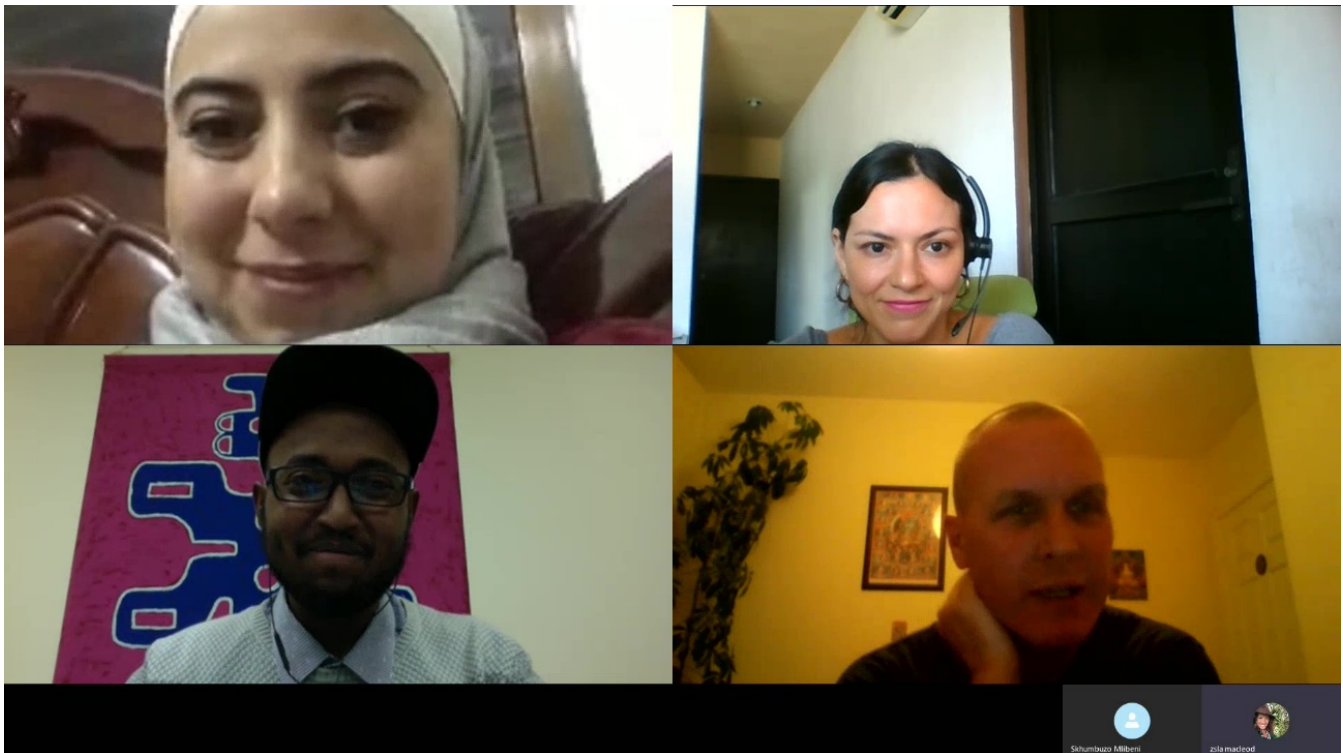
SCREENSHOT OF AN ONLINE COLLECTIVE VISIONING SESSION. CLOCKWISE FROM TOP-LEFT, NESREEN (JORDAN), DENISE (MEXICO), MATT (IRELAND), AND MOHAMMED (NETHERLANDS) WERE ALSO JOINED BY ACTIVISTS FROM THE UK, SOUTH AFRICA, AND UGANDA.

Our collective visioning group included activists from South Africa, Mexico, Italy, Trouwunna (Tasmania, Australia), Ireland, UK, Syria, Uganda, Germany, Canada, the Netherlands, Turkey, USA, and Jordan. And our movement engagement included anti-capitalist/alter-globalisation activism, radical environmental activism, indigenous rights activism, anarchism, feminist activism, local organising and training, refugee solidarity work, food sovereignty projects, cooperatives, and permaculture

development of the themes arising through the online forum was required. An immediate puzzle was how to facilitate such a dialogue given the geographical spread of the activists involved. While such processes might usually have been organised in the form of a public meeting, this was not logistically possible for this specific group. So it was decided that due to the international composition and geographical spread of the activists involved, a collective visioning group dialogue would be facilitated online using the communication

software system Zoom. This approach allowed for a collective visioning process involving eight participants of the online dialogues in seven different countries across four continents.

At this point, it really did feel like we were breaking new ground. And the experimental nature of the process made for a collective sense of ownership and agency. There were initially valid concerns that face-to-face learning/inquiry might be more difficult when using videoconferencing because of the lack of physical presence, which tends to be more intimate (Sedgwick and Spiers 2009, 7). However, with advances in technology and familiarity with online interactions, most research now reports a satisfaction with the incorporation of videoconferencing into research methods – allowing interaction *of a different kind* in a setting that includes rich visual data such as body language and facial expressions (Glassmeyer and Dibbs 2012, 298). In our case, a number of participants of the collective visioning dialogue commented on how "intimate" and "natural" the dialogue felt given its online nature, with one commenting: "I was surprised actually because we were talking from abroad but I was feeling the energy in the same way as if the people were in front of me, so that was really effective." The group was limited to a modest number in order to potentiate group cohesion, the building of trust, and the time and space for individuals to participate fully and to be heard. Once the group had established a safe collective space we used visualisation methods to co-imagine the future world(s) we wished to see/build. The group then collectively formulated our vision and discussed strategy for its prefiguration. The process opened a space within which the activists involved were able to experiment with alternative lenses through which to view the world. One participant describes such a shift in perspective:

> I am glad to have done this positive collective visioning – I have a friend and every night we do a collective visioning which is like the opposite of this. We ask each other things like in ten years' time how the world is going to change, with climate change – all of that, and both of us are hopeless, we're like 'this is the end.' We did this every night, talking about the big things that are going to come and hit us. I can say that this collective visioning has given me hope, rather than feeling stressed and depressed about what's going to happen. Usually, we feel hopeless – we're like 'we give up'! So this can work, people can come together and imagine the life they want to live and the world they want to live in. (Ekrem, Turkey)

Another participant described the collective visioning process as being grounded in the principles of "listening with your heart, sharing from your heart, and being spontaneous." She added that "when everyone is given an opportunity to speak, and the range of opinions and perspectives are shared, then there comes a natural conclusion that feels in harmony with the greater good." The collective visioning process served to rapidly cohere a group of activists with a diversity of ideological, cultural, and geographical backgrounds. All of us were surprised, if not moved, by the sense of solidarity formed within the group, and of the collective wisdom which was produced in common – as a sum far greater than its parts. The process resulted

in a rich body of theory grounded in a new post-capitalist, post-patriarchal, post-colonial and post-anthropocentric synergetic political practice on the ground:

- The participants described a radical solidarity which they framed as love – acting to construct a framework of plurality providing a cohesive, collective identity across the often divisive array of ideologies, methodologies, identities and cultural norms found within their movements and across society itself.

- A clear theme was the importance of re-positioning love (and the matrix of loving-caring relations which constitutes society on a daily basis – hidden and devalued in patriarchal society) as the central and primary social driver. Activists from both the global South and North discussed how in many cases indigenous knowledge has never forgotten this, and how this truth has been obscured in modern capitalist societies, and replaced by neoliberal values which reduce all things to profit – reshaping the organisation of our social and psychological structures.

- And a number of activists involved in some of the more recent dramatic socio-political uprisings across the world described the revolutionary moment itself as being co-constituted by love – as a joyful and emotional experience in which previous divisions of class, gender, race, ideology, and religion fell away (at least temporarily) – prefiguring the new society they wished to see. This prefiguration of a society (which is at once communalistic and pluralistic) grounded in love was a common theme throughout the collective visioning process, and the construction of practices to extend this (r)evolutionary love in order to co-constitute the new society as an ongoing process remains a key area for further exploration.

But perhaps more importantly, each participant reported a sense of renewed focus and clarity regarding their own activism, and a greater sense of collective agency moving forward. And in times such as these we will need as much of this as we can get.

Conclusion: Utopia as Process

We have seen how the current wave of ecological and anti-capitalist activism has been prefigured by a strong and vibrant lineage of knowledge co-production through multiple struggles over many years. And consequently, we can therefore see how this positions our current movement wave as responsible for prefiguring what comes next. The forms of knowledge co-production explored in this article reveal "glimpses of a future world" (Shukaitis and Graeber 2007, 37) from the seeds of liberation already existing in the present. For Ernst Bloch, such imagination is "productive of the revolution," and revolution is "the changing of the world" (Brown 2003)–positioning imagination not as mere fantasizing, but as a process inherently attuned to "objectively real possibility" (Bloch 1986, 145) and therefore to the "properties of reality which are themselves utopian"

(which already contain the future). Similarly, Katarzyna Balug positions imagination as the central driver of cognition and perception, concluding that society can therefore "only create that which its members can imagine" (Balug 2017, 4). Without engaging in such future-oriented discussion on values, goals, and visions, it will never be possible to "take over" that very future (Mannermaa 2006, 4). Utopian political imaginaries have largely been rejected since the end of the Second World War for understandable reasons. But such a negation of imagination has led many theorists to narrow their focus solely to the empirical now, and so constrain contemporary political imagination to a fixed (and thus capitalistic, patriarchal, colonial and anthropocentric) present. This is not to negate the importance of a political praxis that is responsive to the present and rooted in everyday experience – or as the Zapatistas put it: "*preguntando caminamos*" ("walking we ask questions") – but simply to acknowledge that without such collective visioning our movements will lose the innovation, creativity, and sense of trajectory they need to succeed.

The forms of knowledge co-production and collective visioning discussed in this article offer significant potential for developing new activist practices for the current wave of ecological and anti-capitalist movements. With them, activists can simultaneously imagine futures that realign movement trajectory while grounding themselves in present moment realities. Such collaborations utilise utopia as process and reframe its function from noun to verb– operationalising imagination as a productive power in the pursuit of new knowledge and praxis. This article therefore wishes to encourage educators, students, and activists alike to engage in an ongoing relationship/dance between the kinds of approaches to learning and knowledge production that contemporary activists might seek to advance their struggles and the theoretical objectives that the academy might orient the educator toward. And also for us to collectively pursue theoretical and conceptual questions in ways that are grounded in the here-and-now of contemporary grassroots struggle. As we stand witness to an increasingly globalised network of authoritarian capitalism, its xenophobic nationalisms, its racism, its ongoing ecocide, and its undermining of democratic systems, our ability to collectively envision radical social change has never been so essential both inside the university and out on the streets. I will meet you there!

Note

1. If you are interested to learn more about the collective visioning project please visit: https://www.love-and-alterglobalisation.net

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RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

'OK Boomer': Internet Memes as Consciousness Building

by Morgan Anderson and Gabriel Keehn
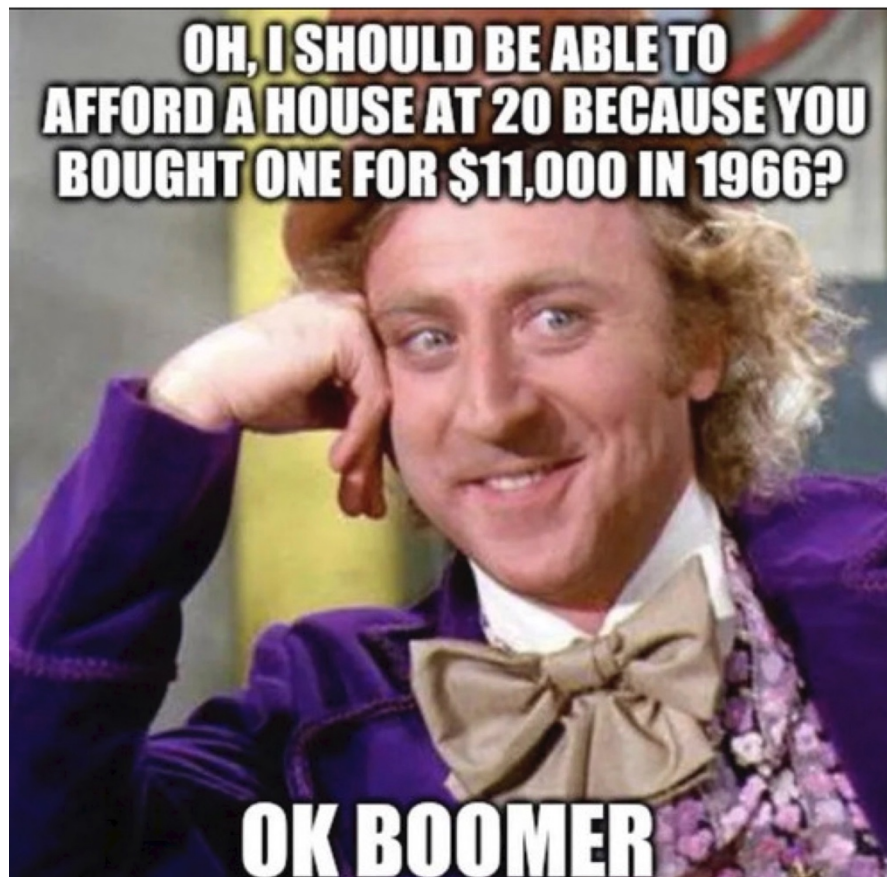
"OK BOOMER" MEME, COURTESY OF AUTHOR

It would be an understatement to say that the internet has reshaped our social world. Indeed, it has become the conduit through which much of our social lives are made possible. The internet, by condensing and removing factors such as time and distance, has fundamentally altered how we relate to others, to ourselves, and to our environment. In recent years, scholars have argued that the influence of the internet on our social relations has extended to large scale social movements and political organizing. Certainly, the role of social media in facilitating recent activist movements, while not without its problems, has been well documented.[1]

While the role of the internet and social media in influencing political organizing has gained the attention of scholars in recent years, less attention has been paid to the social influence of internet memes specifically. Internet memes[2], generally understood as an image overlaid with a word or series of words, have become a ubiquitous form of communication, especially for younger generations. As Simon J. Evnine notes, memes "are images captioned and re-captioned for humorous, political, and satirical purposes, sometimes made for the clearly aesthetic goals of exhibiting beauty, wit, and pathos."[3] The speed with which memes can be consumed, altered, and shared, in addition to their widespread accessibility have made them a unique form of social communication with, we argue, fascinating implications for political consciousness building.

A recent notable example of memes as consciousness building is the emergence of the "OK Boomer" meme. Meant to express the political frustration of Millennials and younger generations with what they see as a fundamentally inequitable and hostile political landscape, the OK Boomer meme has become a shorthand way of signaling one's understanding of the deepening structural inequalities that present unprecedented challenges for our nation's youth. The student loan debt crisis, rising housing costs, unaffordable or inaccessible health and mental health care, the weakening of the social safety net, declining expected lifespans, and the existential threat of climate change means that Millennials and younger generations are inheriting a social landscape that they believe is uniquely more hostile than that experienced by generations before them. Despite the material reality of our nation's youth, a pervasive tide of political conservatism seeks to further consolidate wealth and power, ignore structural barriers to economic stability, and worsen the climate crisis. Growing increasingly tired of expressing their concerns to what they interpret as a generation of ambivalent older Americans that dismiss the political views of our youth as the whining of "snowflakes," the OK Boomer meme emerged as a way for younger generations to unite, commiserate, and we argue, contribute to the important work of consciousness building that is a necessary precondition for political action. Indeed, as Evnine notes:

> Broadly speaking, people start using the images in ways that connect them to certain affects and/or narratives, others respond and imitate, there is consolidation and refinement through the early stages of a meme's history, and so there comes to obtain the requisite association between images, on the one hand, and affective dimensions and implied narratives, on the other.[4]

In other words, the OK Boomer meme is more than an image, but also an internally consistent and intelligible narrative that reflects the type of nascent political theorizing necessary for building social movements. In this way, as we later argue, memes have the potential to serve as entry points through which educators can build on students' mimetic knowledge as a way to cultivate what Max Haiven has referred to as "radical imaginations."[5]

Therefore, what interests us is what follows: first, the historical and sociopolitical conditions that have precipitated the success of the OK Boomer meme; second, the ways in which the meme can be understood as participating both in a history of intergenerational group consciousness and of political engagement; and finally, the implications that this meme, and memes more broadly, may have for pedagogy, both inside and outside of traditional classrooms. We seek to articulate what we see as the implicit class critique leveraged by Millennials and Gen Z through the utilization of the OK Boomer meme. What has been widely framed as a younger generation dismissing their elders, we argue, is actually a nascent expression of a sophisticated sociopolitical critique. Additionally, we show that despite such criticism, the OK Boomer meme avoids adopting an essentializing stance. Instead, by providing examples and analyses of this memographic practice, we argue that educational scholars might understand OK Boomer as a consciousness building movement among Millennials and younger generations that helps these groups build solidarity in the face of their collective marginalization from oppressive systems of capital that present them with unique challenges.

Here, we believe it is both important and helpful to note our positionalities as Millennial scholars. As Deianira Ganga and Sam Scott explain, "the *positionality* literature is now vast and variegated, emanating from a range of disciplinary fields with their own particular subject specialisms, research philosophies and academic cultures."[6] For us, positionality simply means the lens through which we view the world. We both occupy the identity category that has been both the object of critique and the author of the generational rebuttal in the form of the OK Boomer meme. As two Millennial academics, we have acutely felt the effects of the unique material conditions endured by our generation that we outline in further detail in what follows. This means that we are not disinterested observers, but are to the contrary, deeply embedded in the economic and sociopolitical conditions with which we write. As such, we argue that we are uniquely positioned to offer theoretical insight into what we see as Internet memes as consciousness building among both Millennials and Gen Z. Having both come of age at a time when technologically mediated modes of communication and the use of Internet memes became ubiquitous in everyday life, we are fluent both in mimetic communication *and* academic language. We are not unique in this regard. According to the Pew Research Center, the number of college-educated young adults is currently at its highest point yet. As of 2016, 40 percent of Millennials had a bachelor's degree compared to 26 percent of baby boomers in 1985.[7] A generation characterized by *both* unprecedented comfort with technologically mediated interactions as well as high levels of college education results in unique modalities of communication that present

pedagogical opportunities for educators straddling these seemingly divergent, but as we argue complementary, social and discursive spaces.

Scholars of sociolinguistics call this "code-switching." [8] Referring to the practice of switching between languages among second language learners during nascent stages of language acquisition, or to the modifying of linguistic patterns when adjusting to unique social contexts, code-switching enables a speaker to navigate between disparate linguistic communities. In this way, we argue that Millennial scholars and educators are uniquely positioned to serve as a bridge between organic intellectual memographic practice, in the Gramscian sense, and academic theorizing. (Though, as we later note, categories such as "Boomer" and "Millennial" are fluid and correlate more strongly to disposition rather than age). Navigating academia where age and experience tend to grant one more cache (not unjustifiably), we feel particularly attuned to instances of youth articulations of experiences being dismissed outright. Therefore, we call for Internet memes to be taken seriously as consciousness building activity that is necessary for political engagement and mobilizing.

For example, by tapping into mimetic discourses familiar to students, educators can tease out alongside students the social, cultural, and economic systems that make a specific meme discourse both intelligible and effective. Students may understand the mimetic context that makes OK Boomer superficially humorous, but a meme-fluent educator can contextualize OK Boomer as an implicit critique of the move from Keynesian redistributive economic policies enjoyed by many Boomers to the age of neoliberal austerity under which younger generations currently toil. Here, an otherwise simple meme serves as an entry point for teasing out much more sophisticated modes of analysis. As such, a mimetic discourse can serve as a jumping off point for deeper, more critical engagement.

What is OK Boomer?

As with many prominent memes, the origins of OK Boomer are difficult to trace accurately. However, an examination of the meme's rise to prominence provides an interesting context to its current ubiquity. While there are recorded instances of the use of the phrase as far back as 2015, it did not achieve the sort of widespread and systematic use required for meme status until early 2019, and did not gain any mainstream notoriety until later that same year. The spread and influence of the meme can be attributed largely to its popularity on the social media video-creating platform TikTok, a platform whose userbase is largely made up of young people. One of the earliest and most popular examples of this is a video of a young woman holding up a handwritten sign that reads "OK Boomer" next to a video of an unidentified older man who is engaged in a diatribe about Millennials and young people in general, accusing them of having what he refers to as "Peter Pan syndrome." The man in the video references a number of longstanding Millennial stereotypes, such as that they are entitled, naïve, and that they fundamentally misunderstand the nature of the "real world." [9] Many other videos on the platform work as riffs on the original, incorporating either

the video or audio of the man speaking. One example shows a young woman awkwardly dancing while the audio plays in the background. As the video progresses, text appears on the scene that reads, "Boomers: wrecked the housing market, destroyed the environment, don't know how to convert a PDF, currently bankrupting social security." [10] Here we see an example of the explicit politicization of the meme. Though presented in a humorous and irreverent manner, the underlying message is clear: the Baby Boomer generation, while critiquing younger generations for a variety of perceived weaknesses and failures, is itself largely responsible for the conditions that have made the socio-cultural and political life of current generations difficult in the first place. The juxtaposition of the supposed misdeeds of the Boomer generation with the tone-deaf condescension of the Boomer avatar is meant to be illustrative of a certain mindset (call it the "Boomer mindset"). Specifically, the Boomer mindset adheres to what we might think of as a certain type of generational bootstrapping narrative: "nobody has ever had it easy," says the Boomer, "but you certainly have it easier than I did, and I made my way just fine." This sentiment is particularly offensive from the perspective of the Millennial because it seems to ignore, or at least minimize, the myriad structural factors that contributed both to the relative ease with which many Boomers were, and are able to, achieve many of the traditional markers of middle-class success, and that have made it much more difficult for Millennials and younger generations to attain the same. As the user-generated online pop culture dictionary website "Urban Dictionary," aptly defines the phrase, "OK Boomer" refers to a situation "[w]hen a baby boomer says some dumb shit and you can't even begin to explain why he's wrong because that would be deconstructing decades of misinformation and ignorance so you just brush it off and say okay." [11] More will be said about this in subsequent sections, but it is important to note here the fundamental antagonism at stake in the OK Boomer meme, and the distinct mindsets being addressed by it.

Though presented in a humorous and irreverent manner, the underlying message is clear: the Baby Boomer generation, while critiquing younger generations for a variety of perceived weaknesses and failures, is itself largely responsible for the conditions that have made the socio-cultural and political life of current generations difficult in the first place.

The OK Boomer meme spread incredibly rapidly from its inception on TikTok, finding its way into a wide variety of mainstream media. The meme even made an appearance on the global political stage, when Chloe Swarbrick, a 25-year-old member of New Zealand's parliament, responded to heckling from one of her older colleagues during a debate on carbon emissions and climate change with "Ok, Boomer." [12] Predictably, because of the somewhat combative nature of the meme, and the various generational dynamics

of blame, guilt, frustration, dismissal, and the like at play, the OK Boomer meme has elicited a barrage of strong responses from people who felt themselves to be (often unfairly) targets of the phrase. Responses ranged in level of offense-taken from the generally sympathetic but gently chiding, [13] to the fed-up and reactive, [14] to the fully hysterical, a tone that was reached when conservative talk radio host Bob Lonsberry referred to the term "Boomer" as "the n-word of ageism."[15] Lonsberry was roundly and rightly criticized for this comparison, but it is illustrative of the incredibly high emotional and political resonance the OK Boomer meme has been able to achieve in a short span of time. We argue that the rapidity with which the meme broke into, and shaped, popular discourse is a testament to the potential political power of memes.

Millennials, Material Conditions, and Memes

To further contextualize OK Boomer, over the past several years, Millennials, the generation of Americans born between 1981 and 1996 who are currently anywhere from 22 to 37 years old, have been the subject of unique scrutiny. Indeed, generalizations surrounding Millennials' shortcomings related to disposition, work ethic, and political leanings abound, and such assumptions have thoroughly permeated our cultural ethos. Millennials are often described as entitled and lazy, and have received criticism for being responsible for the demise of consumer commodities ranging from cereal to diamonds.[16] This generational ire has inspired the authoring of countless books aimed at helping frustrated members of older generations better understand Millennials, problematically positioned as akin to a different species, in their temperament and outlook on the world.[17] As both a generational and cultural descriptor, the concept of what it means to be a Millennial is a contested identity category.

An interesting moment of such generational tension occurred in August of 2018 with the headline in *Philadelphia Magazine*, "How Millennials Killed Mayonnaise."[18] Both the impassioned publication of such an article—the subject of which could only be described as puzzlingly mundane—and the subsequent fervent backlash it garnered indicated the arrival of a singular cultural moment. It too demonstrated the deep cultural chasm between these two generations. On the one hand, younger Americans are centrally concerned with navigating a sociopolitical and economic landscape that structurally impedes the promise of basic economic stability amidst the existential threat of climate crisis. On the other hand, an older generation laments the decline of a beloved condiment. [19] While such generational misgivings are certainly not a new social phenomenon, which we explore in greater detail in what follows, the overlapping of this particular historical moment with the immediacy of the production, consumption, and reinterpretation of memes presents a unique set of circumstances and, we argue, opportunities.

In this way, OK Boomer as a mimetic discourse is rooted in a critique of the shifting political and material conditions that continue to deepen inequalities by increasing structural barriers to stable economic lives such as access to healthcare, living wages, affordable housing, or higher education. Here, the OK Boomer critique is not without its shortcomings. For example, it may be considered a failure of imagination to merely call for younger generations to get a fairer shake under a "kinder, gentler, capitalism" rather than demanding a reimagining of our social lives entirely—a project we see as the ultimate goal. Nonetheless, the OK Boomer discourse articulates important critiques of sociopolitical and economic structures that can serve as an entry point for identifying such problems on the road to more radical dispositions.

For example, the rising cost of living compared to overall wage stagnation over the last several decades has made the dream of homeownership—the key for upward social mobility—far less attainable for Millennials. In fact, research indicates that projections of long-term quality of life and "absolute income mobility," or earning more than one's parent's, has significantly declined for the Millennial generation. While the cost of everyday consumer goods such as television sets and clothing have dropped in recent years—due in large part to the replacement of American jobs by exploiting cheap labor in the developing world—the cost of education, childcare, housing, and healthcare have risen considerably. [20] As Jordan Weissman notes, "[p]rices are rising on the very things that are essential for climbing out of poverty."[21] Indeed, a 2017 study found that rates of economic social mobility have fallen from "90% for children born in 1940 to 50% for children born in the 1980s."[22] The price of housing now constitutes more than one-third of a family's spending, whereas it accounted for only a quarter of spending in 1995.[23] Many are left to attempt to subsidize their income with second and third jobs. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 53 million American workers are currently subsidizing traditional 9-5 work days by working in the "gig economy," where workers notoriously forfeit any labor protections in exchange for flexible work provided, typically, via online applications. By the year 2020, 42 percent of these workers will be between the ages of 22 and 37 years old—Millennials.[24]

Memes to Movements

We understand that one might reasonably question whether it is appropriate to conceptualize something as amorphous, leaderless, and slippery as the OK boomer meme as a youth movement at all. Rather, one might argue that the meme is simply a form of cultural expression, like many other common hashtags or memetic images. Indeed, political movements and activism are traditionally associated with specific leaders, statements of goals, or other traditional markers of political engagement, things that memes, at least at first glance, patently lack. While we appreciate these potential objections, a central aim of this project is to expand and update the way we conceptualize social movements and how they behave in the digital age.

With the advent of the internet, and specifically social media network technologies, the question of how, where, and if such technologies can be considered political activity has been a central concern of those studying the development of political movements. With respect to many

of the most prominent contemporary examples of social movements (e.g. the Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter), the internet, and memes specifically, played an indispensable role in the development and dissemination of those movements' messages. As Xiao Mina notes in her discussion of the role memes and other internet trends play in social movements today, "It's nearly impossible now to think of a social movement without the internet, and as the world comes online, communities advocating for change are popping up globally, in places large and small, channeling their energies to streets and to the web."[25] Indeed, it is arguable that the connective possibilities, the ability for quick and wide dissemination of messages and concepts, and the inherently leaderless nature of internet spaces make them particularly conducive and effective as both sites and conduits for social movement politics. For these reasons, we believe that the OK Boomer meme merits consideration as a type of internet proto-movement, taking advantage as it does of so many of the features of the internet that lend themselves to political movement building, despite not yet meeting the criteria for a full-fledged movement.

> ***In situating the OK Boomer meme in a liminal space between full-fledged movement and mere emoting, we are drawing on a long tradition of radical thinking on the role of individualized resistance as a necessary but not sufficient condition for the sort of consciousness building that is necessary for genuine movements.***

In situating the OK Boomer meme in a liminal space between full-fledged movement and mere emoting, we are drawing on a long tradition of radical thinking on the role of individualized resistance as a necessary but not sufficient condition for the sort of consciousness building that is necessary for genuine movements. Robin D.G. Kelley, for example, frames his study of radical African American labor movements with a consideration of the various ways that he and his co-workers at a McDonalds in the 1970's used self-expression, subversion, and even sabotage to fight against (albeit in small ways) the daily oppressions they felt in their workplace. For Kelley, though these types of political expression and participation are often denigrated or overlooked in traditional historiography and political thinking, they are essential to understanding how individuals form their political identities. He writes, " If we want to make sense of those McDonald's workers…those of us committed to writing working-class history must look way, way, way, below, to the places where the noble and heroic tradition of labor militancy is not as evident."[26] For Kelley, and many other thinkers of radical resistance, both the fundamental evils of oppression and the origins of resistance to those evils, are at the subjective, individual level. Again, the individual and subjective are never substitutes or replacements for community development and group movements, but we argue that the sorts of ground-level, subjective experiences of oppression are important

precursors to those larger-scale forms of political expression.

Manuel Castells, who has arguably developed the most wide-ranging theory of the role of networks in movement politics and the ways that the internet can help or hinder those movements, has argued that "the diffusion of Internet-based social networks is a necessary condition for the existence of these new social movements in our time. But it is not a sufficient condition."[27] However, as Castells continues, "proto-social movements could become social movements in an environment of communicative autonomy" such as the internet. [28] Social movements are always grounded in a shared sense of frustration, anger, despair, or a wide other variety of uniting and motivating emotions. Castells considers these sorts of resonant emotional connections, in addition to a set of objective material conditions, to be critical to the success of social movements, writing "[y]et, social movements do not arise just from poverty or political despair. They require an emotional mobilization triggered by outrage against blatant injustice, and by hope of a possible change…"[29] Memes are incredibly, perhaps uniquely, well-suited for this task of emotional mobilization, both activating the individual experiences of those who experience injustice and also tying them to larger-scale political goals and ideals. As Limor Shifman puts the point, "*memes serve as pivotal links between the personal and the political.* Since they are based on shared frameworks that call for variation, memes allow citizens to participate in public, collective actions, while maintaining their sense of individuality." [30] It is in this space of potentiality between simple expression of political frustration and full-blown political movement that we see the role of the OK Boomer meme as a marker of group consciousness, and perhaps as a bridge between the two. From a pedagogical perspective, building on students' mimetic knowledge can serve as an entry point for cultivating more radical imaginations. It is important to specify here the particular group that is meant to be isolated when we talk of group consciousness and consciousness building in the context of the OK Boomer meme. It is tempting to think that the meme is meant to refer exclusively to the Baby Boomer generation, which covers roughly those born between the years of 1945-1965, [31] especially since the term "Boomer" has generally historically referred to that group. However, we argue that OK Boomer is best understood not as identifying exclusively individual Boomers, but rather to draw attention to a certain set of ideological attitudes, beliefs, and predispositions; a mindset toward the current younger generations and their particular struggles that can be held by anyone, traditional boomer or otherwise. Indeed, as Taylor Lorenz argues, "[i]n the end, boomer is just a state of mind."[32] Ultimately, it is meant to refer to a person who is resistant to change, does not have a sense of urgency with regard to addressing issues of inequality, or is unable to appreciate the unique challenges facing the next generation of global citizens. In this way, OK Boomer is not meant to essentialize an entire group of people. Rather, it is to isolate and critique attitudes of ambivalence toward the harrowing conditions faced by our nation's young people.

As discussed above, the current material conditions that have directly resulted from both neoliberal and neoconservative policies of the last several decades inflict daily economic, racial, and sociopolitical violence on our young people. Many members of these generations have reacted to these circumstances, predictably, with frustration and anger, feelings that are amplified when they are accused of being "entitled," "lazy," "snowflakes," and the like. For younger generations, as reflected by OK Boomer, there is a widespread sense of being thrust into an unworkable situation not of their own making and then being blamed for feeling helpless, cheated, and apathetic. By conceptualizing the OK Boomer meme as a proto-movement at least contributing to the sort of consciousness raising that lays the groundwork for deeper political engagement, we can understand that the frustrations behind it are not simply with the sense of being given a raw deal by previous generations, although this is certainly at play. Instead, the primary target of OK Boomer is the attitude that considers younger generations *themselves* to be at blame for their struggles, and that ignores the concerns expressed by younger generations about their own futures. OK Boomer is best thought of not as a blanket dismissal of a generation that is perceived as having failed at its duties toward future ones, but as a shorthand for a much deeper expression of frustration. OK Boomer says, "you have dismissed my concerns and blamed me for aspects of the world around me that are patently out of my control all while offering no help or solidarity of your own, and you have therefore revealed yourself to be my enemy." This sentiment is in no way tied to any member of a specific generation, and expresses a sense of material solidarity with those who are subject to the same conditions that motivate it, and with those who seek to remedy or alleviate those conditions. There is, to put it another way, a reason that nobody uses the phrase OK Boomer to refer to former presidential candidate Senator Bernie Sanders, despite his falling within the range of the Boomer generation. Sanders, to many members of the younger generation, is seen to take their concerns seriously, to recognize that their apparent "failures" in life are not for a lack of effort, of willingness to work, or anything under their control, but are rather attributable to larger-scale, structural social forces. At the height of his presidential campaign, Sanders enjoyed the support of nearly one third of voters under the age of thirty-five.[33] On the other hand, many younger political figures and commentators who espouse traditionally conservative or right-wing views on the plight of younger generations (e.g. bootstrapping narratives) are regularly subjects of the OK Boomer meme.

This usage of generationally charged language to express larger-scale political animosity and distrust is by no means new, and the OK Boomer meme can also be seen as another stage in the evolution of this type of political discourse. Perhaps the most famous example of this type of discourse is the New Left counterculture slogan, coined in 1964 by UC Berkley free speech activist Jack Weinberg, "Don't trust anybody over thirty." Weinberg would recall later that the original motivation for the saying was to demonstrate the independence and organic nature of the movement at the time, that they were not being directed from behind the scenes in some way.[34] Weinberg's slogan became a rallying cry for much of the youth counterculture

after it first appeared, expressing both the grassroots, organic nature of youth anger at the conditions of the world they had been birthed into, and their frustration at the apparent indifference expressed by the conservative elements in the culture to their plights. Similar to the OK Boomer meme, Weinberg's slogan, though couched in explicitly general terms, was meant to signal something more than simple generational hostility. As Mario Savio, another leader of the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley, said in a now famous speech:

> The things we are asking for in our civil rights protests have a deceptively quaint ring. We are asking for the due process of law. We are asking for our actions to be judged by committees of our peers. We are asking that regulations ought to be considered as arrived at legitimately only from the consensus of the governed. These phrases are all pretty old, but they are not being taken seriously in America today…[35]

The important thing to note here is that the motivating force behind the anger of the Free Speech Movement was that they felt that their concerns and interests were "not being taken seriously" enough by those in power, be they over thirty or under. Like OK Boomer, "don't trust anyone over thirty" was meant to be taken not literally, but ideologically. Indeed, much like the role of Bernie Sanders today, many of the icons of the youth counterculture of the 60's, such as Jack Kerouac, William S. Burroughs, and Timothy Leary, were much older than thirty. However, since their political attitudes and sympathies were in-line with those of the counterculture, they were not seen as proper targets of the "don't trust anyone over thirty" dictum. Again, what is at work here is not simple ageism, but politics.

Given that the OK Boomer meme is motivated by class-based material conditions, is mobilized by members of a certain class to express shared feelings of anger and solidarity with one another across socio-cultural and generational contexts, and participates in a longstanding tradition of voicing political dissent in generationally charged language, we argue that the OK Boomer meme, and memes more broadly, can expand the toolkit of critical educators seeking to engage students in the sort of consciousness raising that is a precondition for deeper political engagement.

OK Boomer, Public Pedagogy, and The Call to Conversation

We want to conclude our discussion of the OK Boomer meme with some reflections on what this mimetic discourse, and the conditions that it is responding to, mean for pedagogy both inside and out of the classroom. If, as we have suggested above, OK Boomer is best understood as a form of political consciousness development and expression, we suggest here that it also serves as a form of public pedagogy,[36] calling attention to a set of political and economic issues that younger generations see as having been problematically overlooked by the dominant power structures. Rather than serving to shut down conversation, as it is often accused of doing, OK Boomer should be taken as a challenge to engage more seriously with those who

might be otherwise deemed less worthy of political dialogue. By drawing the attention of those with more political influence to a different set of issues, OK Boomer is not a dismissal, but an invitation, both to action and to conversation.

We fully acknowledge that the OK Boomer meme may appear terse and even combative, as far as invitations go. However, it is important to be clear that, from the perspective of younger generations, as elucidated by Mario Savio in his Berkeley speech, these issues are not new, but are only now gaining political traction and public interest because of agitation from younger generations. Indeed, this type of confrontational politics has been at the core of many of the most successful internet-based political movements, from the Arab Spring to Black Lives Matter. Peter Lindsay has recently done preliminary theorizing on what we might call an emerging "pedagogy of irritation," by which interest and investment, which are preconditions of education, are achieved through a certain type of friction and prodding. He writes, in the context of a college classroom, "One effective way to capture their [students] interest is to raise their hackles – to get them invested in a subject by…well…irritating them."[37] He goes on to suggest that it is pedagogically fruitful to interrogate feelings of irritation both within ourselves and those with whom we are engaged in discourse: "If you were irritated, why – for some of you – did your irritation motivate you to read further, and why – for the rest of you – did it tempt you to quit altogether?"[38] It is this fine line between motivating irritation and alienating offense that the OK Boomer meme walks, and it is in that tension that its pedagogical value lies. As pedagogues, we must take seriously the challenge of OK Boomer whether or not it irritates our sensibilities, or even our senses of ourselves. The animating conditions that have pushed the younger generations to the point of feeling so unheard and unfairly maligned should push those of us who may embody certain aspects of the Boomer mentality to not only examine what it is about the OK Boomer meme that agitates us so much, but what we have done to contribute to its taking hold. As with so many other instances of marginalized voices rising to make themselves heard, and in sometimes uncomfortable ways, OK Boomer should push us as pedagogues toward more compassionate listening, self-reflection, and ultimately allyship in what we have suggested is best understood as a grassroots, nascent, youth proto-movement.

Notes

1. See Morgan Anderson and Gabriel Keehn, "Tweeting from the Tower: Exploring the Role of Critical Educators in the Digital Age," Critical Questions in Education vol. 10, no 2 (Spring 2019): 135-149.

2. For the purpose of this paper, we use "internet meme" and "meme" interchangeably.

3. Simon J. Evnine, "The Anonymity of a Murmur: Internet (and Other) Memes," British Journal of Aesthetics vol. 58, no. 3 (July 2018), 303.

4. Simon J. Evnine, "The Anonymity of a Murmur: Internet (and Other) Memes," British Journal of Aesthetics vol. 58, no. 3 (July 2018), 307.

5. Max Haiven, Crises of Imagination, Crises of Power: Capitalism, Creativity, and the Commons (London: Fernwood Publishing, 2014).

6. Deianira Ganga and Sam Scott, "Cultural 'Insiders' and the Issue of Positionality in Qualitative Migration Research: Moving 'Across' and Moving 'Along' Researcher-Participant Divides," Forum: Qualitative Social Research vol. 7, no. 3 (May 2006), 1.

7. Nikki Graf, "Today's Young Workers are More Likely Than Ever to Have a Bachelor's Degree," Pew Research Center (May 16, 2017).

8. See, for example, Peter Auer, Code-Switching in Conversation: Language, Interaction, and Identity (London: Routledge, 1998).

9. https://www.tiktok.com/@linzrinzz/video/671478 2003637521670.

10. https://www.tiktok.com/@torschach/video/67485 20592888106246.

11. "Ok Boomer." Urban Dictionary. Accessed December 2, 2019. https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Ok boomer.

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15. Sara M. Moniuszko, "Radio Host Schooled after Comparing 'Boomer' to N-Word; Dictionary.com, More on Twitter React." USA Today. Gannett Satellite Information Network, November 5, 2019. https://www.usatoday.com/story/entertainment/2019/11/05/radio-host-bob-lonsberry-criticized-after-comparing-boomer-n-word/4163037002/.

16. Kate Taylor, "'Psychologically Scarred' Millennials are Killing Countless Industries From Napkins to

Applebee's—Here Are the Industries They Like the Least" Business Insider (October 31, 2017).

17. See, for example, Bruce Tulgan, Not Everyone Gets a Trophy: How to Manage the Millennials (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.), 2018; Jean M. Twenge, Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled—and More Miserable Than Ever Before (New York, NY: Atria Paperback), 2014; Chip Espinoza and Mick Ukleja, Managing the Millennials: Discover the Core Competencies for Managing Today's Workforce (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.), 2016.

18. Sandy Hingston, "How Millennials Killed Mayonnaise," Philadelphia Magazine (August 11, 2018).

19. Here, we are being intentionally cheeky. However, as we discuss later, the spirit of OK Boomer is to provoke in order to inspire dialogue.

20. See Derek Thompson, "Why America's Essentials Are Getting More Expensive While Its Toys Are Getting Cheap," The Atlantic (May 2, 2014). https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2014/05/its-expensive-to-be-poor/361533/.

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23. Alicia Adamczyk, "Here's Why Millennials Have to Fight Harder Than Their Parents Did to Stay in the Middle Class," CNBC (April 12, 2019) https://www.cnbc.com/2019/04/12/oecd-why-millennials-are-falling-out-of-the-middle-class.html.

24. Ibid.

25. An Xiao Mina, Memes to Movements: How the World's Most Viral Media is Changing Social Protest and Power (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2019), 3.

26. Robin D.G. Kelley, Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 13.

27. Manuel Castells, Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2015), 226.

28. Ibid. 227.

29. Ibid, 248-249.

30. Limor Shifman, Memes in Digital Culture (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2014), 129.

31. There are of course debates about the exact window, but this span covers most of the plausible accounts. See Doug Owram, Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby Boom Generation (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

32. Taylor Lorenz, " 'OK Boomer' Marks the End of Friendly Generational Relations," The New York Times (October 29, 2019).

33. Hardwood, John. "Joe Biden and Elizabeth Warren Separate Themselves from the 2020 Democratic Pack in New NBC/WSJ Poll." CNBC. CNBC, September 17, 2019. https://www.cnbc.com/2019/09/17/biden-warren-lead-in-latest-nbcwsj-2020-democratic-poll.html.

34. The implication from some observers was that the free speech movement was secretly funded by Russian Communists. See Paul Galloway, "Radical Redux," Chicago Tribune (Chicago, IL), Nov. 16, 1990.

35. Quoted in Seth Rosenfeld, Subversives: The FBI's War on Student Radicals, and Reagan's Rise to Power (New York: Picador, 2012), 219.

36. We use an inclusive and value-neutral definition of "public pedagogy" here, meaning to refer to "spaces, sites, and languages of education and learning that exist outside of the walls of the institution of schools." Jennifer A. Sandlin, Brian D. Schultz, and Jake Burdick, "Understanding, Mapping, and Exploring the Terrain of Public Pedagogy," in Handbook of Public Pedagogy: Education and Learning Beyond Schooling, eds. Jennifer A. Sandlin, Brian D. Schultz, and Jake Burdick (New York: Routledge, 2010), 1-6, 1.

37. Peter Lindsay, The Craft of University Teaching (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 87.

38. Ibid. 95.

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Pedagogy and the Politics of Organizing in Mississippi[1]

by Premilla Nadasen

MISSISSIPPI SEMESTER, IMAGE COURTESY OF AUTHOR

Since Donald Trump's election, we have witnessed widespread and highly visible public protest in response to recently instituted draconian policies. The Movement for Black Lives, women's marches, sanctuary cities, airport pickets, strikes by service workers, and a grassroots Democratic Party resurgence are uplifting a new generation of inspiring leaders. Although such demonstrations are not new, they have taken on a renewed intensity in this current political climate.

Alongside these high-profile protests is a different kind of under-the-radar politics: grassroots activists are developing models of resistance grounded in relationship building. It is led by people in local communities—sometimes in the heart of "Trump country"—with few state supports and little means to survive. Having endured decades of devastating cutbacks in social programs and the implementation of an array of carceral and other punitive policies, they are working together to collectively weave their own safety net and, in the process, offering an alternative vision of change. This kind of radical engagement often doesn't get the attention it deserves. Social movements have always been characterized by both spectacular demonstrations and day-to-day organizing. Although historians and journalists highlight the "big moments," the day-to-day work, which cultivates leadership in ordinary people and lays the groundwork for mass protest, leads to meaningful and lasting change.

My students and I got an up-close look at some of the grassroots organizing through a course I taught at Barnard College called "Mississippi Semester." We partnered with a low-income advocacy group in Biloxi, the Mississippi Low-Income Child Care Initiative (MLICCI), spent a week traveling around the state, and came away with an appreciation for the transformative politics practiced by local residents. Perhaps most surprising, the grassroots organizing was not all located in the blue bubble of Jackson. We witnessed powerful examples in places like Biloxi and the Delta, often considered more conservative areas of the state.

I designed "Mississippi Semester" as a pedagogical experience centered on engagement with a community organization. A buzzword in academia, "community engagement" often takes the form of service-learning and student internships, which frequently burden community groups rather than aid them. Many campus-community collaborations recognize the value of experiential learning and community-based knowledge, but the approach is too often one of extracting knowledge from the community rather than establishing an equal partnership between community and students. The intention of this course was not solely for students to be educated in a non-classroom environment or to engage in experiential learning. Nor was it primarily about learning from community residents. My aim was not to organize a course around my or the students' research agenda, but to carry out a project designed and directed by the community organization for its own benefit.

MLICCI has worked for over 20 years with child-care providers--many of whom are as poor as the parents they serve--and lobbied for expanded child care assistance for women on welfare. I first learned of it when I gave a keynote lecture for the Ms. Foundation's Economic Justice Program grantees four years ago. MLICCI representative Cassandra Welchlin, who was in attendance, asked me to come to Mississippi and present at their statewide women's economic security summit. During that December 2016 visit, I learned from Executive Director Carol Burnett that the small-scale, low-budget organization needed some research assistance. At the same time, in the wake of the heated presidential election, my students were clamoring for involvement in social justice work. Thus, my partnership with MLICCI fused with student interest into a course proposal that would give students an opportunity to work with low-income women in Mississippi and provide a service to MLICCI.

Teaching such a course required resources. I applied for and received a college-based "Innovation in Teaching Grant" to cover the cost of the trip as well as other expenses. I wanted to ensure that financial hardship was not a barrier for student enrollment. Barnard is an elite, private, women's liberal arts college connected to Columbia University in New York City and thrives on a model of intensive teaching and learning. The course was enormously time consuming. I took care of many details and logistics, everything from making airline and van rental reservations to developing a Google survey for students interested in the course. Over 30 students applied for eight slots. I chose a diverse group of students with a range of intellectual interests and technical skills. But I also wanted students with a certain amount of life experience, who I believed could easily acquire the necessary cultural fluency and work closely with our partners.

MLICCI asked us to develop an index of women's economic security to assist them in their lobbying efforts. Mississippi has one of the most inaccessible Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) programs in the country. Out of 12,000 statewide applications for TANF in 2016, only 165 were approved. The state also has one of the highest poverty rates in the country. MLICCI was trying to pressure state officials to release federal TANF child care assistance funds so poor women could get child care subsidies and enter the workforce. Our data, they believed, would help them make that argument.

Since the task before us was a little outside my area of expertise—I had done a lot of research and writing on poverty but was not a quantitative expert—I reached out to the college's Empirical Reasoning Center. They assisted us with culling data, selecting indicators for the index, and training students in Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping. As the students discovered, poverty is hard to quantify, despite countless official measures and statistics, because it is subjectively measured and interpreted. We wanted intersectional data—poverty broken down by race, gender, and geographical area—that would allow us, for example, to compare the poverty rates of black mothers with three children to white mothers with three children. Since this was hard to extract from general census data, we relied on the American Community Survey that offered more comprehensive information about a sample of families. Prior to the trip, we brainstormed which variables to weigh more heavily as we formulated the index. Is housing or transportation more important? How should we take into

account the ages of children? How important is education relative to having a job? The goal for our trip, per MLICCI's request, was to travel around the state and interview local stakeholders to get feedback on our proposed indicators. We generated a long list of questions about housing, health care, income, and job security.[2]

In addition to community-driven research, the other pillar of the course was collaboration. The students and I worked together to learn GIS mapping. Students also brought to the table an array of skills—on-line publishing, web design, filmmaking, photography, and statistics. From the get-go, rather than lead the students, I marshalled their talents and worked alongside them to collectively assist the organization's advocacy work. Rather than transferring the responsibility of supervising students onto the community organization, as a class we collaboratively muddled through obstacles we encountered. Students' invaluable input in the unfolding of the course determined our final products—a website and a self-published written report. As a result, the course had no blueprint and was less clearly defined at the outset. Because I was not always the expert and had to cede some power, students had a sense of ownership and honed their leadership skills. After six weeks of brainstorming, intensive research about quantifying poverty, and Skype conversations with MLICCI, we were ready to embark on our trip.

Collective Power in Mississippi

We landed in Gulfport, Mississippi, on a balmy afternoon in the middle of March, ready to spend a week in the heart of the Deep South. Most of the students had never traveled to the region but were eager to step outside their comfort zone, visit a Deep Red State, and put into action what had so far been abstract discussions in the classroom. We had no delusions of volunteerism or an alternative spring break do-gooder experience to help the less fortunate. Our aim was to build relationships, offer skills, develop capacity, produce something tangible, and learn.

One of our first interviews was with a job training program, Women in Construction (WinC), run by the nonprofit Moore Community House in Biloxi. Initiated during Hurricane Katrina, which devastated the Mississippi Coast, the program channeled women into higher-paying construction trades to make a dent in the gender pay gap. It did so by giving participants practical skills, a stipend, and child care. About 20 of us were sitting in a circle at Moore Community House—15 trainees and 5 of us from Barnard. The trainees were mostly African American, with some Latinx and white women.

The previous night, the eight students, the course assistant, and I crammed into my Best Western hotel room to review our list of questions. We decided that getting a handle on women's economic security meant not only thinking about insecurity—what people lacked—but also understanding what security meant. How would one's life be transformed with economic security? What would individuals do that they are unable to do now?

Economic security seems to intuitively translate into more leisure time and self-gratification. It is not intuitive,

however. The equation of economic security with personal fulfillment is partly a product of neoliberal ideas of individualism circulated in popular culture. Investment firms such as Charles Schwab and pharmaceutical companies have instilled in us aspirations for a life of travel, relaxation, hobbies, and walks along the beach. Economic security and healthy living, we are told, means finally doing the things we have always wanted to do. We predicted that for our interviewees, economic security would mean quality time with their children or engaging in self-care and that day-to-day life would be less stressful and most certainly not centered on crisis management. Or it might mean a full night's sleep--a luxury for single parents who sometimes have to work two jobs or travel long distances for work. We had several predictions about what having an economically secure life would mean for women in Mississippi.

We did not anticipate the response articulated by most women at the meeting. Rather than seeking personal fulfillment, they would choose to give back to the community and help others. Interviewees hoped to create a recreational space for young people in the neighborhood. They wanted to ensure that the less fortunate were cared for. The sense of communal responsibility was surprising and inspiring. Our interviewees didn't have steady work, were sometimes separated from their children, had been on welfare, and/or had poor health. Despite these multiple challenges, their long-term goals, their visions for a better life were about collective well-being, not individual advancement or personal leisure. Why did people respond this way? Is it because poverty by necessity leads to reliance on others? Is it because they learned the hard way that real transformation comes through collective change? Or does it have something to do with the history and culture of the South? I suspect the answer lies in some combination of all of these. Our meeting at Moore Community House revealed how ordinary people, hidden from public view, are creating alternative models of collective well-being and social justice in response to state abandonment. The commitment to the collective left a powerful impression on us.

The women in the job training program are not outliers. There is a long history of collective action in Mississippi. I had been to Mississippi before but hadn't spent much time there. Mississippi, nevertheless, played a prominent role in my radical imagination—not as a site of poverty and despair, but as a site of resistance and tenacity. As an undergraduate at the University of Michigan in the 1980s, I was immersed in anti-racist organizing with the student group the United Coalition Against Racism, which dug deep into history and theories of social change. The example that we turned to most frequently was the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

SNCC adopted a distinctive approach to grassroots organizing in the South.[3] Veteran activist Ella Baker, the brainchild behind SNCC, encouraged young people to chart their own path and remain independent of more established civil rights organizations, such as Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). SCLC was organized hierarchically with power concentrated at the top. King's oratorical gift was the key to SCLC's strategy of mobilizing masses of ordinary people to participate in high-profile demonstrations with the aim of pressuring

government officials to dismantle racially discriminatory local and federal legislation. Ella Baker advised the young leaders of SNCC to embrace a political agenda that was "bigger than a hamburger" by setting its sights not only on desegregation but also on social transformation. SNCC rejected the top-down structure of SCLC, adopted group-centered leadership, and chose to organize rather than mobilize. It invested in working with communities over an extended period of time. Rather than devote energy to passing legislation, which targeted elected officials, SNCC shifted its gaze toward empowering ordinary people. Members set up shop in rural Southern communities, got to know local folk, and created space to enable them to speak for themselves. SNCC nurtured the confidence that gave ordinary Mississippians the courage to confront white landowners, stand tall in the face of threats of violence, and walk into the statehouse and register to vote. An empowered local leadership would ensure that the vulnerable would not be victimized even when high-profile leaders left town and cameras were turned off. SNCC's methods reflect the significance of communal approaches and the deep bonds among people that frames so much of the history of organizing in Mississippi.

One take away from our trip to Mississippi is the echo of collective power evident among 1960s activists. We witnessed similar collective solutions to deep-seated social problems. Networking among advocacy organizations and the commitment to building community are powerful ingredients in Mississippi progressive politics. Cooperation Jackson implemented an alternative economic model that subverts the patterns of exploitation and expropriation that undergird racial and economic inequality in the South. Its worker-owned and collectively organized farm, catering business, and community center are rooted in a vision of democratic engagement and social transformation.[4] Springboard to Opportunities, which describes itself as a "radically resident-driven" affordable-housing advocacy nonprofit, launched a basic-income pilot program, Magnolia Mother's Trust, to provide poor single mothers with cash payments. Magnolia emerged from one-on-one and focus group conversations with local residents who insisted that, more than anything, families needed cash. Both Cooperation Jackson and Magnolia Mother's Trust are envisioning and realizing new forms of racial and economic justice.

Less well known are models of change outside Jackson. The Nollie Jenkins Family Center, started by Ms. Ellen Reddy in Holmes County as a child care center, is a space that serves and empowers the local community. According to one student, the Center is "One of the most striking and significant instances of the unique 'spirit' of activism that I observed in Mississippi." The foundational premise of the Center is that every family needs to be cared for and everyone has a responsibility to look out and care for one another. The community—not child protective services, the police, or school officials—becomes the means to address behavioral problems, mental health challenges, and domestic violence at home or school. The Center is developing an agenda of expanding economic opportunities in the Delta, making schools safe for everyone, supporting sexual autonomy for young people, and empowering African American girls. One of my students described this as "the abolitionist future."

Our partner organization, MLICCI has fostered a network of dozens of low-income child care centers and community organizations around the state. The interracial group works assiduously to create spaces of conversation and build a collective agenda that will improve the lives of poor women and children. Executive Director Carol Burnett, a native Mississippian, has been organizing in the state for over 30 years. A petite white woman and one of the state's first female ordained Methodist ministers, Burnett is deeply committed to racial and gender justice. Jearlean Osborne is the community organizer who travels around the state making the all-important connections that are the heart of MLICCI's work. Roberta Avila has been involved in social justice work for 35 years and is a founding member of the Mississippi Immigrant Rights Coalition. MLICCI envisioned the economic security index as a collaborative project that would incorporate the input of a wide range of advocacy groups--folks on the front lines of women's poverty--and as a strategy to foster dialogue among local communities about the meaning of women's economic security. To that end, we met with groups and individuals across the state involved in health care, legal justice, domestic violence, and drug rehabilitation to draw on their knowledge and expertise. Collaboration, collectives, partnerships, and social bonds came up again and again on our trip. They were evident in the political work we witnessed, a component of research partnership, and a guiding principle of the class.

Outcomes, Challenges, and Takeaways

After returning from our trip, the students used the data we gathered in Mississippi to produce a GIS report that mapped several indicators: education, earnings, health care, child care, poverty, and unemployment. The report starkly illustrated the close correlation among poverty, race and gender, which impacted black women most severely. The report was preliminary. Given the constraints of a 15-week semester, we couldn't include all, or even most, of the relevant indicators. And some of the most significant information we gathered through interviews, about debt and transportation for example, was not captured in the available census data. We concluded that a more comprehensive survey was necessary to fill in the gaps of available poverty data.

When I taught the course the second year, we conducted oral histories to supplement the quantitative data with qualitative data. Through hour-long interviews, students learned how the various poverty indicators were intertwined in a family's life. For example, families without transportation had a hard time holding down a job, accessing welfare benefits or utilizing child care services. Child care and systematic racism sometimes served as insurmountable barriers for people who sought to return to school to improve their economic standing. Or they found themselves mired in education debt. The narratives put a human face on the quantitative data students had compiled the previous year and enabled us to see how multiple indicators compounded the problem of poverty.

One challenge that students encountered was the unpredictability of the workload. The flexible structure and changing expectations of the course--to accommodate student input and MLICCI's shifting needs—was difficult for students accustomed to advance planning. They understood that the course required a huge time investment, yet this was not their only course. During the first year, we only decided halfway through the semester to produce a written report, which turned out to be a large undertaking. Work was also distributed unevenly. The class was organized into teams, which meant that students did different amounts and types of work, with some immersed in "intellectual" work while others engaged in technical work.

The second iteration of the course was more challenging. My goal of students decentering themselves was more difficult perhaps because of the way the trip was organized. In year two, we began our week by visiting museums and historic sites, which generated personal trauma for students because of the proximity to the vicious racial violence that marked Mississippi's history. Interpersonal conflict, feelings of guilt and blame, and reflection about one's own family history and personal experiences took center stage and quickly manifested in racial tensions within the class, with white students seeking care and Black students wanting their own space.

In both years, students of color felt that the burden of emotional labor fell on them. As one student explained, the "emotional labor…was done/most necessary by other students of color in the class" because of the hesitation and insecurity of white students. "Black students were pressured to be more reserved, even-tempered, and we were encouraged by the other students to gather less and be more inclusive. Interestingly, each of the Black women of the course found solace in one another, and in the Black women organizers we met in Mississippi." Black students, in general, felt more comfortable in Mississippi than white students and were able to more easily engage with local residents. White students expressed anxiety about speaking out for fear of offending people: "I often am worried about being accidentally offensive or failing to be politically correct. For this reason, I often refrain from speaking and focus on listening. I don't know if this is always the best decision." It was not easy to balance the collective goals of the course with individual student needs.

Even though several students felt that the class dynamics mapped onto familiar racial patterns, the praxis of racial solidarity they observed in Mississippi disrupted expected ideas of race. MLICCI is a multiracial organization. Two white MLICCI leaders, Carol Burnett and Matt Williams, quickly earned the respect of all students:

"Matt and Carol from MLICCI expanded my ideas of the role of white people in social justice work, which is something that I have been grappling with for a while now. Admittedly, I was thrown off at first when we Skyped with them, having spent weeks talking about the racial injustices women of color were experiencing at the hands of white people in Mississippi, but I appreciated the ease and swiftness with which they called out the systemic racism at the root of all the issues. Furthermore, they were not racially conscious out of a

desire to collect social capital and clout – which I have observed frequently at the liberal bubble of Barnard/Columbia – but rather because they knew that what was going on was not right. … Our trip to Mississippi was life changing for me in a number of ways, and in one of the most salient, it expanded my ideas of what social justice work can and should look like."

The racial tensions among the students contrasted with the apparent interracial harmony in MLICCI and was the obverse of what one might expect, given the pervasiveness of racism in the South. Perhaps that is because for a white Mississippian to take an anti-racist stance requires a prior internal racial reckoning, whereas the racial liberalism that dominates Northern urban communities is accepted wisdom rather than conscious personal choice. Perhaps it is because the stakes of an anti-racist agenda and the need to confront white supremacy are much clearer in Mississippi whereas the veneer of equality in the North masks the deep racial divide, although that is slowly being chipped away. The entrenched character of anti-Black racism is becoming more evident to white liberals in the wake of the recent murders of unarmed Black people and subsequent Black Lives Matter protests. The recognition of the devastating consequences of racialized structural violence--always evident to Black and Brown people—has recently prompted many white allies to foreground white supremacy and racial privilege in their political engagements.

Equally important for students was the pedagogical model that uplifted the expertise of local Mississippi residents. According to one student: "I expected we would go to Mississippi and impart unto them the tools and vernacular that one finds only in elite institutions. This class was a necessary, and humbling, experience in that way. The first day we landed in Mississippi, I knew that there was nothing that my Political Science or Critical Theory classes could have taught me to match the expertise and authenticity of the women we met." Another student who is from a low-income background and always felt discomfort with academic research in poor communities said this:

"I strongly believe that the Mississippi course is a model for how academia can effectively engage students and researchers with the outside world in a way that is beneficial and not self-serving for the researcher/student. For example, the final report for the Mississippi course wasn't just created for the purpose of having a culminating piece to showcase the work that we did as group of students at Barnard and Columbia. Instead it served another purpose: it showcased the work and the research we conducted *at the service* of MLICCI. We acknowledged the pivotal role MLICCI has played for decades in advocating for better child care policies. Throughout [the] trip to Mississippi, we also acknowledged the many volunteers, child care providers and mothers who resist the oppressive systems that limit their economic and social well-being. Before embarking on any research endeavor in the future, this course has inspired me to consider the following: *Why am I researching a given topic and a particular group of people and at what cost to those being studied? How will*

I ground myself in the work that has already been done on said topic? What kinds of assumptions and privileges am I approaching the research with and how will I acknowledge them? When my research is over and done with, who will it benefit?"

The course also pushed back against a neoliberal educational model that lauds individual student achievement and rewards those who outdo their peers. According to a student: "This class has been the most democratic classroom I have been in. I have moved even further away from the individualistic spotlight-seeking scholarship." Students worked collaboratively rather than in competition. As one student explained: "It felt as if I were part of a team more so than a class, and we were all working together to achieve the same goals." Students reported that working as a team and building relationships with a community organization were two of the most important takeaways of the course. "I appreciate the collaborative nature of the course because it was SO different than any class I've ever taken at Barnard. It helped me to come out of my shell and become really engaged with the coursework and my peers."

The labor of constructing the index, interviewing local residents, and working with MLICCI fundamentally changed students' perceptions of Mississippi and introduced them to a network of grassroots activists and community-based organizations. At the end of the semester, one student who had never considered living in the South applied for a job as a journalist in Jackson. Another student switched her career path from working in the pharmaceutical industry to policy advocacy. For another student, our approach to research prompted her to reconsider attending graduate school because "I have seen how it is possible to interview and record oral histories in an ethical way."

Toward the end of the semester, both classes disseminated their findings and shared their experiences with the Barnard community. This course, alongside other community-engaged courses, such as Harlem Semester, Theorizing Activisms, and Seeking Asylum, taught by my colleagues prompted the college to apply for a foundation grant to teach local courses with a similar intention of collaborative learning that serves grassroots community organizations over an extended period of time. The newly funded courses may be more easily replicable at other institutions without grant support because they do not contain a travel component, which can be prohibitive in terms of cost, and hurdles such as students' family responsibilities and work schedules. I taught a course, for example, in which students conducted oral histories of labor trafficking survivors for a New York City-based migrant workers organization, which cost very little and accommodated students with busy schedules.

The COVID-19 pandemic, budget constraints, and social distancing guidelines make it imperative to think creatively about how faculty can incorporate into their curriculum social justice work that does not require close contact or travel. Such partnerships are more important than ever as the health and economic crises are leaving communities, especially communities of color, reeling. The unprecedented scale of the crisis has led to emergency measures that only a few months ago were unimaginable.

Although budgetary concerns are fueling a trend toward austerity in colleges and universities, progressive educators can also use this moment to forge new solidarities and implement an educational model that highlights collective engagement and public, as opposed to private, interests. At the very moment when our collective interest ought to be front and center, individualism, xenophobia, racism, victim-blaming and callous disregard for human life seem to have a firm hold on public discourse. Remote learning may open up possibilities for working with communities beyond our local or even national borders because physical distance may be less significant when developing virtual projects. At the same time, social distancing and reliance on virtual connections pose challenges, such as inequitable access to technology and barriers to building trust without interpersonal engagement. However, in a world of widespread COVID-19 infections, mass unemployment, and unbridled anti-Black racism, there is too much at stake to not actively reimagine our curriculum and community engagement.

Concluding Reflections

MLICCI's development of an economic security index didn't require a partnership with a history professor and undergraduate students. It would have been easier to write a foundation grant and commission a think tank with full-time staff and a research and marketing department to conduct this work for them. The end result of our work was less about the publication of a report than the partnership that was born. The trip to Mississippi was meaningful for the students and was especially enlightening at a historical moment when geographical divides seem to shape political discourse. It was the stuff of relationship-building and long-term collaboration, albeit with a short-term productive outcome. In addition to lobbying, MLICCI intended to use the process of constructing the index to deepen relationships and generate conversations among low-income advocates and child-care providers across the state. Moreover, engagement with the students rejuvenated them and bolstered their work. As Carol Burnett said, "Seeing our work through the students' eyes inspired us."

We didn't go to Mississippi armed with our own research agenda and academic theories about poverty. We took our cues from local activists and supported work already underway. We wanted to follow and support rather than lead and teach. Although Mississippi Semester in no way replicated the radical organizing of SNCC, it enabled us to appreciate the value of building lasting relationships and uphold the voices of people who are less concerned about raising their own profile than about social transformation from the ground up. It is a model from which we have a great deal to learn about the importance of collective power and progressive social change, particularly in a context of individualism and celebrity culture.

In some ways, the political dichotomy between Red State/rural/conservative and Blue State/urban/liberal as an ideological construct functions similarly to stark North/South divisions of the civil rights period. The 1960s South—with visible Jim Crow signs, Bull Connors, the firebombing of black churches, and assassinations of local civil rights

leaders—was cast by the press as an aberration, a place that needed to be brought into line with dominant American values presumably characterized by racial equality and democratic governance. This false narrative, however, erased the widespread racial violence that plagued the "enlightened" North. It cast northerners and the federal government as the agents that eventually transformed the South, obscuring both federal complicity in Southern racism and the long history of collective change and day-to-day organizing that were hallmarks of southern Black politics.

Progressive resistance is not confined to a few liberal enclaves. The dismantling of the welfare safety net, the rise of precarious, part-time, low-wage labor, and legislation eroding workers' rights, have made individual lives more insecure and undermined families and communities. But ordinary people are finding alternatives. Rebuilding collective power, one person at a time, as SNCC demonstrated four decades ago and as MLICCI and the Nollie Jenkins Family Center do today, may be our best hope for a different kind of future.

Notes

1. Thanks to Carol Burnett, Nara Milanich, Robyn Spencer, Destiny Spruill, Samantha Ortega and the reviewers and editors at Radical Teacher for their feedback. And a very special thanks to the team at MLICCI: Carol Burnett, Roberta Avila, Jearlean Osborne, and Matt Williams who hosted us and shared their stories. For more information about the course, see mssemester.wordpress.com

2. Premilla Nadasen, Fatima Koli, Alisa Rod, David Weiman, "Mississippi Semester: New Social Justice Approach to Teaching, Learning, and Community Engagement" *Numeracy* 12 (1) (January 2019)

3. There is a voluminous literature on SNCC. For example see Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, (University of North Carolina Press, 2003) Clay Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Harvard University Press, 1981) Charles Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (University of North Carolina Press, 1995) Wesley Hogan, *Many Minds, One Heart: SNCC's Dream for a New America* (University of North Carolina Press, 2007)

4. Kali Akuno and Ajamu Nangwaya, *Jackson Rising: The Struggle for Economic Democracy and Black Self-Determination in Jackson, Mississippi* (Daraja Press, 2017)

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Activist Notes

The Great Sham of the California State University System

by Liz Sanchez

STUDENT PROTEST OF 40% FEE HIKE, MARCH 1992, UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION, SPECIAL COLLECTIONS AND ARCHIVES, OVIATT

LIBRARY, CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE. PHOTO CREDIT: AKIKO ARITA

For the past 5 years, I have been actively involved with student politics and activism within the California State University system. From my undergrad to my current status as a grad student, I have collaborated alongside many amazing CSU student activists all over the state in addressing various forms of inequities and injustices we have faced on our CSU campuses and as a statewide system. We organized and participated in numerous on-campus social justice campaigns and direct actions. We have fought against lack of funding, lack of resources, high tuition rates, unfair campus policies, forms of discrimination, and the list goes on and on. The emotional labor invested in our consciousness raising efforts drained us, but we persisted because of our collective identity and the passion we have to fight within student movements. However, what many people do not know or understand is how our experiences often resulted in a fear complex and long-term mental health issues. There were many sleepless nights and weekly anxiety attacks due to our interactions with administrators. For us, administrative corruption went beyond class hierarchy and economic inequities. Many of the administrators we came face to face with threatened, lied, manipulated, and gaslighted us. These experiences inspired my current master's thesis research as I want people to thoroughly understand why student affairs is a sham.

As an organizer and developing researcher, I decided to turn to scholarly activism in order to tell our stories and offer analytical insight. Through qualitative methods, I documented field notes I made through observations of CSU student organizers at all 23 campuses to gain more insight about the collective experience. I then interviewed ten students to obtain in-depth narratives and highlight individual experiences. Five of them were elected student representatives in student government, and the other five were student activists within political grassroots organizations. Additionally, I utilized autoethnographic methods because I was an active participant in the field. Through reflective exercises I provided information on my personal journey and, thus, contributed a narrative to our collective experience. After I collected the data, I scanned the transcriptions and journal entries for patterns, and these patterns developed into 4 overarching themes: "*emotional violence and policing*," "*attempts at accountability*," "*recognition of positions of similarity*," and "*the complications of collective organizing in the CSU*."

My findings revealed how the power of storytelling influenced students' collective identity and their dedication towards consciousness raising efforts, even when they faced burn out and administrative conflict.

My findings revealed how the power of storytelling influenced students' collective identity and their dedication towards consciousness raising efforts, even when they faced burn out and administrative conflict. Yet, the most concerning portion of the findings revealed the significant impact that administrative culture and their authoritative power had over these students and their peers. According to these students, many of them received threats to their academic careers; were threatened with expulsion; were yelled at, bullied and manipulated by admin. Additionally, admin would pit students against each other. Due to their heavy influence in student government and student affairs, administrators were able to normalize a type of civic engagement culture that alienates certain styles of activism. As a result, the student participants and their campaigns were alienated. I, specifically, observed other students' shame and witnessed them disavow the participants of this study because of their forms of activism, and this often created a divide amongst students, which deterred many of their campaign goals. This division often benefitted the admin because it allowed them to dodge accountability efforts and continue on with their own agendas.

CSU student activism and its collision with the administration underlines the varying ways students can be impacted by the corporatization of higher education. As administrators gain more power and partner with privatizers, they maintain colonial fundamentals in higher education. This includes enforcing dominant cultural idealisms, such as structural hierarchies, at the expense of marginalized communities. Today, modern day universities will likely denounce forms of discrimination and offer sympathetic speeches towards student inequity. Yet an institution's unwillingness to shift their foundational values that inflict and perpetuate injustice reveals the true nature of the neoliberal university system. The student organizers I worked with exposed how the CSU commodifies diversity and used our identities as a marketing tool. Instead of addressing student concerns, these admin utilized student codes of conduct and their administrative status to bully these students and deter their activism. They had very little interest in our concerns and the liberation of our communities. Instead, their main interest was to sell our identities and graduation rates so that they can remain competitive in the academic market.

There were moments where I felt defeated, but as I observed and worked alongside these students, I realized how important student activism is and how we must continue our work. A handful of student organizers were often at the core of these campaigns and they sacrificed so much for the benefit of the entire student body. They believe in an education system that is free, accessible, and values community support over profit. These students not only inspired my research, they also inspired me to pay it forward and continue advocating for education reform. We must end administrative corruption and address the managerial model that only works to empower their statuses – not their students. Our truth must be heard, and action must follow. #freethecsu

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Activist Notes

Student Voices in the Movement for Integration and Equity

by Sophie Mode and Dulce Michelle

IMAGE BY DULCE MICHELLE, TEENS TAKE CHARGE, NEW YORK CITY

In a time when equity and justice are at the forefront of conversations across the nation, it is essential that the voices of students are not ignored or tokenized. New York City has the most segregated public school system in the nation, more segregated now than in the 1960s. Hundreds of thousands of students spend every day in segregated classrooms, and yet our voices are not the focus. Students are powerful. Students are knowledgeable. Students are passionate. Students are the ones directly feeling the effects of an immensely segregated and inequitable system.

Here is what student leaders at Teens Take Charge (TTC), a youth-led organization fighting for educational integration and equity in NYC public schools, have to say:

"I do this work because I realize that in my role as white student I should be trying to do as much as I can to give other students opportunities that might come much more accessible to me. I am determined to be as productive as possible instead of sitting by and watching injustices occur. I've most recently taken part in helping promote the Education Unscreened campaign and helped establish our coalition team. Strategies I have seen work well are always preparing myself with knowledge first and having meaningful conversations with ordinary people and people of power because both have impactful effects. I am sustained as an activist because I have a strong community and group that supports myself and each other. As a student activist, I need an understanding environment, by that I mean sometimes being able to know that I want to step back when things feel like too much."

-Carla Gaveglia, Freshman at Cornell University (Recent Graduate of the NYC iSchool)

"I fight for integration because I know that equity and integration is possible if we fight and remember that my identity matters as much as someone else's. I am on the policy team where we do coalition-building, help spread TTC's proposed policies to other organizations and officials in separate meetings and the Education Unscreened team where we attend different meetings with key officials and groups, communicate messages of work to DOE officials through letters and emails, and more. I love attending different meetings to promote TTC's policies. This is an amazing chance to showcase what we're fighting for. I am sustained because I know that what I'm fighting for is for everyone, including everyone in the future."

-William Diep, Senior at The Brooklyn Latin School

"What motivates me to fight is my mom's good advice and seeing all the horrible things about the world and it makes me want to change that. I am a part of the Growth Team and we worked on events and contracting organizations and schools. I also have been signing petitions for Black Lives Matter and sending an email to try to get back the Summer Youth Employment Program. Strategies that I have found successful are being a good listener and being consistent. I am sustained as an activist because I am able to do things without giving up."

– Koudjedji Coulibaly, Senior at Essex Street Academy

"Seeing (or at least previously seeing when we were at school) how segregated my school is every single day is a reminder why we need to keep fighting. Not to mention just how interconnected education is to absolutely everything else. So when our schools are inequitable, it feeds into many more problems in our society. Integrating our schools and creating an equitable education for all is a necessary step in dismantling the systemic racism in this country. With TTC recently I have been working on the push to repeal Hecht Calandra--the racist NY law that maintains segregation in specialized high schools--and put the power of admissions for the specialized high schools back in the power of the city. Strategies that have worked for me as a leader is delegation, knowing when you should do something or when you will get a better result when someone else does it. Especially as a white activist it's important to know when you should not take up space and instead allow for marginalized voices to share their experiences and thoughts. I am sustained as an activist by just how much is on the line, how many students are failed each year when our schools do not integrate."

-Ula Pranevicius, Freshman at Wesleyan University (Recent Graduate of Bronx High School of Science)

"Many of the tasks that I like to take on directly affect me and those in my community. I feel like it is my responsibility as a good samaritan to tackle what I am passionate about. In my activism it is very helpful to stay organized and communicate with others who are also working on tasks with you. I have realized when I take on too many tasks, I begin to neglect other tasks I had promised to complete. The community that you are welcomed into once you start partaking in activism is what sustains me. Connecting with people who have the same goal as you makes me feel good and motivated. It is always helpful to have other activists check in with you to see how you're doing mentally."

-Abbie Jobe, Senior at Eleanor Roosevelt High School

IMAGES BY DULCE MICHELLE, TEENS TAKE CHARGE, NEW YORK CITY

RADICAL TEACHER

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Teaching Note

"Warriors, Not Victims": Precious Knowledge, the Fight for Ethnic Studies, and Accountability to the #MeToo Movement

by Vani Kannan, Shyrlene Hernandez, and Alexis Martinez

IMAGE BY MAX BENDER

In the fall of 2018, Vani taught a course titled "Writing and Social Issues," and Alexis (an English major) and Shyrlene (a nursing major) enrolled in it. As part of a unit on educational justice, Vani assigned the film *Precious Knowledge,* which chronicles a student-led movement to save the Mexican American Studies Program at Tucson High School. [1] Despite the program's stunning success, [2] or perhaps because of it, Mexican American studies at Tucson High School faced increasing scrutiny from Arizona state government. [3] The fight chronicled in *Precious Knowledge* resonated deeply in our class. Movements for education justice, including the rich history of CUNY student movements and ongoing struggles,[4] were often present in class discussion.

Students felt deeply inspired by the student-activists in Tucson. They reflected on their own educations, and how little Ethnic Studies material they had been exposed to. They were activated, and wanted to *do something.* As a first step, we decided to screen the film on campus and facilitate a discussion on education justice struggles in Tucson and New York City. However, after we released the event flyer, Vani received an email from Dr. Karma Chavez, a professor at U.T. Austin, asking us not to screen it. Dr. Chavez shared an article that explains that a key activist/actor in the film, Leilani Clark, was sexually assaulted by the director. When Leilani came forward, the director edited her out of the film. Since then, Leilani and her supporters have asked people not to screen it.

When we received this news, the #MeToo movement had already become a central touchstone in our classroom. In a student-centered, inquiry-driven curriculum focused on social issues in the midst of what Corrigan has termed the #MeToo movement's "rhetorical zeitgeist," [5] it is not surprising that the #MeToo movement became central to the discussions in our majority-women-identified classroom. [6] Alexis designed a research project on rape culture after we briefly watched the live hearing of Christine Blasey Ford's testimony in class. When it came time to present it to the class, she wanted to approach it very sensitively without asking personal questions, but was taken aback when the class conversation got personal:

> the class cried and embraced one another and the whole atmosphere was beautiful. It's hard to describe what it was like in that room. It was like a domino effect: one person shared their experience, and then someone else did, and then it became a whole classroom discussion. Some people said that they had never told anybody before. Victims are often blamed, and made to feel that they'll have to suffer the consequences and not the perpetrator. The classroom became an inclusive environment where people could share experiences they had buried away, and counter the culture of silencing.

Alexis's presentation prompted students to see the interconnectedness of rape culture with their own research inquiries (which included topics from colorism to workplace harassment to teenage mental health struggles).

When Alexis watched *Precious Knowledge*, she was overwhelmed with anger and sadness. She raved about it to friends and family. She was inspired by the initiative that students took to save the Ethnic Studies program when politicians were trying to ban it. She wanted to screen the film on campus because she hoped to create an inclusive environment where people could make connections to their own lives—just as the class did during her presentation. Like her, others in the class had to wrangle with their concurrent desire to share their excitement about the film, and the very clear ask from the survivor that people not show the film. Alexis reflected, "none of us wanted to believe that the director who documented such an inspiring movement would commit such a horrendous act."

In the end, it was a sense of accountability to Leilani Clark, and to the larger #MeToo movement, that led students to cancel the film screening, and invite Leilani to speak instead. The class collectively wrote a letter and sent it to the English Department announcing the decision, an excerpt of which describes this decision-making process:

> Many of us were moved by the film and cried when we watched it. We felt enlightened by it and wanted to share it with others at Lehman. However, we stand with Leilani Clark. We see her as a warrior, not a victim, and feel that she should speak her truth no matter what. It helps so many other survivors who may be afraid to speak out. . . . Because this is a social issues class, we have done research on the #MeToo movement and the culture of victim-blaming. We take this issue very seriously, and want to shed light on how women and survivors who come forward are silenced.

By inviting Leilani to speak on campus, students wanted to showcase her continued activism and writing, and shed light on both the movement for Ethnic Studies and the movement against sexual assault.

There was some pushback around this decision. Some felt we were "not hearing both sides" and "silencing" the fight for Ethnic Studies by not showing the film. Our response was that Leilani would be showing her own footage and telling her own story--one that did not erase the assault. Survivor accountability--like the critique of "dialogue models" in the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions call, and critique of community-police dialogues in the Black Lives Matter movement--pushes against commonsense academic notions of dialogue as a centerpiece of our pedagogy. While pedagogical dialogue was central to the decision-making process to cancel the film, it was also important for us as a class to arrive at an understanding of why we couldn't take "both sides" but instead needed to be accountable to Leilani's ask. Other pushback, like much pushback during the #MeToo movement, suggested that we should have proof that this assault actually happened. Survivor accountability also pushes against commonsense notions of "proof" by centering survivors' stories; "proof" often requires interfacing with a criminal justice system that further criminalizes survivors and rarely enacts any kind of accountability for perpetrators. We had conversations about both of these points with several attendees at the event, who wandered in after seeing the flyers.

This decision-making process forced us to confront our internalized understandings of justice and accountability, both in the classroom collective and in our own individual

work. Shyrlene, who had spent the semester researching the question of parental consent for minors who wish to terminate a pregnancy, experienced a transformation in her understanding of justice when she learned how police repression of the movement for Ethnic Studies impacted Leilani's response to the assault:

> Before getting the opportunity to speak to Leilani, I felt angry at the fact that she never turned the director in to the police. Until I spoke to her, I thought justice in cases of sexual assault meant taking the case to trial. . . . For people who are already part of activist movements, going to the police doesn't feel like an option. Leilani talked about how the police were already watching the movement. She knew what the consequences could be if she went to the police.

Shyrlene reflected that it is important to ask women what justice means to them, and acknowledged that it won't look the same for everyone. She plans to bring this understanding of justice to her future career as a pediatric nurse as she works with women to help them decide what's best for them.

In her talk, Leilani encouraged attendees to make a similar shift in their understandings of justice, foregrounding community-based, transformative justice models rather than those relying on police and courts. Further, rather than subjugate the movement for Ethnic Studies to the #MeToo movement, Leilani argued that they were in fact one and the same--and a strong movement for Ethnic Studies cannot be built without a clear, underlying critique of the relationships among sexual violence, colonization, enslavement, and land theft. This historical context throws settler-criminal-justice-system definitions of justice into stark relief.

Throughout the process of planning this event, many of us rewrote our lives in relation to rape culture; how many moments had *we* normalized until we read somebody's account of what had happened to them? As the instructor, Vani had a particular responsibility to check in with students who were triggered by these discussions, and talk closely with students who were experiencing the classroom space in a positive way (as a space of learning, growth, and transformation), helping them to understand that other students had a drastically different experience of the space based on their own traumatic histories or presents. At the same time, upholding Leilani's story helped to create spaces where others could tell their own stories, externalize traumas, and understand them as part of larger systems of oppression. It also shifted students' academic trajectories; for example, Alexis is now planning to apply to graduate school to analyze representations of rape in literature.

We encourage readers to heed Leilani's call to not screen *Precious Knowledge,* but instead learn the history of the movement for Ethnic Studies through fuller narratives that do not silence survivors. This is a small but crucial act of practicing movement accountability in the classroom, both to the Ethnic Studies fight for historical accuracy and the #MeToo fight for survivor accountability.

Notes

1. 88% of students at this school are students of color and 53% are designated "economically disadvantaged" ("Tucson Magnet High School"). Lehman College, located in the Bronx, is designated as a Hispanic-Serving Institution; 53% of the students are Hispanic, and over 90% are students of color ("Facts About Lehman").

2. The program had been implemented to address dropout rates, and it had a dramatic impact; 100% of students who enrolled in the program graduated from high school, and 85% went on to college (Palos and McGinnis). The curriculum included multilingual readings in Chicano literature, Black studies, and critical pedagogy, including Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed and Acuña's Occupied America (Depenbrock).

3. The context for this scrutiny includes the passage of two laws: "SB 1070, which legalized racially profiling Latin@s "reasonably suspected" of being undocumented, and HB 2281, which outlawed Mexican American Studies in Tucson Unified School District" (Medina and Martinez). HB2281 accused Mexican American studies courses of promoting "the overthrow of the U.S. government"; Mexican American studies was targeted for "indoctrinating students" and "identify[ing] whites as oppressors and Hispanics as the oppressed" (Depenbrock).

4. For example, during the fall of 2018, the (ultimately successful) grassroots movement to keep Amazon out of Queens -- even though the CUNY administration was courting it (see Thompson and Rabinowitz) -- had galvanized students around the links between education, capitalism, and gentrification.

5. The fall of 2018 was twelve years after Tarana Burke created the #MeToo hashtag, and one year after it went viral.

6. As of March 2020, 68% of Lehman students identified as female ("Lehman Facts").

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RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Teaching Note

Teaching for Critical Consciousness During the Student Debt Crisis

by Gregory Bruno

IMAGE BY EHUD NEUHAUS

I began using the theme of education in my first-year composition courses at Kingsborough Community College because it is one context that I am sure that I share with my class, something we all have some degree of access to and opinions about. I like this theme because it allows for a lot of student autonomy; students are free to interpret "education" in whatever way they choose, while I am able to shift their focus to a variety of units – one of which centers on the cost of college and student loan debt. Many of my students, the overwhelming majority of them, opt to write papers based on this unit.

I promote the use of narrative in my class and encourage students to tell the stories that lead them to their research questions. This, I believe, embodies Paulo Freire's theory that we read the "world" long before we can read the "word" (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 35). For Freire, meaningful literacy practices begin with the student and their experiences. In trying to situate my writing class in the lives of my students, and not the other way around, I find that the cost and access of higher education is an important point of entry, rife with both personal and political significance. This approach works because students are almost always willing to contribute *something* to this conversation, even if that is often only their frustrations and complaints.

Because so many students rightly relate the issues of college cost and loan debt to class mobility, I have dedicated a second unit of my course specifically to the topic of class and education. In discussing the costs and benefits of attending college, I begin by assigning the *New York Times* opinion piece, "The Implicit Punishment of Daring to Go to College While Poor," written by Queens College (CUNY) student, Enoch Jemott. Jemott's piece is as beautiful in its candor as it is incisive in its criticisms. Jemott describes the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) as "numbingly complex for families without a high level of financial literacy" (Jemott, 2019). I assume many students find this description familiar and hope it will encourage discussion about how socially inherited skills and abilities like financial literacy are often withheld from disenfranchised communities, even though those skills and abilities are often fundamental to accessing the services aimed to support them. These lines about FAFSA documentation tend to prompt a classroom dialogue equal parts rant and inquiry. Students trade war stories over their frustrations, laugh at the absurdities of bureaucracy, and argue over politics.

One trend I've noticed—but did not expect—is that some students have little sympathy for Jemott's argument. They take particular issue with what they perceive to be the helplessness of the author. At first, I was troubled by this interpretation, but as I thought more about it and listened more carefully to my students, I began to understand that this confrontation represented an opportunity to analyze how we conceptualize "support" for disenfranchised students.

Investigating this issue of financial literacy further meant that our feelings about Jemott's argument were only the beginning. In researching the connections between disenfranchised demographics and access to federal aid programs, students began to make the broader connections

between predatory loan lending and race and class. The *Frontline* documentary, "A Subprime Education," explores this issue in detail, highlighting the criminal activity of for-profit private colleges targeting low-income students. I show this short film in class and ask my students to make connections back to Jemott's argument. Many make the connection that it is the same obfuscation that mystifies FAFSA that leads so many students into incurring unnecessary loan debt.

This tends to spark a political dialogue about the role of government assistance, not simply in terms of financial support but also as social scaffolding. I like to introduce a bit of critical theory here and ask students to think about the ability to navigate such complicated systems and structures not simply as privilege but instead as an inherited form of social or cultural capital. What emerges is a complex dialogue about personal accountability, government overreach, structural racism and classism, and the unfathomably high cost of attending college in the United States.

The trick, I've learned, is to balance the airing of grievances with meaningful questions about these topics. Narrative works here. It allows students to insert themselves into the work, to tell the stories of their questions, to explain why these issues really matter to them, and to argue why they should matter to others.

"Meaningful" is the operative word here. For me, "meaning" implies something more than reading solely to substantiate preexisting beliefs or values. It means asking questions that a student does not already know the answer to. I try to remind my students that their problems are a part of larger political and economic systems. This tends to steer the conversation away from shallow arguments of self-interest and toward deeper understandings of systems and structures. I find that students are encouraged to examine the politics and systemic organization of policy decisions when they recognize how such decisions affect them directly, but the meaning they make from these understandings works both ways. Students come to understand how policy initiatives and legislative actions affect their daily lives, but they also come to see how their lived experiences can influence those decisions and actions.

Still, there are many students who are resistant to politicizing their beliefs and experience. Others are simply unsure of how to make the leap from lived experience to academic discourse. Jemott's piece and the *Frontline* documentary work well in this regard too, as they can—in some ways—serve as a model for expanding and developing experience and observation into deeper critical analysis.

To make this unit work, it becomes the educator's responsibility to have at least a basic understanding of the context and circumstances of college cost and the politics of access in education, so they can provide the scaffolding necessary for developing these ideas more fully. I often recommend students historicize their work by consulting primary documents like the Higher Education Act of 1965, which produced the federal student loan reserve as well as suggest that students consider researching the differences between private and federal student loans. For more ambitious students, I have recommended they consult the

Morrill Land Grant Acts and even consider the historical and political origins of community colleges, tracing all the way back to Joliet Junior College.

Historicizing their work puts students' ideas into dialogue with academic texts, but recent political contexts have also generated opportunity for meaningful inquiry. Over the past few years, many of my students have conducted research arguments and analyses of the misadministration of public service loan-forgiveness, the fine print of programs like New York's Excelsior Scholarship, and the differences between subsidized and unsubsidized loan borrowing. What makes these projects work is the fact that they operate on the two aforementioned levels: 1) these students are writing from a place of authority and personal agency but expanding those perspectives to engage political and academic discourse, reading both the "world" and the "word" as Freire would put it, and 2) the information these students gain could inform their personal understandings. Writing a research paper on private vs. federal loans, for example, could save a student thousands of dollars over a lifetime. A project on New York's Excelsior Scholarship might protect a student from garnished wages or any number of other penalties.

The implications of this type of work are most obvious when we consider the politicization of college cost and the complexity of the environment in which our students live and learn. The Occupy Student Debt Campaign, born out of the 2011 Occupy Wall Street Protests, popularized this message while progressive presidential candidates such as Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren and Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders harnessed the energy and excitement of younger and educated voters by promising to absolve student loan debt and provide publicly funded options for higher education. These promises are easy enough to comprehend but imagine what a more nuanced understanding of these issues might bring to a more detail-oriented discussion. What if more students were able to make meaningful connections between their lived experiences and political discourse? Such analysis is crucial, not just for students to perform better in the academic environment, but also as a means of supporting an informed and active democracy.

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RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Teaching Note
Activist 101 Activities for Pre-Service Teachers

by Heather K. Olson Beal, Lauren E. Burrow, Chrissy Cross and Amber Wagnon

IMAGE BY JONATHAN KEMPER

We teach in an educator preparation program in a regional comprehensive university in Texas where the overwhelming majority of our PSTs are white and female. Southern states like Texas are often connected with conservative traditions, which are characterized by a reluctance to challenge authority. Our personal experience as parents of school-aged children, as former teachers, and as teacher educators in a rural area confirm that many teachers do not participate in political activism or organizations; some actively avoid political engagement. Knowing that this is not true of Black women educators, who have a long tradition of organizing to advocate for their own and their students' rights and needs (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; Dixson, 2003), we feel even more strongly the responsibility to support the few Black teachers by building up a workforce that is invested in activism.

Despite professional socialization and norms that may support avoidance of political engagement within the profession as a whole, there has been a sharp increase in the last two years in political organization and activism on the part of educators at the state and national levels, with educators from five states organizing walk-outs in 2018 (i.e., Kentucky, Colorado, Arizona, West Virginia, Oklahoma), a record number of educators running for public office across the country (Campbell, 2018), and educators in other states organizing and participating in marches to call attention to hot-button political issues, such as gun violence, Black Lives Matter, overemphasis on standardized testing, health care, educator retirement benefits, and immigrant rights.

It is our express goal, as teacher educators, to not only educate our PSTs about political engagement but also provide opportunities for them to practice political engagement with our guidance and with the support of their peers. We teach our PSTs that it is their responsibility to advocate for their students. In Texas, there is even a state teacher certification standard that explicitly states that teachers must "serve as an advocate for students and the profession" (Texas PPR Standards). While PSTs may genuinely want to fulfill this responsibility, educator preparation programs often fail to teach them how. And, unfortunately, they may not have models of teachers who undertake this important work from whom to learn and follow. We believe it is critical that educator preparation programs provide opportunities for PSTs to practice becoming informed citizens and engaged teacher leaders capable of effectively fighting back against those who devalue and dehumanize our PK-12 students from marginalized and minoritized populations.

We have experimented with methods for combating this all too common complacency and lack of knowledge about the role politics and activism play in education. We are seeking to embody the three commitments of the teacher activism framework delineated by Picower (2012), whose qualitative study explored how self-identified teacher activists defined and enacted their work. The three commitments are: 1) reconciling the vision, 2) moving toward liberation, and 3) standing up to oppression. In the first step--reconciling the vision--teacher activists described a vision of a world in which social justice is the reality and committed to regular action steps to bring about that socially justice world. For the activists in Picower's study, this was more than a decision to act; it was a fundamental part of their identity. We are working, with our PSTs, to help them see both the reality of the unjust world *and* to see themselves as not just teachers, but as teacher activists. In the second step-- moving toward liberation--teacher activists did more than act; they prepared their students in how to take action for social change. This commitment reflects our efforts to prepare our PSTs to act, as well as to teach *their* future students to do likewise. In the third step--standing up to oppression--teacher activists committed to stand up against oppressive educational practices, whenever and wherever they see them, that exacerbate existing inequalities outside of schools.

The following are several examples of course activities we designed to activate PSTs' natural inclination to support their students' diverse identities and realities by educating them on how to take simple, yet significant action to become teacher activists (before they even reach their future classrooms). The activities, assignments, and experiences are designed for undergraduate and graduate students in both face-to-face and online learning settings and take into consideration national, state, and local opportunities and needs for activism.

Teaching Strategies and Activities

Call Your Rep Assignment

In order to prepare for this assignment, we teach students about the importance of advocating for their students, for their families, and for the profession. We teach them how, where, and when to register to vote. We teach them about different ways to communicate with our elected leaders, including attending school board meetings (a course requirement), city council meetings, and candidate town halls, emailing or texting elected leaders (e.g., using tools like Five Calls, Resistbot, and FaxZero), and calling them on the telephone. Students have to research a particular issue relevant to education and contact an elected leader. To practice, we allow them to email or text the first time; the second time, they have to make a phone call and speak directly to the person who answers the phone. Afterwards, they reflect on how the experience went and how it made them feel, as well as share the response (if any) of the elected leader or spokesperson. It is quite common for them to say they were extremely nervous, sometimes even nauseated, to make the call, as it is something they have never done before. Many (though not all) say that they will continue to contact their elected leaders about issues that matter to them in the future and will encourage their coworkers to do likewise.

Developing a Rubric to Evaluate Political Candidates

PSTs need to learn how to develop effective evaluation instruments, including rubrics. In an ordinary assessment and evaluation course, they would develop a rubric to evaluate a fake assignment or, possibly, an assignment they saw used in a local school. In our course, our students designed a rubric that they would use to evaluate aspiring

US Senators and Congresspeople from Texas and practiced using it at a town hall attended by 8 state-level candidates. This assignment had two primary objectives: (a) to help our students--future teachers--develop the skills necessary to evaluate the potential for political candidates to promote equity and to address the systemic inequalities that target their future students from minoritized populations, and (b) to help our students develop skills in creating performance-based evaluations (which, if used properly, have the potential to be much better assessments than the standardized tests which are known to be particularly poor measurements of minoritized students' academic growth). This process enabled them to learn more about the candidates' positions on important issues, to learn more about voting, and to have an authentic experience developing a performance assessment tool.

Investigating Mass Incarceration and its Impact on PK-12 Education

Many of our PSTs come from racially homogenous rural and suburban communities and school environments; they have little personal experience with and are not familiar with the topic of mass incarceration. As professors, we want our PSTs to be able to connect the impact of mass incarceration on society and specifically children and their education experiences. For this assignment, students are assigned to watch *13th*, a Netflix documentary about mass incarceration directed by Ava DuVernay. After watching, students synthesize what they learned from the movie by creating an infographic about the movie that includes three visual components, five major points/facts/events of their choice, and an overarching theme they identified from the movie. Students present the infographic to the class, after which they--in small groups--complete a large KWL (Know-Want to Know-Learn) chart about mass incarceration and education. The discussion guides them in asking critical questions about this topic and how it will impact their future students. After identifying their questions, they research the answers on mobile devices and share their findings with the class. To conclude, students identify one action step they can take as future teachers to help disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline and mass incarceration.

Conclusion

In addition to these activities, we try to embed opportunities for them to take action throughout our courses. Students learn how to follow a proposed education law as it makes its way through the legislative process; they attend local demonstrations in support of marginalized identity groups (i.e., by attending the first-ever Pride rally in the oldest white town in Texas); they join a professional organization to expand knowledge base and networks for informed advocacy; and they begin to create and sustain a community of social media educators from whom to learn and follow.

In our experience, these assignments gently push the students to take responsibility for cultural problems as a tiny step in helping them realize that they can and, indeed, *must* be agents of social justice and education reform in their classrooms. We hope that these ideas will prompt readers to either support or enact changes in their current teacher education courses by integrating and/or improving on these examples to help develop PSTs into informed, participatory activists on the national, state, and local levels who seek to promote and ensure democratic spaces in and out of the classrooms.

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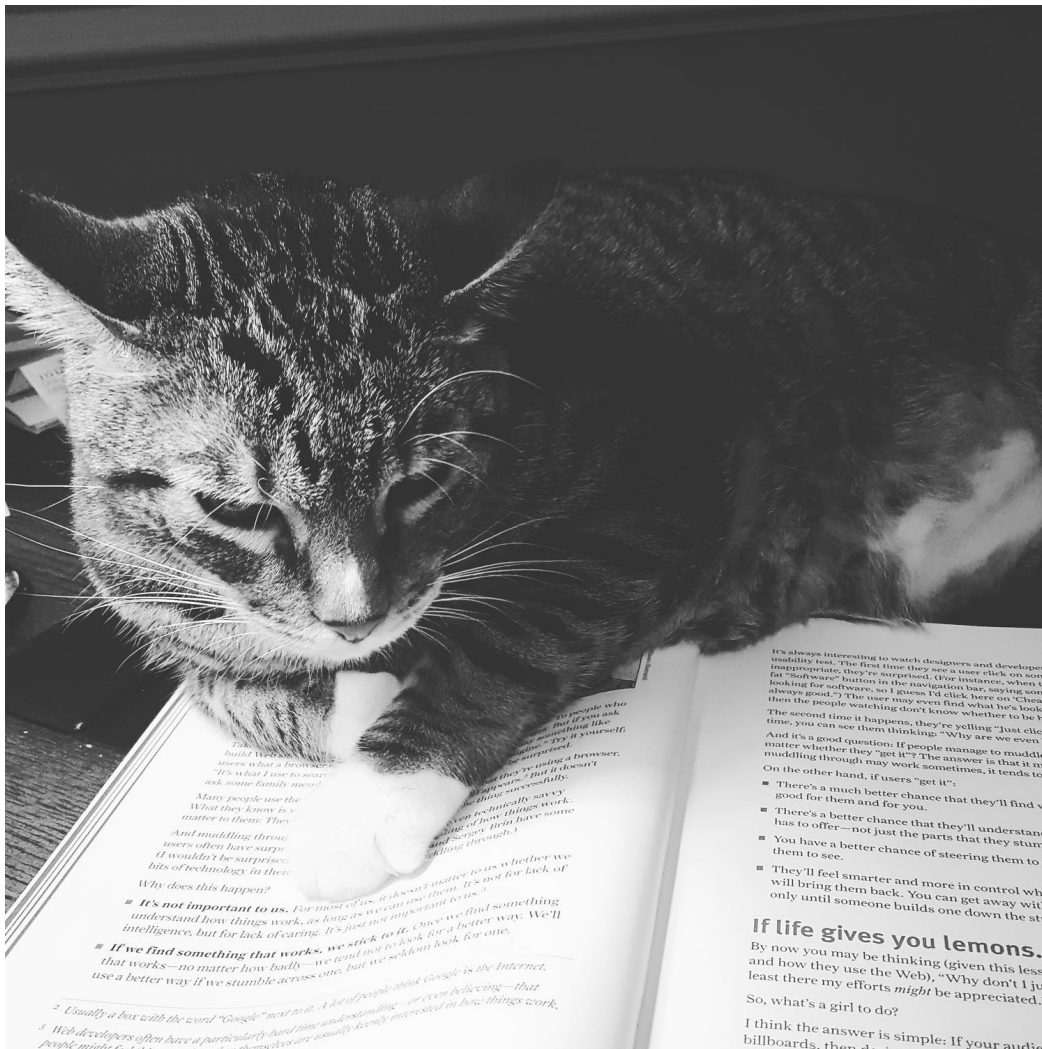
Poetry
not yet

by Veronica Hotton

IMAGE BY HEATHER MCKEEN

not yet

I have not graded your paper yet
        not yet

piles grow
they get moved around the room
moved to different rooms
carried in backpacks or bags
dragged in and out of cars
        moved to folder
                        to binder
                                to desk
                                        to table
                                                to lap, then back to folder

I have not graded your paper yet
because it is time to create the next assignment, yes, already time
I have not graded your paper yet
because that assignment was forgotten, yes, forgotten

the piles need to be alphabetized first ✔
the late papers need to be rounded up ✔
the piles need to be complete   ✔
the papers need to be re/stapled   ✔✔

were we like this before or after the grading rut?
        I am sad
they overcharge you
        they underpay us
        or a messy combination
more facts to internalize

because I am tired
of grading
        you
I have not graded those papers yet

I wish I had shiny-star-stickers ★
    for you
would the piles dwindle,
if I could gift you something
for your quality and quantity?
could that help me dive into those piles?

I have not graded your paper yet
because I would rather have you read it, today

to me, to us, so we all hear it, together
we can listen to what works, what
needs fixin', and what can be
       re/moved
       re/added
we can celebrate
       you

I have not graded your paper yet
because my cats are sitting on the piles
       the folder
         the binder
           the table, the desk, my lap
feline cheek drool has marked your paper
their stapling claws and fangs have punctured your paper
at least they were not recently in the little box
       at least the lease only allows cats

I have not graded those papers yet
because they are at the bottom of
another pile I have not graded
       no
not yet

RADICAL TEACHER

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Poetry
Say Their Names

by Joy Martin

IMAGE BY CLAY BANKS, WASHINGTON DC

Say Their Names

i 26 February 2012: Trayvon Martin, 17

Trayvon Martin
Returning to his Sanford, Florida, neighborhood
Attempted to eat Skittles and talk on his phone
Youth in full bloom until
Vigilante stalked him
On suspicion, no crime known—
Not concerned with proof of action or guilt.

Matters taken into wrongful hands
Armed in pursuit of this Black teen, the man
Reached for his gun,
Took aim, took life, took
Innocence
No standing-ground defense should he claim.

ii 17 July 2014: Eric Garner, 43

Eric Garner
Rose in death for us to chant his name
In Staten Island, New York, and the world,
Choked on suspicion of selling cigarettes.

Gasping for breath
After wrestled to the ground by
Race-blinded officer who was
Never prosecuted even though
Eleven times Eric begged, *I Can't Breathe.*
Riots did not erase the stain.

iii 9 August 2014: Michael Brown, 18

Michael Brown
In Ferguson, Missouri, off to college next week,
Carefree, pushing boundaries, walked down middle of street
Held no gun, posed no threat, nevertheless,
According to autopsy, was shot six times when
Excessive force used (his arms reportedly in air)
Left him dead, 4 hours lying uncovered in August heat.

Being brown was his major crime
Race crossing against the riptide
Of injustice that pulls too many under
Without hope that things will change so
No one need fear an unjust death.

iv 22 November 2014: Tamir Rice, 12

Tamir Rice**,** of Cleveland, Ohio,
All of 12 years old
Mowed down after calm 9-1-1-caller had said situation
Involved probably a juvenile pointing a fake gun.
Robbed of youth, he was

Robbed of life
Instead of living out his dreams.
Condemned to death without a trial
Erasing justice from the deadly scene.

v 4 April 2015: Walter Scott, 50

Walter Scott, driving
Alone in North Charleston, South Carolina,
Lost his life due to a defective center stop lamp.
The officer briefly scuffled with him; why? unknown.
Evidentially, he posed no threat.
Running away, he was

Shot in the back five times
Caught by bullets
Opened up to bleed, left to die
To suffer this predictable loss
To surrender hope as it bled away.

vi 5 July 2016: Alton Sterling, 37

Alton Sterling, accused of causing trouble,
Lost his life in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, when
Two officers responded to a call made from
Outside a convenience store. False accuser
Not known.

Selling homemade CDs while Black
Turned deadly under officer fire.
Each person of color taught this lesson,
Referred to euphemistically as justice,
Leaves the world to shout against
Injustice and chant:
N*o Justice! No Peace!*
God have mercy on our nation's soul.

vii 6 July 2016: Philando Castile, 32

Philando Castile, while
Having a date with his girlfriend
In Saint Paul, Minnesota,
Lost his life at
A routine traffic check: told to show license
No lip offered yet he was shot
Doing as the officer requested,
Outraging viewers of the viral video

Caught on girlfriend's camera.
As he calmly
Stated merely to inform
That he had a licensed gun, he
Inevitably
Lost his life for trying to do everything right,
Eager to avoid any misunderstanding.

viii18 March 2018: Stephon Clark, 22

Stephon Clark, shot at twenty times,
Took eight bullets, six in the back, murdered after
Entering his grandmother's backyard.
Police hit him in his leg with their first shots.
He fell face-down on Sacramento, California, soil.
Officers then fired fifteen additional rounds—
Nearly five minutes passed without giving care.

Coldly, to reduce assumed risk, he was sacrificed.
Life of this father of two gunned down, though
Armed only with a cell phone.
Reportedly he had broken some car windows, thus
Killed by policemen who failed to self-identify.

ix 13 March 2020: Breonna Taylor, 26

Breonna Taylor was startled out of slumber while
Resting in her bed. Unknown intruders left this
Emergency medical technician eight-times-shot-dead.
Only 26 years old
Never to wake again
Never to hold a lover or child
As a barrage of twenty bullets flew.

The deadly shooter lost his badge—not for murder tried.
Administrative leave given to the other two.
Young lady, innocent of any crime, slaughtered in
Louisville, Kentucky, when these plainclothes
Officers used battering ram, broke door down,
Raided her once-safe home.

x 25 May 2020: George Floyd, 46

George Floyd's neck compressed
Eight minutes forty-six seconds
Out of breath
Right before their eyes. Now ours.
Ghastly act, bystanders pleaded as
Everyone heard him gasp, *I Can't Breathe.*

Fatal racism
Left him lying in Minneapolis, Minnesota,
One breath short of life.
Yet another person suffocated
Dead, choked at neck, officer's knee the noose.

xi 18 June 2020: Andres Guardado Pineda, 18

Andres Guardado Pineda got in a gun's way
Never to see his 19th birthday. Shot
Dead in an alleyway
Riveted with bullets, five times in the back.
Evidence from his system—no drugs, no alcohol.
Surveillance footage destroyed, they say.

Gainfully employed as security in
Unincorporated section of Gardena, California,
At an auto-body shop where,
Reportedly when confronted, he ran
Determined to live for another day
And was gunned down by pursuing deputy.
Dead at the scene rendered.
On the street, a ghost gun allegedly found nearby.

Purportedly, deputies sought to sport inked-tattoo
Insignias linked to a violent clique
Nicknamed, as whistleblower revealed,
Executioners—
Deputies accused of "chasing ink" to celebrate
At "998" parties over drinks.

xii 31 August 2020: Dijon Kizzee, 29

Dejon Kizzee**,** chased for alleged bike-code violation,
Inconceivably shot 20 times in the back while running.
Justification impossible...gun, never pointed, dropped.
One known fact, he was riding while Black
Never again to bike home.

Killed in the streets of Los Angeles, California,
In front of a neighborhood of witnesses.
Zero rationale for his murder demands
Zero tolerance of such brutality.
Enough euphemisms. Enough carnage. Enough injustice.
Enough.

In memory of these and the many other stolen Black lives

RADICAL TEACHER

Review

The New Student Activists: The Rise of Neoactivism on College Campuses

by Sarah Chinn
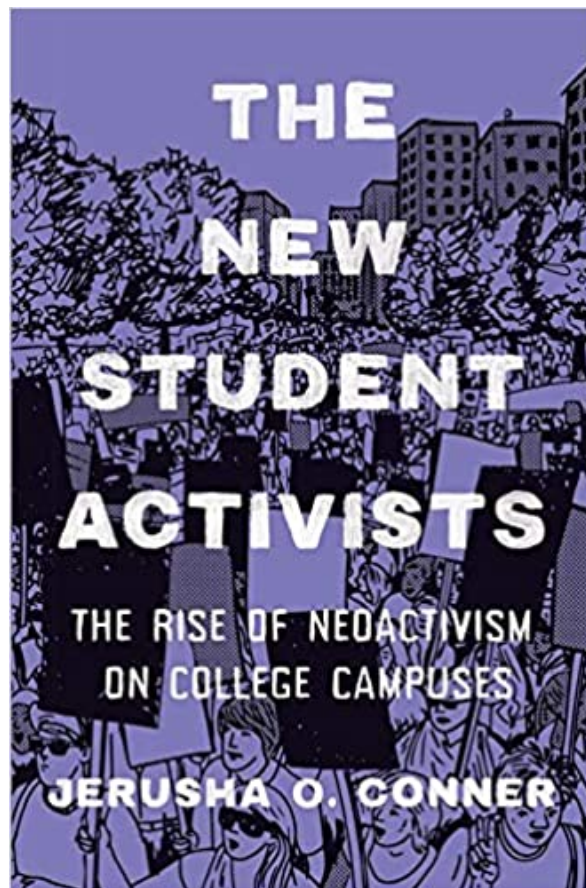
THE NEW STUDENT ACTIVISTS: THE RISE OF NEOACTIVISM ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES BY JERUSHA O. CONNER

Review of *The New Student Activists: The Rise of Neoactivism on College Campuses.* By Jerusha O. Conner. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020.

Many essays in this issue on new student movements have asked and/or described what is new about these movements. Is it the political struggles they focus on? Their style of activism? How they address intersecting questions of race, gender, class, sexuality, etc? Jerusha O. Conner argues that what she calls "neoactivism" is a combination of all these factors, forged in the crucible of the neoliberal university.

Each era creates the student activists to fit the times, and the twenty-first century is no exception. Conner's main query is what makes *these* activists different – how do they adapt to their own historical moment? In response to the bloodlessness of the neoliberal managerial bent of higher education, which "conceives of prospective students as consumers and current students as commodities that are manufactured for the workplace by the university" (21) students have turned their activism both outwards towards structural inequities and inwards towards techniques of self-care. In their critiques of institutions of higher education, "they call out the neoliberal university's enmeshment of histories of colonialism and racism, and they call on it to understand the education it provides as a public good" (22). At the same time, they focus on the work of activism itself -- the physical and psychic energy it takes, as well as the opportunities it provides for challenging themselves and each other towards more sophisticated political analysis. This is quite different from the priorities of earlier movements, which were far more invested in discourses of self-sacrifice and urgency, often of necessity. (ACT-UP's fever-pitch activism, after all, was explicitly linked to questions of immediate survival).

I would argue, too, that these neo-activists see themselves as part of and responding to history, not just current events. For example, the movements for educational institutions to distance themselves from colonialist and racist heritage is connected to present-day concerns around the representation of BIPOC in student bodies and on faculty, and the working conditions of mostly poor, often Black and brown staff, from secretaries to custodians. And the involvement of young people in the Black Lives Matter movement has been inspiring. But they are just as much invested in symbolism from the past: the naming and renaming of buildings, for example, or, more recently, removal of statues celebrating veterans of the Confederacy. While these issues aren't the focus of Conner's work, they do connect strongly with the arguments she is making both explicitly and implicitly.

Conner's book is based on several years of research, surveying almost 250 students at a variety of institutions, and interviewing forty. She found respondents on rural, urban, and suburban campuses, public and private, across class, race, gender, and sexuality. All the colleges and universities she surveyed were residential, not commuter, campuses, which presupposes a certain level of socioeconomic privilege among most of the respondents – the poorest students are most often at local community and four-year colleges that they commute to from home. This might skew her results somewhat – I'd imagine that the poor and working-class students who enroll in commuter colleges have their own set of political commitments and involvements that could overlap with but could also be quite separate from those of more affluent students, something that Conner's data wouldn't delve into.

At the same time, Conner does manage to get a fairly thorough view of how student activists view themselves and their work. Most striking to me is her finding that these neoactivists have fully absorbed the lessons of intersectionality: only about 10% of her respondents focused on a single political issue, while the vast majority might lean in one direction or another but mostly supported and worked within a range of issues. White students expressed a serious commitment to facing their racial privilege and operated within an understanding of the mechanisms of homophobia and misogyny. For example, many students she interviewed were involved in climate activism. But it was not the environmentalism of traditional Sierra Club members – they saw their political work as justice-oriented, bringing concerns about environmental racism, for example, or the disproportionate effects of climate change on the global South and the very poor.

Also striking was these young activists' emphasis on self- and collective care. While previous generations of student activists have gestured towards the danger of burnout, the assumption was that commitment to a cause meant going all in until you flamed out. Neoactivists, in Conner's findings, recognize the toll that fighting against entrenched systems of power can take and engage in activities that restore and replenish them.

One unusual element of the book was her exploration of how the families and parents of activists dealt with their political work. For young people, the emotional and financial support of parents, especially for students living on campus, is crucial to their ability to do their activism. While few families actively opposed what their children were doing, few actively supported them either. Their attitudes were mostly reluctantly supportive, if that, not least because their children often turned their critiques of social inequality on the family itself. This was especially true for LGBT and non-binary students, who most directly challenged their parents' and families' ways of seeing the world, although parents also worried for their children's safety, particularly for students who were undocumented and took real risks in their activism.

The New Student Activists is a comparatively comprehensive view of twenty-first century political college movements. The structure of the book is not overly creative: mostly it reads like the sociology dissertation it probably started its life as: Conner states the area of investigation, provides the findings, summarizes them, and then comes to a short conclusion and/or offers recommendations. I would have liked Conner to explore the issues more deeply, engage with and even challenge the worldviews of her subjects. There can be a thin line, for example, between self-care and self-indulgence, and occasionally the most diligent intersectional analyses can sound self-congratulatory on the

one hand, or rote on the other. While I enjoyed Conner's clearly appreciative take on contemporary youth activism, she could have taken a slightly more questioning stance – to what extent, for example, do current neoactivists connect with pre-existing political movements for change? How do they borrow from, adapt, and build coalitions with more established organizations, if they do so? And what are their visions for their own futures as activists?

Certainly, Conner's book is a great resource for understanding how college students today see themselves in relation to political activism. It's short, though, on judgment as to how effective neoactivism is compared to its predecessors. Certainly, effectiveness is a difficult thing to measure: how much did the movement against the war in Vietnam end the conflict? Or the anti-apartheid movement change the situation in South Africa? What counts as a "win"? Moreover, it's early days yet for neoactivism. But Conner clearly has faith in this next generation of activists, and I'm inclined to agree with her.
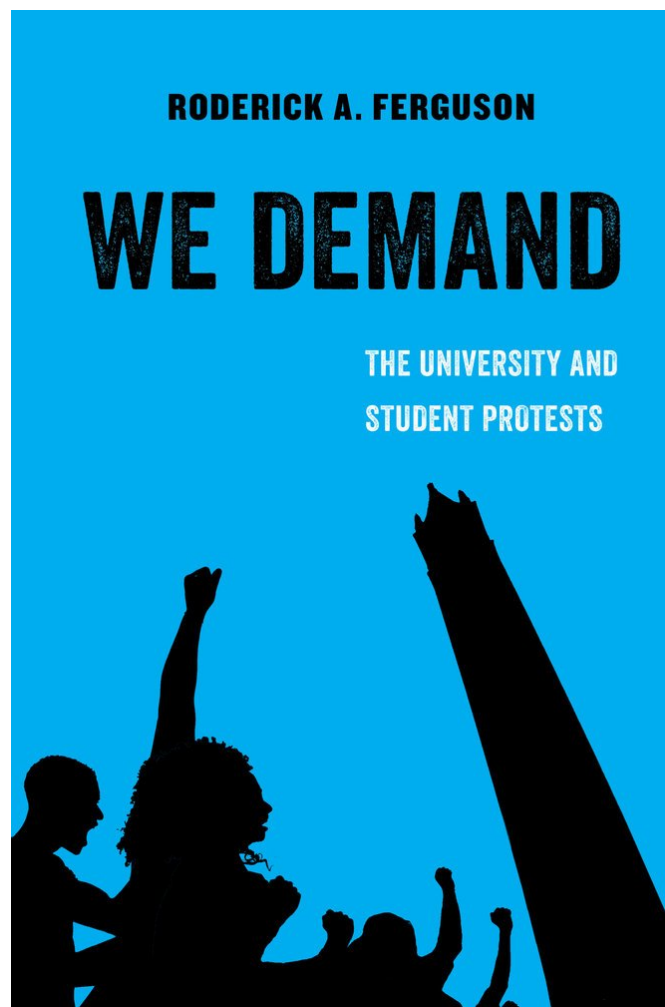
RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Review
We Demand: The University and Student Protests

by Paula Austin

WE DEMAND: THE UNIVERSITY AND STUDENT PROTESTS BY RODERICK A. FERGUSON

Review of *We Demand: The University and Student Protests* by Roderick A. Ferguson (University of California Press, 2017).

Protests erupted across the world in the summer of 2020. They started with a call to action and yet another call for police accountability in the wake of police officer Derek Chauvin's gruesome murder of George Floyd on a Minneapolis street. Interracial, intergenerational masses showed up and showed out in many city and town centers over several days, eventually also demanding a reallocation of resources from police budgets to other city services. Similarly, faculty, staff, and students called attention to the gap between university statements in support of diversity, equity and inclusion, and the manifestations and realities of DEI on campus. Some pointed directly to the ways in which campus police and university relationships with adjacent municipal police departments helped to create and/or maintained hostile environments for Black and brown students, faculty, and staff on college campuses. Sometime in early June, #BlackintheIvory, a hashtag created by two Black women (one faculty, one student), began trending, resulting in thousands of tweets from Black faculty and graduate students sharing experiences of anti-Black micro and macroaggressions in their departments, in classrooms, at their fellowships, etc. Some white faculty, staff, and students amplified these voices and called on other white university faculty and staff to take note, educate themselves, and begin acting against structures of oppression in the university. Tweets, directly and indirectly called out universities' commitments, in rhetoric only, to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Meanwhile, many university presidents worked furiously to make statements that expressed solidarity with protesters and commitments to diversity, while also centering the university's immediate and future financial long term realities as a result of the Covid-19 global health crisis that had shut it down for much of the spring 20 semester.

Roderick Ferguson's *We Demand* gives us a context for this activism. It begins in the wake of earlier protests that erupted nationally in 2015 after the non-indictments of police officers in the deaths of Tamir Rice and Sandra Bland. Then like now, protesters took not only to the streets, but also to their campuses, from the University of Missouri to Yale University. *We Demand* places these "renewed" campus actions in a historical context of student activism and the neoliberal reaction that discredited it, coopted it, and continues to seek to control it (p.3). Ferguson's 2012 *The Reorder of Things: The University and Its Pedagogies of Minority Difference* also examined the university's use of its administrative power to mitigate, through absorption, student protest. In this shorter and more accessible publication, Ferguson takes us through some of *Reorders*' same history, minus the archival sources, providing an instructive to a contemporary audience of students, faculty, and staff for both campus and community campaigns for justice. As in *The Reorder of Things*, Ferguson argues that instead of seeing protests as "disruptions to the status quo" or worse, as "collective tantrums" these insurgencies are part of a long history of radicalism, "redistributive efforts and progressive attempts" for "social transformation (p. 12)"

Organized into four chapters, Ferguson begins with the violent state attacks on anti-war and civil rights demonstrations at Kent State and Jackson State Universities respectively. Additionally, coast to coast, students organized calling for a transformation to the intellectual climate of the academy, with demands that "signaled an interest in the reorganization of institutional life *and* the reorganization of knowledge." The list of demands at schools like San Francisco State College, UC San Diego, Howard University, and City College of New York included Ethnic and Black Studies departments, more inclusive curricula, open admissions, community accountability, and increased hiring of faculty of color (p.17). In response to this wave of campus activism, President Richard Nixon's administration produced *The Report of the President's Commission on Campus Unrest* which blamed students for the violence and called them "potential criminals" (p. 18). Nixon would later mobilize civil rights discourse in the service of law and order. Universities also responded by coopting the language of "diversity" in order to discredit students as "intolerant" and as "threats to … liberal democracy" (p.22). Universities thus emerged as "defenders" of diversity and tolerance and in doing so expanded "administrative procedures, offices" and other apparatuses including campus police departments, creating both social control mechanisms and "diversity bureaucracies" (p. 27). Ferguson provides readers with a useful navigational table of contents that outlines each chapter and a glossary of terms inclusive of "capitalism," "neoliberalism," and "diversity," making it clear that this last term was (and continues to be) "in tension with student activism and demands for racial, gender, sexual, and class justice." (p.116).

Chapter two spotlights the Powell Memorandum, written by Louis Powell, who would later become a Supreme Court justice. Powell's memo further weakened the possibilities for student activism and student calls for changes in campus climate, culture, policies and practices to "ensure minority personhood and environmental protections" (p.36). Just as Nixon's *Report* positioned student protests as a danger to American democracy, the Powell Memo argued that students' "progressive critiques" were actually "demands for social chaos" that "threatened" both "free enterprise" *and* political systems (p.37). The Powell Memorandum along with the *Bakke* decision in California, laid the groundwork for the concept of corporate personhood (and the *Citizen's United* decision). It expanded the possibilities for university-corporate partnerships, resulting in a growth in administrative positions and salaries.

Ferguson's third chapter takes us backwards to situate student activism in a history of radicalism. He introduces Jacques Ranciere's power and significance of *demos*, "the uncounted," those "excluded from the national ideal of the unified citizenry," but through whom we get an accurate accounting of societies' inequalities, "and the arbitrary powers of … rulers" (p.55). Chapter three reminds us of what identity politics and intersectionality meant during the Rights Revolutions and Black Power eras: "relational politics,… [and] a way of understanding the conditions and possibilities of [coalitional] revolutionary practice" (p. 58). Here he

includes the 25-day occupation of San Francisco's Department of Health, Education and Welfare by disability rights activists, the leaders of which were also Black Party Panther members. The BPP not only fed protesters during the occupation, but provided valuable media coverage in their newspaper. Ferguson equates community campaigns with the campus campaigns covered earlier. Both were sites of "relating across social differences"; coalitional politics, and "broadening [of] political and imaginative horizons" (p.60).

In chapter four, Ferguson brings into relief the role of neoliberalism and its economic, ideological, and political project in stopping student attempts to transform the university. Ferguson moves forward in time to look at University of Missouri, Yale, and Syracuse University protests against academic "regimes of alienation" (p.77). Not unlike the activism of the late twentieth century, students also cited structural issues, but here they included demands that considered both physical and mental health (p.79). In the last section Ferguson concludes with a reminder of his intended audience: students on campuses, "who believe that we can or should do better than the world that we've inherited" (p.1). He provides some guiding principles listed as "soft rules." These include the importance of historical and institutional contextualization, of "push[ing] against the limits [of the university]," of relational politics, of the life of the mind, saying "human recovery requires deep and committed thinking," of staying wary of "the bureaucratization of difference" and the university's ability to coopt transformational politics, and finally, to see ourselves as part of a long radical tradition of student organizing (p. 86 - 87).

The strengths of *We Demand* lie in Ferguson's ability to position contemporary student movements in a radical past and to draw out the structural responses. Maybe most important, though, is the way that *We Demand* highlights campus activist strategies, tactics, and ideologies that can inform us in our current moment. While the university responded by "widening [its] powers against the kinds of social transformations that minority visibility demanded" and mobilized and coopted diversity in order to "bolster" institutional inequities rather than "abolish them" (p. 62), student activism of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s revealed a belief that "knowledge could be reorganized and institutions could be changed for the good of minoritized communities" (p. 63). *We Demand* provides us with a more complex framework from which to examine our current and on-going protests. If readers are interested in looking more deeply into origins, ideologies, strategies and tactics, and coalition building, consider pairing *We Demand* with Martha Biondi's *Black Revolution on Campus* (UC Press, 2014) and Amaka Okechukwu's *To Fulfill These Rights: Political Struggle Over Affirmative Action and Open Admissions* (Columbia University Press, 2019).

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Contributors' Notes
New Student Activism

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"EDUCATION FOR LIBERATION" BY MELANIE CERVANTES VIA JUST SEEDS

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