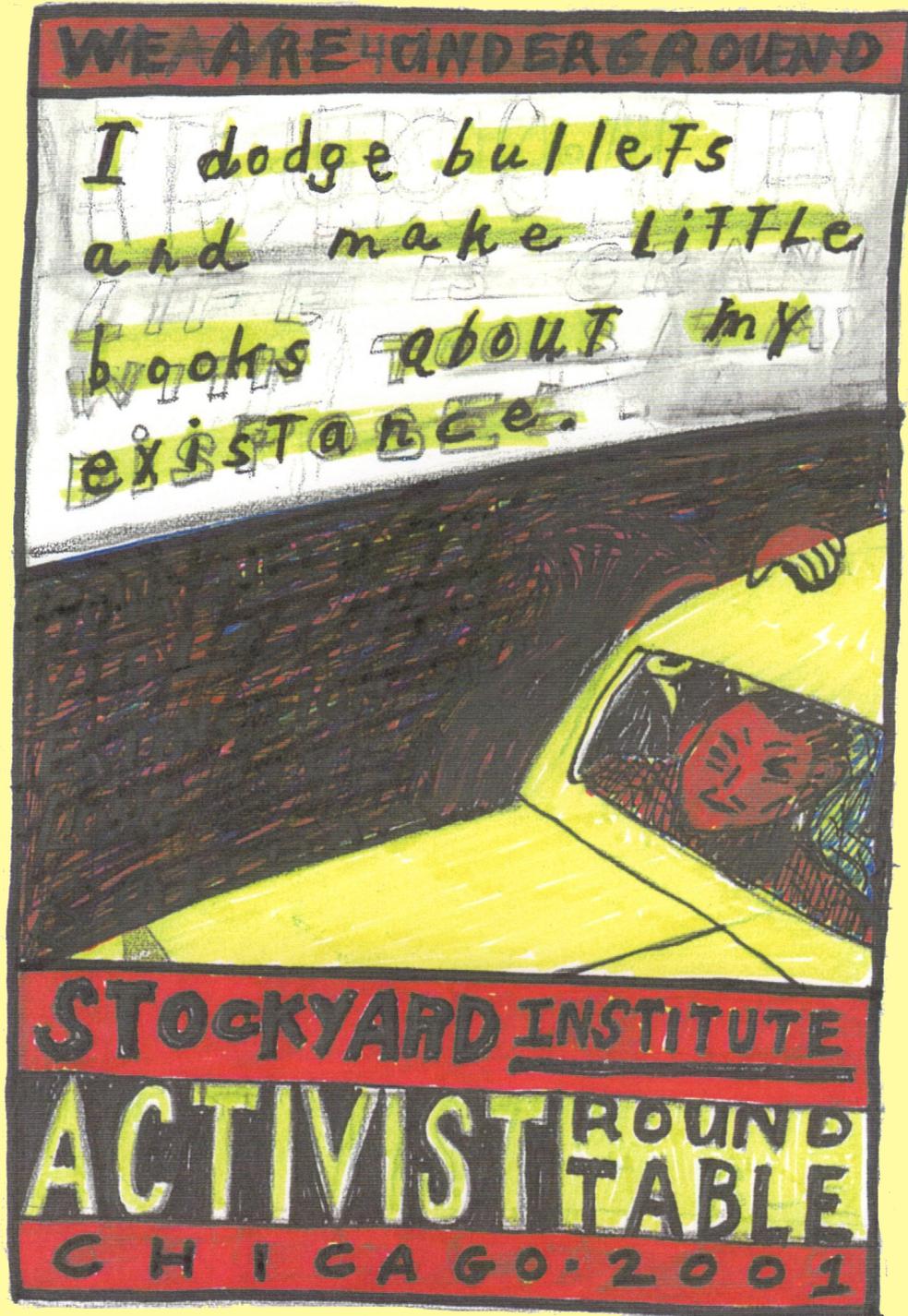


# RADICAL TEACHER

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



## TOWARD PUBLIC PEDAGOGIES

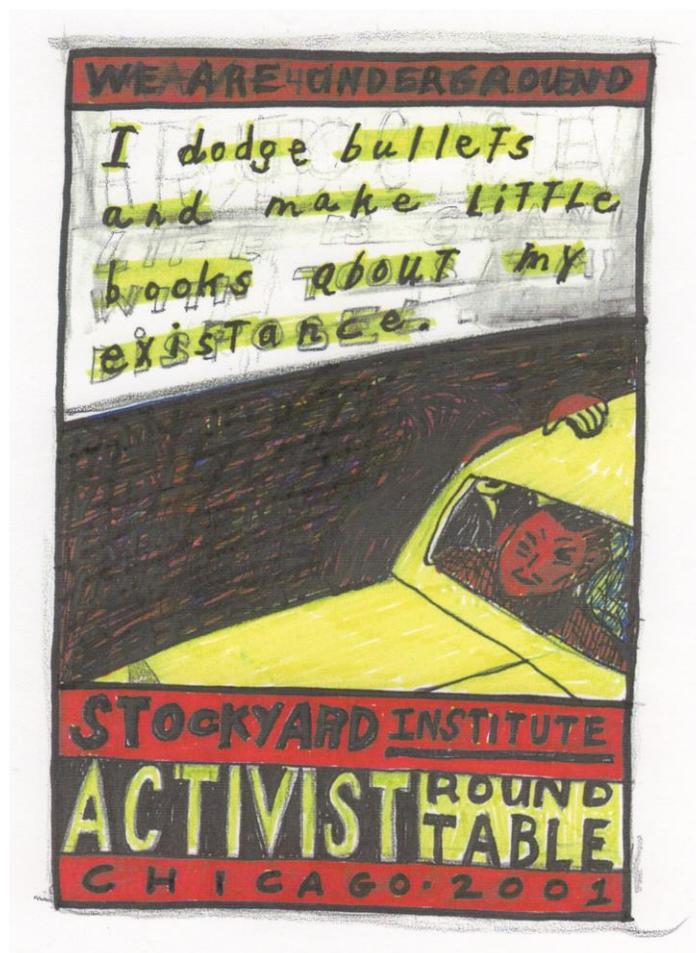
COVER IMAGE: WE ARE UNDERGROUND - I DODGE BULLETS AND MAKE LITTLE BOOKS ABOUT MY EXISTENCE, STOCKYARD INSTITUTE ROUNDTABLE (2011). DRAWING BY JIM DUGNAN

# RADICAL TEACHER

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## Introduction: Toward Public Pedagogies: Teaching Outside Traditional Classrooms

by Linda Dittmar and Pamela Annas



"WE ARE UNDERGROUND - I DODGE BULLETS AND MAKE LITTLE BOOKS ABOUT MY EXISTENCE", STOCKYARD INSTITUTE ROUNDTABLE (2011), DRAWING BY JIM DUIGNAN

In drafting our original Call for Papers, we did not think of this cluster in terms of “Public Pedagogy.” We simply wanted to assemble essays about a range of radical teaching practices that take place outside the traditional classroom and the giant MOOCs that are replacing it. Such discussions have appeared in *Radical Teacher* in the past, though they were rare and appeared piecemeal. (Exceptions are *RT*’s art activism (#89), prison (#88), and food (#98) clusters.) What drew us to this teaching was our sense that interesting work is in fact occurring informally, outside the “business as usual” of most education, and that it would be useful to think of this work across contexts and subject matter.

The result is suggestive, though hardly comprehensive or exhaustive. Certain interesting proposals—about teaching mathematics, dance, and creative writing workshops in union halls—never came to fruition. Others never surfaced, notably a range of work underway with veterans or articles about climate and the environment. Teaching in refugee camps, radical home schooling, teaching in protest sites and movements such as Occupy and the Dakota Pipeline protest, alternative health education, and improv political comedy workshops were also on our mind but did not arrive in the mail.

The articles we do present in this issue provide a provocative beginning for thinking about public pedagogies. Their discussions—Margaret Gulette on a community based high school in Nicaragua; Nan Bauer-Maglin on creative writing mentoring in NYC; Travis Boyce on crowd learning on sports and race through social media; Jyl Lynn Felman on feminist pedagogy for seniors; Stevie Ruiz and students on a collaborative mind mapping project in environmental justice; and Donna Nevel on community teaching about Israel/Palestine and the Nakba—point to fresh ways of thinking about renegade pedagogies. Two poems by Jill McDonough provide vivid connections to teaching in prisons and in summer camps for adolescents. The focus throughout this issue on extra-institutional spaces and discourses implies a critique of the market logic of neo-liberal education and a concern with social justice that is to varying degrees activist and radical in its intent.

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education.***

Rooted in critical pedagogy, cultural studies, and feminist and anti-racist practices, it is a teaching and learning “against the grain” that critiques and resists the reproduction of inequalities in light of the ongoing privatization and de-politicization of mainstream education. It is a communal, coalition-building pedagogy that serves excluded populations by positing a resistant, decentered,

and disruptive engagement with knowledge and culture. Ranging between ameliorative and transgressive, this pedagogy seeks to disrupt and transform the dominant configuration of knowledge and understanding by positing dissent as a context for a critical, empowering education. Challenging the strictures of power, it interrupts the normative enforcement of injustice and creates opportunities for alternative perspectives and voices to engage in social transformation.

It should be noted that attractive and even utopian though it may sound, the concept of *public pedagogy* is vague and open to many applications, both regarding what “public” means and what “pedagogy” is appropriate for it. Gert Biesta (2012), building on Hannah Arendt’s definition of freedom as action, argues that rather than seeing public pedagogy as a pedagogy for the public or of the public, public education should “work at the intersection of education and politics... [T]he public pedagogue is neither an instructor nor a facilitator but rather someone who *interrupts*.” Biesta<sup>1</sup> offers as illustration the staging of artistic interventions in public spaces. Sandlin, O’Malley and Burdick (2011) conclude their carefully researched review of the field by noting that the usefulness of the term *public pedagogy* has been compromised by the mythologizing and totalizing claims attached to it.<sup>2</sup> They stress the need for careful and nuanced research in order to refine our understanding of that concept, listing many “shoulds” that researchers need to undertake.

Among others, Sandlin et al.’s “shoulds” include the need for careful study of the relation between theory and practice (“empiricism”) regarding how educational sites assigned to this rubric of “public education” actually work. Another nagging question their review lets drop concerns the extent to which education is communally constructed or top-down. Is it education for the people, by the people, or with the people? Extending this question to the present *RT* cluster of articles we also note the looseness of the term *radical* in this context, encompassing the differing goals of education for individual empowerment and education to enable collective action for social change.

Most immediately, these articles invite us to think about our own teaching, inside as well as outside of conventional institutions, with an eye for the renegade possibilities that can in fact occur in any place where teaching and learning aim to embody transformative praxes.

The essays collected here were not written with the term *public pedagogy* in mind, let alone any top-heavy theoretical thinking that aims to distill a field of pedagogy from the assumptions and practices that happen to have joined under this umbrella. Rather, they point us “toward” thinking about public pedagogy and about a teaching that exposes the power and politics at work within culture. Is this activism in itself? Will it lead to activism? Most immediately, these articles invite us to think about our own teaching, inside as well as outside of conventional institutions, with an eye for the renegade possibilities that can in fact occur in any place where teaching and learning aim to embody transformative praxes.

## Notes

1. Gert Biesta, "Becoming Public: Public Pedagogy, Citizenship, and the Public Sphere," *Social and Cultural Geography*, 13:7, 683-697.

2. Jennifer A. Sandlin, Michael P. O'Malley, Jake Burdick, "Mapping the Complexity of Public Pedagogy Scholarship: 1894-2010." *Review of Educational Research*, September 2011, Vol.81, No.3, 338-375.



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## In My Nicaraguan High School: Giving Excluded Women and Men a Second Chance

by Margaret Morganroth Gullette



A WOMAN WHO IMAGINES GETTING HER DIPLOMA AND THEN A LAW DEGREE, WITH HER "DREAM" WRITTEN ON THE SLATE, 2004. NOTE BROKEN CHAIR IN THE HIGH SCHOOL PREMISES THAT WE BORROWED ON SATURDAYS UNTIL 2017. PHOTO BY FRANK ZOLLERS.

In 1989, with Reagan's Contra war still raging in northern Nicaragua, my husband and I went to a small, impoverished fishing village surrounded by 250 square miles of subsistence farms and revolutionary cooperatives on the Pacific Ocean in the remote southwest of the country. San Juan del Sur had just become the sister city of Newton, Massachusetts. In the three months we lived there, I started on the long journey that leads from capitalist alienation and bourgeois individualism through the various forms of tourism, to the discovery of the collective and to whole-hearted identification with vulnerable others. The contrast between my two states, geopolitical and psychic—my formerly passive, self-absorbed North American state of mind, and my new Nicaraguan-grown selfhood—could not have been more extreme than it felt then. We stayed that first time for three months—sent as delegates of Newton's Sister City Project, to see if we could figure out how best to help the people—and that stay changed our lives.<sup>1</sup>

Transformations occur to those on the ground, not to those looking on, as David Runciman says (in the *London Review of Books*) about the people who actually Occupied Wall Street, or Boston, or *something*, versus those who watched it from home on their phones. My self-transformation came about through education. Mine came through *theirs* and is still going on with no end in sight.

## How We Began

Among my San Juan acquaintances in the 1990s was a public-health nurse, Rosa Elena Bello, who was running a clinic for poor women and children with a Belgian doctor, Patricia Claey's, who raised the money for it in Europe. First thing I did was run a small fund-raiser in Newton for their *brigadistas de salud* (the basically-trained public health reps who lived in the villages) so they could each have a medicine chest with bandages and antiseptic, etc., and then I raised money for a cow-buying program to provide milk for the dozens of malnourished babies the clinic had been seeing. After those two completed attempts, Rosa Elena came to me again, with a determined look and a giant problem. She and Dr. Patricia had expected that after the clinic's first five years of dedication to providing health for pregnant women and their children, all the nasty statistics (high rates of infant and maternal mortality and morbidity, kwashiorkor) would have abated. They hadn't. But they had figured out why. The women were illiterate. Words on posters baffled them. They couldn't follow medical instructions. They couldn't tally their change in the market to see if they were being cheated. They lived in a world that could not make sense to them. They had missed out on education. When they were young, their villages did not have schools, or they, being girls, could not attend; and no elementary school would accept them now. What the region most needed was a literacy program for women.

Rosa Elena, solemn, laconic, and impressively earnest, wanted me to translate their proposal into English and look for funding in the States. I had never written a proposal for anything but a crossover nonfiction book of my own, on the middle years of life in the United States. I didn't have the

slightest idea whether there were philanthropic resources in the States for Third-World basic education for adult women. But their projected program made sense to me, as the daughter of a first-grade teacher and a former college teacher myself who was beginning to know something about the conditions of poor women's lives in the barrios and in the *campo*, as well as the slightly more substantial levels of the teachers in town. The project was based, of course, on the world-famous literacy program of the Cubans after their revolution in 1959. This was adopted by the Sandinista government immediately after the triumph of their revolution in 1979. The Sandinista program, which sent young people from the cities into the countryside, was also successful in some ways, but it lasted only six months, which is not actually long enough for literacy to take hold. In any case, that renowned initiative had taken place decades before, and it had missed many people, especially rural women.

Rosa Elena's project had serious outreach, a feminist curriculum, teacher-training, and monitoring. I did the necessary and eventually, after 24 rejections, found funding for one year from an Italian feminist sociologist, Flavia DeRossi Robinson, who had immigrated to the United States when Italy was still post-fascist. After that first approval, my grant proposals found donors somewhat more readily. Funding has been a continuous struggle for me and my loyal and active Advisory Committee, but dealing with the vagaries of foundations and soliciting individual donors is another story. The Sandinista revolution had been feminist in principle, but the government had done little to put its money where its mouth was. Adult education never became a priority. In all these years we have never received any funding, or even textbooks, from any reigning political party.

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My visionary friend, Rosa Elena, now a doctor herself, ran our literacy programs with gifted teacher-trainers, as she has continued to do since at the Free High School. They found a woman in every one of 44 villages who had at least a sixth-grade diploma, and taught these "monitors" some basic pedagogical techniques and how to use the workbooks. I called the curriculum "Paolo Freire for Women," because the first workbook used vocabulary that women care about. The first full word the women students wrote on their blackboards was "feto" (fetus); and by drawing and cutting out paper body parts and putting them up on an outline of a human body, like Pin the Tail on the Donkey, they learned to say the proper names of the genitals, which had been shameful or obscene, or slang that only men could use. We used the word "feminismo."

Just having them speak up in class, stand, walk to the blackboards, and write the freshly-learned letters in words demanded self-assertion. Just teaching them the basics that men knew—arithmetic as well as reading—helped level the gender playing field a bit. It gave the women confidence in areas where they had been helpless, like possessing basic information in family conversation, or monitoring their children’s homework. And because we covered adult themes like poverty and power relations and women’s rights, all the women in a village or barrio knew important concepts that the men in their families had never learned as boys in elementary school.

Our two programs eventually graduated over 300 women who had earned their sixth-grade diplomas after only three years of study. It turns out women learn fast when they are adults and hungry to learn, and when what they are taught matters.

And then our graduates wanted to go on to high school. Of course it had to be free, like the literacy programs. The Free High School for Adults, I call it. “El Instituto Libre Para Adultos Margaret Morganroth Gullette” is its formal, letterhead name. (Rosa Elena named the school after me, without asking,, They all call it “El Margaret” for short. In Spanish I say simply “El Instituto Libre.”) The wonder to the students is that it exists at all, and some know that I do the major part of the fund-raising, and that it isn’t easy. I used to say, every Opening Day, “Study hard this year, don’t waste your time, don’t miss a day, because I don’t know if we’ll have the money for another year.” I still worry; every year to come is precarious. The students are grateful to Dr. Rosa Elena, now the rector, and to the executive director, Maria Dolores Silva, and their teachers. They are simply (with no obsequiousness), openly, frankly, grateful. To hear some of them, on a short video made in 2016, go to <https://youtu.be/15XljlrfYsg>

The wonder for me, still, is that the Free High School provides second chances for all the people, men as well as women, who have earned sixth-grade diplomas but whom the regular public high schools nevertheless exclude: the pregnant girls, the women raising children (but *not the men* who fathered the children if they are under eighteen), anyone over eighteen, people who work Monday through Friday, and anyone who lives too far from the local daily schools, which are open only to youngsters. The government required us to include men, and our feminism decreed that men also had to be exposed to smart women teachers and able sister students as well as to the topics we add to the official government curriculum: women’s rights, human rights, environmental stewardship, and reproductive justice.

The Free High School thus welcomes the woman of forty who was made pregnant at fourteen and had her second baby at sixteen, and the man of thirty-five who blew off further education for a small paycheck at thirteen. It welcomes the cane cutter and the cleaning women whose fathers put them to work in their early teens, when they would have liked nothing better than to be like the *borgués* kids and go to school in a smart uniform every day. Eventually, for our students, as grade follows grade,

and a certified diploma caps it all, the successful learning experiences and the good results that follow from winning a diploma seem to bury the self-reproach, the remorse, the bitterness toward one’s parents, the rage at early poverty, and the waste of those lost years.

Our motto is “Empowering Women and Men for Life.” “Life” is a big word that needs to be filled with meaning. Our curriculum includes a demand for social activism: providing literacy training, or doing environmental clean-up, or working with the Health Ministry against dengue or rat infestations. Other parts of the curriculum, and the gender relations in the classroom, open a whole positive world, of rights and responsibilities, and possibilities. So supporting that Free High School of possibility, which opened in 2002 and in 2016 already had 1001 graduates, is my constant anxious obsession, and Rosa Elena’s, and our pride.

How we attract these special hard-to-reach students, and then how our teachers teach them—and what they teach our teachers, and how the students change—are my next themes.

## How the Barriers Came Down

Faculty dedication is everything in a program of this kind, no matter how rich the curriculum and the required civil activism. The first students to enroll in 2002 and for some years afterward were reluctant as well as yearning. Racialization is by skin color, and many rural people are darker and more indigenous-looking. Class barriers existed everywhere one looked. Most students were the first in their families to attend high school. Many people were way older than eighteen, and age worked as an extra kind of class barrier. Many had not stepped into a classroom in decades. The timid under-served (whether they were 18 or 54, Spanish-looking or with Olmec or Chinese features) had to believe, but truly believe, that they had the brain power to handle secondary learning as well as the better-off thirteen-year-olds in the daily high schools. That they could learn in one long day on Saturday—from 7:30 A. M. to 3:45 P.M.—what the younger got five half days to learn. Our students had to get over the humiliation of wearing flip-flops when those kids sported fancy sneakers.

Outreach persuasion was the first necessity. Our teachers were, and are, midlife Sandinistas, almost entirely women, who had unexpectedly benefitted from the first wave of higher education provided to the working class after the 1979 revolution to get their college degrees. Now these college trained, called *licenciadas*, had to start building up self-esteem in this neglected and immiserated populace. They had to help the mothers plan how to find child-care during the hours they would spend in class. They had to encourage men embarrassed about their work-hardened hands. The administration—my budget—also had to provide notebooks to the neediest.

At first, the students knew so little about “education,” or the promises of education, that they didn’t know what it might consist of, or lead to, or what to wish for. Rosa Elena had the brilliant idea of asking them to discover, name, and write down their “dream.” People wrote a sentence on

a small black slate board. A photographer who was present sent me photographs of these written dreams. One of the many: "I want to be a professional for the sake of my son"; "an educated woman"; "to study law."



A WOMAN WHO IMAGINES GETTING HER DIPLOMA AND THEN A LAW DEGREE, WITH HER "DREAM" WRITTEN ON THE SLATE, 2004. NOTE BROKEN CHAIR IN THE HIGH SCHOOL PREMISES THAT WE BORROWED ON SATURDAYS UNTIL 2017. PHOTO BY FRANK ZOLLERS.

Soon enough, though, whole families started to attend, the younger siblings, the cousins. When family members attended our graduations, they marveled at the dignified colorful robes and the tasseled mortar boards, were gratified by the ceremony and elevated speechifying. (*Just like the real high schools!*) Bright graduates started to head out of town for yet higher education, to technical schools, even to universities. They did well. Over a third of our graduates have higher degrees. Soon our word of mouth was terrific.

One family I know has three generations of women who have earned their diplomas. Scarleth, the latest, graduated in 2016 at the normal age of 17. Aracelys, her mother, started with us in her thirties, and with her diploma in hand went on to get a teaching certificate. She now receives a monthly salary from the Ministry of Education and teaches a rural 1-6 multigrade, like the old one-room classrooms of North American pioneer history. In that village I saw Aracelys teach three different math lessons to a class of 18 children, all quietly, diligently writing in their notebooks. The discipline comes from the absolute respect owed her as a teacher. *Her* mother, Concepción, had been a cleaning woman in the dirty, run-down and over-crowded Health Center. When Aracelys initially balked, she encouraged Aracelys to attend by saying she too would attend. After she and Aracelys graduated, in the same year, Concepción got a nursing degree. The Ministry of Health hired her as a nurse in the same Health Center where she had cleaned floors and toilets.

About 56% of our graduates are women, rescued, as some are eager to tell me, from lives spent in unwanted child-rearing and backwoods macho oppression and boredom. Ernestina, a woman who lives near the Costa Rican border, about as far away as you can get from the port town of San Juan del Sur, says, about the day she learned she could go to our Saturday School, which was as soon as we opened in 2002, "*Gloria!*"

Now, with so many graduates in each village and barrio, our reputation brings many eager impoverished and under-served people. The School is known for having better discipline than the daily high schools. With excellent teachers and the same accredited diploma, there is no shame in attending El Margaret. The rural parents let their children with sixth grade diplomas, usually age thirteen, attend now. Fewer rural parents are now stubborn, or afraid. The ex-superintendent of schools, Dorquis Muñiz, formerly one of our literacy and math teachers, tells me that now a good half of the rural parents actively want their children to attend our village middle schools as soon as they finish elementary school. In one family I interviewed where a daughter and two sons of different ages had all graduated in the same year (and the floor of the house was, as usual, dirt), I asked the parents admiringly, "How did you encourage them?" They looked at each other a little dubiously. The father had previously said, bashfully, that he'd had no high school schooling, and the mother probably had even less. They didn't know what a high-school curriculum comprised. But they trust that it is valuable. He said, smiling, "We told them to get up early and study hard."

Structure was the other basic for outreach: We opened our middle schools in 12 villages, so farmers and housewives raising children, and children too young to ride the buses, can attend for the first three years. The middle schools meet three afternoons a week, for four hours. The Saturday School in town offers the same three years plus two more, for five years of schooling leading to the diploma. Everyone who graduates from rural middle school has to attend the Saturday School for the last two grades of high school in order to be taught by people with college degrees. Donors, including American Jewish World Service and Random Acts, provided a free bus that brings the rural students along one main road from far away, because a high private bus fare had long prevented many from attending.

But in the Saturday School, although tuition is free, someone in the family has to have hard cash for the notebooks, a pen, a lunch. Two of the town girls I knew from the Battered Women's Shelter came to me this year just before School opened. (One, then 13, had been prostituted by her mother. She lived in the shelter for eighteen months and earned her sixth-grade diploma by studying with a volunteer tutor.) Both teens have children now; neither works. They both want to attend. Even with me, who knew them in that bad time, they are slow to admit why they can't register: neither can afford the notebooks. One also doesn't have the requisite jeans and white shirt that we decided to require because otherwise the clothes snobbery is off the charts. This is not Africa, but it's the third-poorest country in our hemisphere. Even paltry [sic] costs are crises for some subsistence farm families or under-employed townfolk. You have to keep remembering how deep the poverty goes. You have to keep reminding yourself.

## What the Teachers Had to Learn

Teaching is what makes all these successes possible, once you consider recruitment and retention and encouragement as part of teaching in our cultural conditions. The Saturday teachers with college degrees all knew their materials well. (Most teach in the daily high schools and work for us on Saturday. They tend to lecture, despite our best efforts to encourage discussion-leading.) Yet showing up and teaching what you know is scarcely enough. It was a learning experience for them, figuring out what is different about our students, compared to the adolescents attending the daily schools who don't work and don't have children and can afford notebooks, uniforms and cell phones.

The differences between our teachers and our students come down to class and income. No teacher is well paid by the government, but they all receive a secure monthly salary and live in the contemporary port, with its library, convenient shops, and resort atmosphere. They are not only more cosmopolitan but also "professionals." "Profesor," or "licenciado(a)" (college-degreed person) are the titles for high-school teachers. These are terms of the highest honor in a country where university education is rare and almost 65% of students still drop out of the daily high schools without a degree.

What did the teachers need to learn to teach well? (always a good question to ask, even in developed countries.) Some started off condescending to the students, the way people can be who feel walls of difference separating them from others who earn less, have a harder time managing birth control, keeping their white clothes pristine, or controlling machismo in their daily lives. Why couldn't these students be on time? The guys were to them "chavalos vagos," lazy good-for-nothings, bad boys, drunks. The poor were "humildes," I used to be told approvingly, as if humility were a quality to be encouraged. The *campesinos* and the maids and the fishermen didn't look you in the eye, they didn't talk out of turn. They didn't talk at all. It wasn't clear they could learn, or why did it take some of them until age seventeen to pass even the third-grade, as Fidel Pavon, now an installer of biosand filters for the Newton Sister City Project, confesses on the YouTube video about his early life? Were they just plain dumb?

Eventually, the teachers learned. They could explain to me what I was already seeing with my own eyes. Who among our students can afford watches? Did they *want* to work in the cane fields at age thirteen? In some villages, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there is still no electricity. An iron is what it was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a metal wedge heated over an open fire. Water might have to come into the house by the bucketful, carried on the heads of girls from far away. We don't demand uniforms, but yes, a white top and blue pants or skirt (the Nicaraguan flag colors). Esprit de corps, said my girlfriend, Rosa Elena, who was a rural girl who dropped out of high school at the time the guerrillas were forming, when the Somoza dictatorship was harassing her and her friends if they gathered in groups of more than three. And it is terrific to see a passel of students approaching the School in blue and white. Think how

amazing it is that everyone turns up in a clean white shirt. Some woman's work is behind that every time. *Know that.* Know why.

The teachers recognized that our students can be tired. One fisherman told me how hard it was to keep his eyes open all day after coming back on Friday from days in the Pacific fishing grounds; he confessed that his math teacher went too fast for him. If you have been out of school for ten years, you have to relearn your primary-school math. To each teacher's patient ethnography, add her need to read the face of silent incomprehension. Then, add knowing how to restate so the light falls in the right way.

***Teaching is what makes all these successes possible, once you consider recruitment and retention and encouragement as part of teaching in our cultural conditions.***

In the early days, before the free bus, the private bus schedule deposited all the students from the south late on Saturdays, and some of the teachers scolded them as if it were their fault. Ernestina, coming all the way from Tortuga on the bus, told me that was an injustice, and rude. "So I shouted back. I'm an adult, I know my rights. . . . Everyone had to settle down, be polite." "I was not just a student," she told me, not apologetically. "I was a mother, a worker. I had a lot going through my head. I had to cook, get the children ready for school. The teachers wanted us to concentrate." Add human patience to everything else teachers need.

Humor. Knowing how to play is important, says Mayra Solís, one of the teachers who has been with us longest (and is the principal of the daily public high school). Mayra tells me this story.<sup>2</sup> Some men do come to class drunk. She told Isaac if he didn't "feel well" to sit in the back of the class. She was afraid he would go out in the street and get hit by a car. He put his sleepy head on his desk.

This was in the Margaret. It was a geography class on the "Littoral." Did they know what it meant? No one answered, so I explained and asked, Can you mention beaches on the coast near San Juan del Sur? Suddenly Isaac jumps up out of his seat and starts singing the anthem to San Juan that goes, "Escamequita, el Toro y la Flor, playa Hermosa, Remanso y Ostional/ son playas que visten de encanto." [He was naming the famous beaches. "These are the beaches dressed in enchantment."] Bottom line. . . with this drunken person we accomplished [an] objective of the class. It was a good experience because his companions applauded.

I always say, "We have to seek strategies for this type of young person." Isaac succeeded in graduating.

Dorquis Muñiz tells me about Ramon, another adolescent often seen lying in the gutter. One day he came to our Executive Director, the compassionate Maria Dolores Silva, saying he wanted to enroll in the first year, or seventh grade. Maria Dolores admitted him and asked him

to help her open up and lock up. He stopped drinking Friday night so he could be sober on Saturday morning. He defended his senior monograph, required of everyone, ably. He graduated.

The successes—graduates year after year, wearing their togas, holding their diplomas, over a third going on to higher education—helped all the teachers, like the students, see possibility where some had seen only hopelessness.

Many teachers eventually became expert explicators of the conditions of their students' lives. Lupe, from rural Cebadilla, who went through the School later, said, "All the teachers and the director treated us as equals."<sup>3</sup> Many teachers are able to tell me, in empathetic detail, how difficult it was for students to pull their lives together enough to attend for an entire year, and then another. Every conversation with a student is another patient ethnography. The teachers here were already working to level the gender- and class-based playing field by offering instruction leading to the diploma. But giving these students opportunities to succeed took much more. Empathy, listening well, finding the right location every time on the spectrum between incapacitating pity and incapacitating toughness, comprehending gender differences, formulating the helpful sentences, welcoming the small steps of liberating accomplishment.



A GRADUATION, WITH MARGARET IN ATTENDANCE, 2013. PHOTO BY DAVID GULLETTE.

I interview some graduates every year, so I learn firsthand from their age autobiographies what they suffered and what they learned, what they are accomplishing and where they want to go next. Now they know there can be a next step.

## What the Students Say They Learn: Claiming the Word

In our classrooms, many students learn most of all not to be timid. Centuries of humbleness, hammered into

children by their parents, enforced by the Somoza dictatorship and the feudal conditions of work, are worsened for many by having grown older now, in the "modern" world, where revolution is supposed to have brought equal opportunity, but inequality has grown; and they lack the skills or knowledge supposedly connected with age. They come to us bearing that bad feeling of being "too old" and left behind. And then the School undoes this learned helplessness.

One midlife woman, Nohemi Orozco, who started with us in 2002, finally received her degree in 2015, after interruptions that included adopting a child, illness, raising her own children. It took 14 years to finish, but now she teaches adult literacy. When I interviewed her, she said,

My mental attitude, despite my age, is that I am not staying behind. Right now I am studying English, they gave me a scholarship, and then, over and above English we'll see what happens, because the truth? I don't think I will stay put here, let's see what comes up later.<sup>4</sup>

Marlene Roque, one of our most accomplished graduates, says she learned "how to speak" in the school. She speaks for many when she explains,

I enriched my vocabulary with people, because in the High School I had teachers who helped me break a barrier, which was timidity, and they always sent me to make speeches, and thus I went about breaking the ice, and now speaking doesn't frighten me.<sup>5</sup>

As her Spanish improved, she felt more sure of using her words, of her ability to make an extemporaneous speech. At her graduation, she took the microphone, to energetically call on the national government to help keep the School running. (Some students know that in all 15 years we have never gotten a dime from the Ministry of Education, and it makes them indignant.) Marlene became a community leader, using her political voice to help bring her village a school building in the face of opposition from the then-superintendent of schools. Then, when we established a middle school in her village, she became one of our own teachers; then an assistant in a diabetes clinic. She is getting a university degree in psychology at the same time.

Two of our own graduates teach in the Saturday School. One, a woman who came originally from the *campo*, teaches Spanish. "I write estimates better," a 34-year-old welder told me, who also says he talks better. Many students tell me this, proudly and gratefully. Speaking well in any language means overcoming the traps of class, although we may not think of ignorance and poverty in such verbal terms. People who don't read, who can't spell properly, don't speak properly. They have funny accents. Pronunciation is a gross class barrier. Our teachers modeled better pronunciation. Some probably

graded on it, whether they knew it or not. They taught correct grammar, not only in Spanish class. Assignments in all the subjects expanded the students' vocabularies (as Marlene mentioned). Social studies, geography, history, and math gave them analytic tools, through keywords on many new topics. This is otherwise known as "information" and "concepts." The teachers gave them space to speak, by listening. This is actually literal space, because here students often stand to respond. Those who can do it take up space, they take up class time. Their minds expand into this time and space as they talk.

I think of ignorance and freedom in verbal terms in part because I know this problem personally. I came to San Juan del Sur ignorant of Spanish, and thus mute. Literally mute. That first year, during the Contra War, I didn't know the simple formula for condolence when I met a mother of one of the dead soldiers. When I touched her hand in solemn greeting, I was too humiliated to look her in the eye. In all the succeeding decades, I set about acquiring better speech little by little. (Reading novels in Spanish, so good at dialogue, I still memorize vocabulary I may be able to put to use.) Is this a question of raising my class level? Yes, although not obviously, as I am white, *borguésa*, and in the eyes of my local acquaintances, *acomodada* (*comfortable*, the polite word for *wealthy*). Moreover, I know punctuation and I publish op-eds in Spanish in the national newspapers. This is much respected. Still, stupidity is what it feels like not to *speak* well: my grammar mistakes, my silence when I hit a vocabulary wall, thus my inability to express myself, to recognize a joke, not to mention being incapable of making one. This kind of ignorance is a class marker of a different kind. To be not worth talking to, or listening to, is a profound human demotion. For years I felt I was not the equal of the *campesina* with the worst accent, not to mention our teachers. I have been ascending the class ladder of speech but I will never be equal.

I just went through a small dinner party with a great Nicaraguan writer, I believe creditably. But I refrained from initiating subjects whose vocabulary I don't know (like literary criticism, I who hold a Ph.D. in comparative literature). So I do uncomfortably believe, even today, that I know something like the shame of being tongued-tied. And the liberation, the self-confidence, the openness, the happiness, of, yes, free speech. In the beginning is the Word.

The ability to speak –especially when it is developed by adults painfully aware of their deficiencies (who know they had never properly learned grammar or spelling), who never imagined they would be articulate and certainly not eloquent, is empowerment for life, in any walk of life, in any part of the world. It brings a kind of equality that has nothing to do with fancy sneakers, the right clothes, money in the pocket.

Making a living comes first of all, as it must. Ernestina (the one who shouted "Gloria!" when she learned she could attend) now buses all the way from her village to sell products like basil pesto in the gringos' Saturday market. She has a lively inquiring look, an eager manner, ready speech, and a son who graduated from the FHS and is

frustrated that he can't find work except as a fisherman. For many, the empowerment of speech, the experiences of learning and activism, and the diploma itself, bring more equal human relations, if not necessarily more desirable jobs. The economy fails them. Social/ linguistic and economic inclusions, however, modest as they may seem to people in the global North, are the cognitive and emotional pre-conditions, I have come to believe (or at least hope), for more radical collective change from below.

## Their Great Successes and the Big Tasks Ahead

This is the understanding soul of socialist democracy: to be able to see without prejudice that in these lifetimes there was nothing but a long history of inequality and hopelessness, and then a long personal and familial struggle, all on mere wispy dreams, and then to see without illusion how the economic struggle continues despite the diploma. "La lucha continua," can mean either "The struggle goes on," or "the continuous struggle" (the accented syllable tells which). I often repeat it to myself, both ways, about funding this odd indispensable School. The students say it all the time. Once you really *get* that story and that proverb, you admire any source of empowerment and any degree of motion forward. "Your high school is changing the culture of the region," a vice-mayor, the late Rosa Adelina, said to me one day. "Your students look up, they look you in the eye, they say their piece. They even disagree."

***The School creates self-interest, to be sure. We would fail if we did not. Here that means the basic sense of having a self, and then of being competent, equal to many tasks.***

*Ambition*, that all-important word, which covers so much more than liberals think who don't know such populations or such a national history, becomes possible. The School creates self-interest, to be sure. We would fail if we did not. Here that means the basic sense of *having a self*, and then of being competent, equal to many tasks. Nohemi Orozco says on the YouTube video, at minute 7:50, "Before, I was going, 'I can't, I can't.' Now [she says, flashing a sudden smile] I feel prepared for *any task*." I knew the "values" of education—critical thinking, for example, clear writing, debating ability. The Free High School does not succeed brilliantly there, although some of our graduates go on to university, and many more could be admitted and go, if they could get scholarships. But when I interview graduates, I recognize many other intangible values. Self-possession, self-assertion, once embodied, can operate in any realm. *Ambition* can include emulating Sandino, who fought the North American-installed Somoza dynasty in the 1930s, or the *comandantes* (some of them women) who led the government in the boldly experimental but perilous 1980s, after the revolution and during the Contra War.

Rosa Elena, who is twenty years younger than I am, steeped in Sandinista history and myth, and dedicated to keeping the School operating, come what may, says we are “forging leaders.” So I would like to believe. I look at their government—run by a “president” who in 2016 when he was reelected for an unconstitutional extra term made his wife his vice president—and wonder what our eventual leaders might accomplish given this context. What will chance and history bring? Meanwhile we at the School are doing what we can to go on, to produce 1001 more educated people who feel they are part of their society, who operate on a more equal footing, and have the tools to go on improving on their own. So the future has some openness. Time will tell how political our graduates try to be, if they dare. Even our oldest graduates have only fifteen years of “life” behind them, and now their children and grandchildren attend.

All we hear about the effort they made is their rejoicing—well-deserved self-satisfaction, I am happy to say. And quite justified. “I sacrificed,” the graduates say. “I got up at four AM to walk through the jungle.” “I had to cross nine *rios*, overflowing, in the rainy season, carrying my notebook over my head.” “My parents let me out of chores three afternoons a week.” “I had to bring my baby to school that first year. It was okay. Plenty of boys made more noise than she did.”

*To donate to the Free High School for Adults, send a check to Treasurer Don Ross, 211 Winslow Road, Waban 02468, made out to Newton SCP-FHS. Or go to <https://sanjuandelsursistercityproject.wordpress.com/contribute/>*

***The Newton-San Juan del Sur Sister City Project is a registered 501(c) (3). Your donation is tax deductible.***

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See “The Contagion of Euphoria,” my essay about my first years in Nicaragua and the literacy programs, which won a Daniel Singer Millennium Prize and is available on their Website, <http://www.danielsinger.org/gullette.html>

<sup>2</sup> My translation, from an email, February 26, 2017, that followed a conversation. The punctuation and accents are as was.

Esto fue en el Margaret estaba [yo] dando la clase de geografía y el contenido era Costas de litoral del pacífico estaba el alumno Isaac adentro del aula pero había llegado ebrio al aula de clase y no lo había determinado cuando pase Asistencia si me di cuenta y le dije si no se sentía bien se ubicara en la parte de atrás del aula por temor a que saliera a la calle y un carro lo atropellara. Comence la clase y pregunto para explorar que entendían por litoral nadie contestó luego les explique despues pregunto pueden mencionarme las costas del litoral del pacífico especial san juan del sur y de pronto sale el de su silla y comienza a cantar la letra del himno a san juan del sur que dice Escamequita ,el toro y la flor ,playa Hermosa ,remanso y ostional son playas que visten de encanto..... total con esa persona ebria cumplimos el Objetivo de la clase fue una experiencia bonita porq todos sus compañeros lo felicitaron por eso siempre digo debemos buscar estrategias para ayudar a este tipo de jovenes y se logro bachillerar.

<sup>3</sup> This and the following texts in English are my translations of transcribed interviews. I was present at Lupe’s. “Todos los maestros y la directora siempre nos trataron por igual.”

<sup>4</sup> Nohemi: “Mi mentalidad a pesar de la edad que tengo [es que] yo no me quedo atrás, ahorita estoy estudiando inglés en Rivas, me dieron una beca, y pues además del inglés vamos a ver que más sale.”

<sup>5</sup> Marlene. I was present: “Enriquecí mucho mi vocabulario con las personas, porque en el instituto tuve maestras que me ayudaron a romper una barrera que era la timidez y ellas siempre me mandaban a hacer discursos y así fui rompiendo el hielo, y ahora no me da miedo hablar.” Jordan, once a cane cutter, now a construction foreman who is first in his class every year and wants to become an architect, said almost the same thing. Both are them appear on the YouTube video.



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# RADICAL TEACHER

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

## Mentoring at Girls Write Now

by Nan Bauer-Maglin



MENTEES AND MENTORS OF THE CLASS OF 2017 CELEBRATE THE START OF A NEW SCHOOL YEAR AT THE 2016 FALL ORIENTATION!

## Part One:

### Girls Write Now: The Mentoring Project

Founded in 1998, Girls Write Now (GWN) mentors underserved high school girls from throughout New York City's five boroughs—over 90% high need and 95% girls of color.<sup>1</sup> GWN runs two programs for mentors and mentees: the Writing & Mentoring and Digital Media Mentoring programs. The Writing & Mentoring program currently has 180 people (90 mentees, 90 mentors) and the Digital Media Mentoring program has 100 people (50 mentees, 50 mentors). This article is about the writing program as that is the one I volunteer for.

When I fully retired from CUNY after 27 years in community college developmental writing and composition classrooms, I knew I did not want to teach in the traditional sense—large classes of students whose writing needed a lot of attention and no time with my teaching load to do that. I had had it! But with mentoring in GWN, I have returned to a form of teaching that is not only rewarding but also stimulating. At my age (75), it probably makes more sense for me to be on the board or on one of the advising committees, but I really wanted to work one-on-one with a young woman who was enthusiastic about writing and whom I might help.

To communicate the complexity and the richness of mentoring at GWN, I asked six mentors a series of questions. These mentors range from brand new this year, like Lucy Frank and Sara Radin, to those who have mentored for ten years, like Heather Kristin; their ages are from 25 to 69 (not including me). Most are not retired, but work at a variety of jobs and, typical to these economic times, many balance more than one job to survive in NYC.

Nicole Counts, 25: I am a book editor. I write short stories, poems, vignettes, and some journalistic pieces.

Sara Radin, 27: I am the Youth Culture Editor for WGSN, a trend forecasting and consumer insight publication. In that role, I consult brands and write about upcoming trends for Millennials and Generation Z. Additionally, I teach the precollege program at the Fashion Institute of Technology and I also run a passion project called *It's Not Personal*, which is a growing anthology and collective inspired by the female dating experience. Outside of all of that, I do memoir writing, often for Bust Magazine Online.

Rachel Cohen, 38: I was a sports reporter for more than 16 years, the last nine-plus at AP. I am currently studying computer programming

Heather Kristin, 40: I'm a memoirist, blogger for The Huffington Post and violin teacher.

Stacie Evans, 54: I work in city government. I taught for many years, but I'm not teaching now. I do write, seemingly all the time.

Lucy Frank, 69: I am a young adult writer.

Despite busy lives, they volunteer to mentor.

Heather: For the past ten years, I've been a mentor at Girls Write Now because growing up in New York City, I had no one to guide me. So I decided to be the mentor I never had. It's thrilling to have sent three young women off to college, and know that I am making a difference in their lives.

Lucy: I never had a mentor when I was young. I want to share what I've learned about writing over all these years with a young woman looking for her voice -- yes, the nuts and bolts, but also the value of discovering what you think and feel, and what it is you want to say, through the process of writing, and how you then nurture the courage, patience, and hope to stay with it.

Girls Write Now asks that mentors and their mentees make a big commitment: for ten months they meet once a week for at least an hour and once a month on a Saturday they attend a genre workshop. The writing genres are the same each year: fiction, memoir, playwriting/screenwriting, poetry, and journalism. However, the sub-genre or specific skill changes each year so that participants in Girls Write Now programming are getting extensive and unique workshops that introduce them to types of writing they are not typically exposed to. Each workshop features a guest speaker who is a professional expert in the genre that is being introduced that day. The workshops are a platform for subsequent sessions between mentee and mentor and are used to motivate the creation of new writing pieces throughout the year. Over the year mentees complete six genre pieces for their online portfolio. In addition, they submit a piece for the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards, read a piece at a public gathering at the end of each year, and publish one piece in the GWN yearly anthology.<sup>2</sup>

For their weekly meetings, mentors and mentees meet throughout the boroughs in libraries, coffee shops, or offices and, when weather permits, outside in parks.

Nicole: We met once a week at a bookstore for a while. When the weather was nice we'd adventure throughout Brooklyn—to Prospect Park, the museum, the botanical gardens. We'd meet for pie and tea.

Sara: We usually meet at a coffee shop in her neighborhood. She lives with her parents in Jackson Heights, Queens, which is a neighborhood I had not been to before meeting her.

Rachel: My current mentee is a senior at Bronx Science; this is our second year together but her fourth in the program. We meet at the Whole Foods on the Upper East Side in the upstairs seating area.

Heather: I meet all my mentees at Starbucks in Union Square. First, we chat about our week, then our lives, and write our dreams.

At these weekly meetings, writing is the first priority. How a writing topic emerges differs with each mentor/mentee pair. Often what was started in the monthly genre workshop will be developed over the subsequent weeks. I would bring in short pieces like the prose poem "Girl", by Jamaica Kincaid, to stimulate my mentee's writing. Often the mentees would have a subject



TASNIM (MENTEE) AND NAN (MENTOR) AT PAIR CHECK-IN, PHOTO COURTESY OF AUTHOR

they wanted to write about or a form they wanted to explore. My current mentee said she wanted to work on fantasy flash fiction. I searched Google as I knew nothing of the form (flash fiction) nor did I particularly like fantasy. I found samples that we read and advice on how to write a successful fantasy flash fiction, so it became an educational experience for myself as well as my mentee.

Heather: My mentee and I were struggling with what to write about when I found essay prompts on *The New York Times*. 100 of them!

Stacie: I have an arsenal of them, both from teaching and from my work with my first mentee, but none of the ones I've tried so far really click with my second mentee. What I've found instead is that our conversations spark her writing.

Lucy: We've settled into meeting at a cafe on W 145th St, where we have tea, she fills me in on her week and then, after half an hour or so, she, in an "oh, by the way," sort of way, pulls out her phone and says, "So would you like to see what I did on the . . ." and we work intensely on whatever piece she's preparing.

For an extended description of the writing process—from reading a piece of literature, to freewriting, to first draft and then several subsequent drafts to polished piece—shared by my second mentee and myself, see the second section of this essay.

If the mentee is a junior or senior, often some of the writing time is spent on college essays and scholarship applications. My first mentee and I visited Hunter College together, and we worked on her scholarship applications. She was accepted to a selective arts program at Hunter.

I asked each of the mentors I interviewed to talk about an assignment or moment that especially worked for her mentee. For me, what began as problem turned into success: My first mentee felt blocked about her submission for Chapters (the end of the year public reading). I suggested she free write about why she was blocked. So she wrote about how she is not your normal 16-year-old writer; that she likes dark subjects rather than the usual high school girl obsessions with boys or clothes or even family. We refined her piece for a few months until it was strong, descriptive, and somewhat shocking. Besides gasps from the audience, one audience member put her in touch with Gillian Flynn, as my mentee had referred to Flynn's writing style and subject matter as akin to her own. This published author emailed her and encouraged her to keep following her own unique sensibilities.

Nicole: The first time one of my mentees read at Chapters was, as cliché as this word can be, magical. I have mentored before, and felt pride at watching someone accomplish something, but to sit with someone for months, working and reworking a piece, and to watch them feel

immense pride while performing, it was astounding.

Rachel: Last year, she suggested we attend Cringe Fest, a GWN event in which mentors and mentees read aloud pieces they wrote when they were younger, and we all cringe (in a light-hearted and supportive way) at how bad they are. It was a great bonding experience that strengthened our work together going forward.

Stacie: My mentee struggled with the travel writing portfolio piece. She hasn't traveled and couldn't wrap her head around writing about something close to home. In the end, she decided to try writing something about the coffee shop where we meet, but she wasn't finding her way into the piece. We talked about some of the writing other mentees had shared during the workshop and what we liked about them. And I asked her to tell me why she likes our coffee shop, why she likes it enough to come there with her friends when we're not scheduled to meet. She started to talk about how she feels when she walks into the shop ... and there was her piece! The same method worked when she was finding her way through to the end of her Scholastic story: questions, conversation, inspiration. I don't know if it will be a fool-proof formula, but it's definitely working right now.

Lucy: We went to the Museum of Arts and Design to see their crocheted coral reef exhibit because I am a crochet-er, and she did an internship last summer where she studied the effects of climate change on coral. The replica coral reefs were crocheted from plastics dumped in the ocean. They were very beautiful, and it was fun to see them together, but she also enjoyed that we had an outing together, and that

she had so much to teach me about coral and about climate change.

In terms of what was difficult or problematic, for many mentors the primary problem is scheduling and keeping to the weekly meetings. As Sara says, "Scheduling can be tough—both of us have a lot on our plate on top of school and work." These mentees are ambitious, often taking AP classes and participating in many afterschool activities. For Heather, it is "Geographic issues! For example, my latest mentee lives far from the city and can't always meet."

Other, more subtle, problems are personal and cultural; for example, my two mentees came with their mothers and sisters to our meetings as their family was reluctant to let them travel from Queens into Manhattan by themselves. I felt a bit constrained by this arrangement. The constraint was timewise. One of the mothers assumed the session was for an hour and would hover near us when the hour was up; whereas we needed to let the writing determine how much time we needed. The constraint was more subtly emotional. I felt our exchange was not as free as it could be as it felt less private than it should have been. Both times, their mothers gradually learned to trust me; I think my age was helpful in that. Also, I found particularly safe spaces to meet in: with my first mentee we met in a college and with my second mentee we used Girls Write Now offices. In addition, I suggested I accompany my mentee to the subway and make sure I saw her get on the subway on her way back to Queens. After a few months, they agreed to let their daughter venture out on her own.

***There are no rules for developing trust and intimacy among mentee and mentor, especially when the two often are so different in experience, ethnicity, age and social class***

There are no rules for developing trust and intimacy among mentee and mentor, especially when the two often are so different in experience, ethnicity, age and social class. Trust is developed over time, fostered by the regular meetings every week and every month as well as the sense of community so carefully constructed by the staff. Also, most mentees come in to the program with a strong sense of commitment—they want to succeed, they want to express themselves in writing. But it does not always work: some mentees or mentors request a different person to work with and some mentees drop out, but that is not the norm.

Stacie: The hardest thing for me is my own worry about whether I'm doing a good job as a mentor. My mentee and I have a fabulous time together (and I always feel re-energized when I leave her and go back to work), but I always wonder what more I could be doing, or how I could be more effective. The mentor manual is helpful, and talking to GWN staff and other

mentors is helpful, too. I still worry. I want her to get the most out of this experience as possible.

Lucy: We come from very different worlds, in almost every way. I sometimes worry that I am assuming I understand what she means when I don't, and that there might be times when I don't even know what I'm not getting. And because she is polite and eager to please, it's sometimes hard to tell what she's feeling.

Each mentor/mentee relationship is different and develops in its own way. What works to motivate your first mentee might not work for the second. This is one way in which mentoring differs from teaching a traditional class. It's true that each such class is different and adjustments need to be made, but the one-on-one experience of mentoring makes those adjustments more immediate and intense.

Stacie: I worked for three years with my first mentee, until she graduated . . . Seeing the change in her writing over the time we worked together was great. I take a tiny bit of credit for that, but mostly it was her growing comfort with writing in English, and her growing comfort with poetry—the genre she most wanted to write but had never tried before she started GWN.

With my new mentee, our meetings are often much more talk than writing. It surprises me how much we have in common considering how very different we are. I loved working with my first mentee, and I was apprehensive about starting over—wouldn't it be weird after how close I was with Mentee #1? But it hasn't been weird at all.

While the main aim of the weekly meetings is to work on writing in the genres, mentors take their mentees on trips to museums, poetry readings, or movies. Stacie is thinking of taking her mentee to see *Hidden Figures*; "I'm already thinking of writing prompts for post-movie work!" My second mentee and I went to the Rubin Museum of Art where she wrote about a sound exhibit and about a print, "The Demoness of Tibet". My first mentee and I walked along the Highline, explored Greenwich Village and the Garment District of Manhattan. My mentee grew to feel comfortable in and have a love of the city.

Besides field trips and the central focus on writing, we work on encouraging our mentees to feel more confident, especially in presenting their writing. At the monthly genre workshops, my first mentee was very quiet. So we made it an aim that before the end of the year, she would speak up in one of the small groups where we shared ideas and writing. In preparation for the Chapters presentation, I had my mentee practice reading aloud over and over again. We were lucky to get a private office—and when we were not lucky we used a long hallway. She would stand up and I would stand as far from her as possible and counsel her to go slow, to speak loudly, and to look up at the audience after ends of lines or at pauses. Girls Write Now currently offers practice sessions for all mentees before they are scheduled to read at Chapters.

Mentors see their role as something wider or deeper than teacher. They are the mentees' supporter, friend, advisor, and guide to the city and beyond. I got to know my first mentee's mother and sister because they would accompany her to meetings. I sat with them at my mentee's Chapters reading and I went to her high school graduation, celebrating with her family. As Rachel says, "The greatest challenge can be striking the balance between being a friend and a teacher."

Nicole: We always started off with a summary of our weeks—we'd catch each other up on hallway drama, and class room goings-on. I'd tell her about work and my weekends. We talked about the easy things—school and friends and boys, and we'd talk about the hard things—parent's deaths, and feelings of loneliness, when we felt worthy and when we didn't. We treated each other like family. It wasn't instant. We built trust over time. Every time we met, every text in between, we revealed layers of ourselves.

Sara: My mentee and I immediately clicked— our relationship is very fluid and natural. I don't only consider her my mentee, but she is also my good friend! We start off most sessions by giving each other a life update—I like to ask about what's going on at school, what kind of projects she's working on, how she's feeling about her work for Girls Write Now, and what would she like to work on with me. I want to be there for her as a support system, outside of her family, friends and teachers. Seeing where she lives and how she's being raised in this incredibly creative, tight knit family unit has opened my eyes to a whole other way of life. I like to joke that I wish her parents would adopt me!

Mentees gain a lot by participating in this program, but mentors do as well— after all, at the best of times teaching is a two-way street. I asked mentors how they have been affected by the mentoring or the workshops at GWN. I, for example, particularly liked the genre workshops. When asked to "write a persona poem from the point of view of someone you do not know," I wrote from the voice of my adopted daughter's Colombian mother, someone neither of us knew anything about. An unexpected creative moment! From my mentee, I learned about beauty practices such as eyebrow threading, and I read her favorite teenage novels.

Sara: I've learned a lot from my mentee. She may only be fifteen but she is very wise beyond her years. She's humble but pretty confident in everything she pursues. She's not afraid to use her voice and put herself out there. I was nowhere near that confident at age 15. It's inspired me to feel more secure in the things I do as a 27-year old. The workshops have been equally beneficial for me. They're an opportunity to learn about and explore new genres I haven't been previously exposed to—for example, the sitcom-writing

workshop was especially helpful since I'm working on a concept for a screenplay.

Rachel: One of the most effective parts of GWN is that at the workshops, mentors and mentees work together as equals. In that environment, we're not professionals and students but simply fellow writers.

Lucy: As someone who lives most of her life around



HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS SHARE ESSAY IDEAS WITH MENTORS AND FACILITATORS AT THE GIRLS WRITE NOW SCHOLARSHIP-A-THON, PHOTO COURTESY OF AUTHOR

older people, lively and interesting as they might be, I've been delighted to be around a young woman just coming into her own. It's been a total pleasure to watch her blossom and to feel that I've contributed to that. Kicking around ideas with her has energized my own writing as well, which is an unexpected bonus. And the energy and enthusiasm in the workshops is irresistible and contagious.

Why is this such a successful program for both mentors and mentees? Girls Write Now has developed over its nineteen years a careful and caring structure. It has a rigorous process of inducting mentors and mentees: first with an application and then an interview. At the start of each year, a GWN program guide for mentors is distributed, covering everything from suggestions for pair writing exercises to information about the GWN College Bound Panel to FAQs like "What do I do if I find my mentee's writing extremely dark and disturbing (morbid, violent, etc.?)" Together mentors meet twice a year to talk about the how-to and what-if of mentoring. Mentees have their own twice-a-year meetings to get to know each other and share their experience in the program. And throughout the year, care is taken to keep track and support the pairs. Mentors submit a monthly report. There is a midyear pair check-in where the two meet with a staff person. Psychological counselors and college advisors are available for consultation. GWN mentees' success rate at college speaks to the value of the program: 100% of senior mentees go to college armed with writing and multimedia portfolios and a strong sense of self — more than half with awards and scholarships.

While this article is about mentoring, including mentee voices on similar topics gives the reader a fuller picture of the mentor/mentee relationship and mentees' sense of Girls Write Now. This sample of quotes was recorded at mid-year pair check-ins.



HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS BUILD CONNECTIONS AT THE GIRLS WRITE NOW SCHOLARSHIP-A-THON'S NETWORKING SESSION, PHOTO COURTESY OF AUTHOR

### **What do you love about your mentor?**

--Although we started off as two totally different strangers with different stories, we clicked immediately and are creating one in GWN history.

--She doesn't think I'm weird or crazy and she takes me seriously. We talk about writing and school and life, which is really helpful. She's not just a writing mentor to me.

--She shows me new writing styles, pushing me out of my boundaries and inspiring me.

--She challenges me with new writing prompts and inspires me to be an empowered girl.

--Whenever I am stuck, she knows exactly what to say or do to give me that push again and continue writing.

### **How would you describe GWN to someone who's never heard of it?**

--GWN is like a paradise of writers. A community that helps you dream and also makes your dream come true.

--a safe space for every young writer and feminist.

--GWN is a program that exposes young women to different genres of writing and helps expand their skills and blow their minds.

--A cult you would want to be part of . . . a good cult maybe like witches with writing magic.

### **What's your proudest accomplishment at GWN?**

--Finding my voice and using it.

--My proudest accomplishment at GWN was making a blog and taking that first step to put myself "out there".

--My poetry is getting better with every month that passes by.

--Not nervous about speaking English anymore.

### **What's one thing you love about the Saturday workshops?**

--I love the craft talk

--The collective calm in the room right before the freewriting segment. The feeling that the possibilities for the blank page in the front of you, for the wonderful writers around you, are endless.

--I get to hear from women and girls from different

backgrounds and who have different perspectives.

### **How can GWN provide better support?**

--More ways for mentees to support each other, in addition to the support I get from my mentor. More mentee-only work assignments—structured, writing-focused opportunities, and break-out groups/activities for mentors and mentees.

--More ideas about different genres. Option to submit ideas for workshops and writing prompts.

--Maybe making it clear that GWN can help with LIFE. One thing that GWN really helped me with was learning that being a writer isn't just about writing; it's about building a network and reaching out to a bunch of people. I feel like mentor/mentee pairs don't have as much of a chance to meet other pairs. It would be nice to get to hear what other people are doing.

I'll conclude this section with two comments from mentors, which sum up the power and potential of the GWN writing program for both the mentor and the mentee:

Rachel: My involvement in Girls Write Now influenced my current career transition because I want to do more to empower young people like our mentees.

Sara: There are so many life skills we don't teach in the classroom or school setting. For this reason, alternative educational platforms like Girls Write Now are so necessary, now more than ever. This program teaches fundamental skills the mentees will use for the rest of their lives. Not only that, empowering young women is at the core of this program. This idea isn't revolutionary, and while it should be the norm, it unfortunately is not. We desperately need more platforms like this to help educate and inspire the next generation of women to help firmly believe in themselves and be leaders in everything that they do, against all odds. It's an honor to be a part of this community and help foster the GWN mission. I wish I had been a mentee in this program when I was in high school!

woman who is on her own, while Kincaid's piece is set in a rural community addressing a Caribbean daughter. "How could you turn your more general poem into one that is much more specific to your experience?" I wondered aloud. While I suggested she make it more specific, incorporating rules and advice about being a Bengali-American girl in 2016, I did not want to pressure her to reveal or say more than she felt comfortable saying. I am cognizant that not every culture enjoys confession and self-expression as much as my own.

## Part Two: A Glimpse into the Mentee/Mentor Process

Writing and editing together is a process of back and forth which is hard to capture in time and words. Tasnim Tarannum, my mentee, wrote a poem entitled "Don't Forget: From Mother to Daughter." I will recreate our process of writing and revising this piece as best I can.

In our first meetings in the fall 2016, we both looked at the 2016 Girls Write Now anthology, *(R)EVOLUTION*. I asked Tasnim to dip into the book over the next week and pick three pieces she really liked, choosing writings in different genres. I would do the same. In the next two meetings we read our choices aloud and discussed them for content and style. One of Tasnim's choices was a poem, "Rules for Being a Modern Woman," by Lauren Hesse, a GWN mentor. Hesse's poem rings with Don'ts: "Don't take up space on the subway.... Don't speak too aggressively in your meeting; you don't want to come off as scrappy to executives...Don't take an Uber alone...Don't text him first...." A poem of warnings.

At a subsequent meeting, I added to our discussion "Girl," by Jamaica Kincaid. I like to bring in literature that gives us a jumping off place. In this prose poem, the mother gives the daughter all sorts of advice: how to grow okra, how to iron her father's shirt, how to smile and to whom. I suggested that we free write about advice/warnings—positive and negative—given by a mother, father, or relatives to a girl. Tasnim free wrote for about seven minutes and then read it aloud to me.

The following week Tasnim turned her free write into a poem. We talked about specificity and universality. We talked about how Lauren Hesse's poem is situated in an urban environment addressing a young single professional



A HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT DEVELOPS HER ESSAY WITH A WRITING COACH AT THE GIRLS WRITE NOW SCHOLARSHIP-A-THON, PHOTO COURTESY OF AUTHOR

This is from an early draft of Tasnim's poem:

Don't forget to study hard.  
 Don't forget to wear a hijab.  
 Don't forget to cover up your rear with a long dress.  
 Don't forget to wear loose pants; others should not see your figure clearly  
 Don't forget to study hard, but don't forget to help others,  
 Your sister for example.  
 Remember family is of utmost importance.  
 Don't forget to be in bed by 11, by 10 you are a sweetheart.  
 Don't forget to bring all your appliances to school, we did not buy all of those for you to leave collecting dust while you idly waste time without a pencil  
 Don't forget to study  
 Don't forget your MetroCard we want to make sure you abide by the rules at all times.  
 Don't forget to comb your hair you don't want someone thinking you come from the slums  
 we did not raise you like that.  
 So don't fret over little things but always remember to look your best

so at least the illusion  
that nothing is wrong with you  
is always  
there.

To this draft Tasnim added details. I asked her to think about repetition. In "Girl" what was most important to the mother was repeated or emphasized: ". . . is it true that you sing **benna** in Sunday school?; . . . on Sundays try to walk like a lady and not like the **slut** you are so bent on becoming; don't sing **benna** in Sunday school; . . .this is how to hem a dress when you see the hem coming down and so to prevent yourself from looking like the **slut** I know you are so bent on becoming; . . ." That her daughter not be a slut (or not be thought of as being a slut) and not sing benna was of great concern to the mother. I asked Tasnim what was most important to the mother in her poem; what was she most worried about? Tasnim decided it would be the wearing of the hijab and how it is an important part of the Muslim culture; for sure, the mother did not want that tradition to be lost just because they lived in another country. We had talked about current anti-Muslim feeling; I had brought in a *New York Times* article on the issue to discuss. I asked if she encountered hostile comments at school or on the subway because she wore a hijab. She said no; her school was quite diverse and accepting. This concern was unfortunately timely as Trump had just submitted the 'Muslim Ban.'

Over the period of about a month, from her first short version to the final version, she penned maybe five drafts, tightening it up, making it more concrete, working on capitals and periods. She added a second reference to the hijab. Now that she had added more specifics so we could see the girl she was writing about, I asked her to look at word usage, sentencng, and some punctuation. I gave Tasnim feedback on her use of the repetition of "study hard" as I felt that took away from the emphasis on the hijab.

Don't forget to study hard.

Don't forget to wear a hijab. . . .

Don't forget to study hard. But don't

forget to help others, . . .

Don't forget to study

Don't forget your MetroCard

And I suggested that the final lines needed work:

So don't fret over little things

but always remember to look your best

so at least the illusion

that nothing is wrong with you

is always

there.

We discussed possible titles for the poem and the need for a footnote to acknowledge the two poems she was influenced by.

I hoped Tasnim would read her poem aloud at Chapters, but she chose a different poem. She did, however, decide to submit "Don't Forget: From Mother to Daughter" for the 2017 Girls Write Now anthology. She had wanted to submit her fantasy fiction piece, but it was not crafted well enough yet, and there was a word count restriction. So we worked some more on the poem. She added an introduction: she was concerned that this not be thought as something her mother had actually said to her. She wrote: "This is not inspired by my mother, but by words I hear around me from the stranger filled streets of Manhattan to my own community. It's a satirical piece that might speak for many women."

Tasnim also changed the reference to the hijab. Here I learned something about myself and my ability to read and edit. She felt the reference to the hijab seemed negative—as if the girl did not want to wear the scarf—and that definitely was not the impression she wanted to give. She therefore changed this line, which was repeated twice, from:

Don't forget to wear a hijab.

to:

Don't forget to tuck in the loose strands of hair  
poking out from your hijab.

and:

Don't forget to wear a hijab  
that actually goes with your clothing  
and skin tone.

She changed this to show how there is a lot of thought put into the maintaining and wearing of the hijab, as it is an integral part of the Muslim culture for many women. Tasnim did not want her poem to disrespect or misrepresent anyone. I had not picked up on the issue of the hijab as I was reading from my own blinkered cultural eyes. I was glad to have learned from Tasnim.

Here is the final version:

Don't Forget: From Mother to Daughter

Don't forget to study hard.

Don't forget to tuck in the loose strands of hair  
poking out from your hijab.

Don't forget to read the Holy Book,  
it's your saving grace.

Don't touch that sliver of meat,  
you don't know where it's been.

Don't take that first sip,  
you don't know where it might lead.

Don't forget to cover up your rear with a long  
dress.

Don't forget to wear loose pants; others should  
not

see your figure clearly.  
 Do not wear close fitting shirts,  
 you don't want someone gaping at you.  
 Don't forget to wear your glasses,  
 you know  
 you can't see without them.  
 Don't forget to study hard.  
 But don't  
 forget to help others,  
 especially your sister.  
 Remember family is of utmost importance.  
 Don't forget to be in bed by 11,  
 but by 10 is ideal.  
 Don't forget to bring all your school supplies with  
 you,  
 your notebooks and binders -  
 no matter how heavy.  
 We did not buy all of those  
 for you to leave  
 collecting dust  
 while you idly waste time  
 without a care in the world.  
 Honestly do you think the world  
 is so forgiving?  
 Don't forget your Metro Card.  
 Don't forget to be courteous  
 to all those around you,  
 yes, even the annoying kid who  
 stole your class notes.  
 Well all I can say is I am glad  
 you took  
 your binder with you.  
 Don't fret over little things.  
 We want to make sure you  
 abide by the rules at all times.  
 Don't forget to wear a hijab  
 that actually goes with your clothing  
 and skin tone.  
 You know you can't pull  
 that white hijab off;  
 you're not pale enough.  
 Don't forget to comb your hair,  
 you don't want someone thinking  
 you came from the  
 streets.  
*But I don't look that bad!*  
 We did not raise you like that.  
 Don't tell little white lies,  
 they may come back to bite you  
 when you least expect it.  
 Remember to look your best  
 so at least the illusion  
 that nothing is wrong with you  
 is always  
 there.

\*Inspired by "Girl" by Jamaica Kincaid and "Rules for Being a Modern Woman in New York City" by Lauren Hesse from the 2016 Girls Write Now anthology (*R*)EVOLUTION.

And so in May of 2017 her poem and all the other mentees' and mentors' writings were published in the 2017 Girls Write Now anthology, *Rise Speak Change*.

## Notes

I thank the six mentors who shared their experiences with me; special thanks to Emily Yost, Senior Program Coordinator, who helped facilitate this article and to Yael Ravin and Pam Annas for their astute editing. Thanks to mentee Tasnim Tarannum for her generosity in sharing her poem and her work on the several drafts leading up to its publication in the GWN anthology. And thanks to the mentees who allowed me to quote their comments about their experiences in the program.

<sup>1</sup> Demographics are for the program year 2015–2016:  
 74% White; 14% Bi-Racial/ Multiracial ; 5% Asian/S.Asian/Asian Am./Pacific Islander; 4% African; 4% Latina

Mentees: 31% African/African Am/Black; 19% Asian/S.Asian/Asian Am/Pacific Islander; 27% Latina; 15% Bi-racial; 4% White

Girls Write Now has built a record of achievement and innovation, distinguished three times by the White House and the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities as one of the nation's top after school programs, twice by the Nonprofit Excellence Awards as one of New York City's top ten nonprofits, and three times by the New York City Council as one of the city's top girl-focused programs. NBC Universal recently awarded our Digital Media Mentoring Program its grand prize 21st Century Solutions grant for social innovation through media arts. Girls Write Now has twice been named by *Time Out New York* a top place to volunteer, as we are covered by major news outlets like the *New York Times*, *NBC NightlyNews*, *Newsweek*, *Buzzfeed*, *Glamour*, *Forbes*, and countless others. In fall of 2016, Girls Write Now received the White House Champion of Change Award for creating opportunities for girls from marginalized communities so that all young people can reach their full potential.

For more about GWN, see:  
<https://www.girlswritenow.org/who-we-are/>.

<sup>2</sup> The Girls Write Now anthology has been recognized as the Outstanding Book of the Year in the Independent Publisher Book Awards, and has earned additional honors from the International Book Awards, National Indie Excellence Awards, Next Generation Indie Book Awards, and the New York Book Festival. <https://www.girlswritenow.org/what-we-write/anthologies/>



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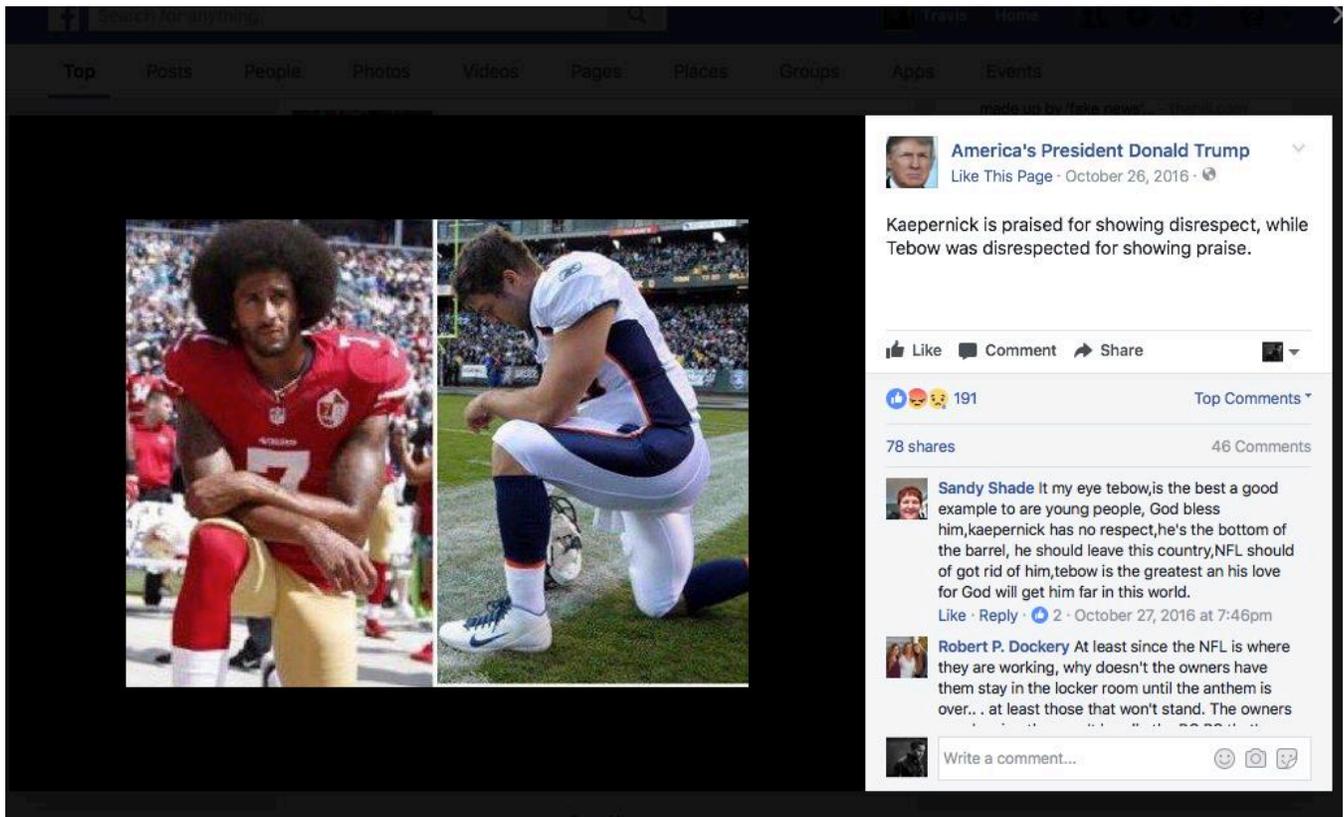
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# RADICAL TEACHER

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

## Putting Learning into Practice: Integrating Social Media, Crowd Learning, and #ColinKaepernick in an Introductory African American History Class

by Travis Boyce



THIS IMAGE IS A SCREEN SHOT FROM A POST ON U.S. PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP'S PAGE THAT SOUGHT TO VILIFY KAEPERNICK AND IMPLY TIM TEBOW AS A GREAT WHITE HOPE.

*Learning online with others is that, with every connection, direct and indirect, comes the opportunity to learn, and learning happens in many of these interactions.* - John Dron & Terry Anderson (in *Teaching Crowds: Learning and Social Media*, 2014, p. 4)

Note: African American History is a regular part of the University of Northern Colorado curriculum. The version discussed below concerns an adaptation that will be incorporated into its next offering.

## Introduction

In his 2006 article published in the *Journal of Negro Education*, historian Pero Gaglo Dagbovie (2006) notes that African American history “arguably represents one of the most dynamic sub-fields of U.S. historical inquiry and higher education” (p. 635). Used as framework to understanding the present lives of African Americans as well as the broader American society, African American history is primarily the study of centuries of challenges: momentous transformations in American society in which African Americans survived the institution of slavery and Jim Crow; endured the conservative repercussions of the Civil Rights Movement in the late twentieth century; and most recently the backlash aftermath of eight years of a Barack Obama presidency. In the wake of these challenges, Black intellectuals since the early twentieth century offered a Black Studies academic narrative to counter the Eurocentric paradigm. The new narrative led to the legitimization of African American history in the mainstream by the late twentieth century.

For the twenty-first century collegiate student, African American history presents knowledge to counter the Eurocentric paradigm. Furthermore, students (especially African Americans) can be empowered “to critically contemplate its status and compare its contributions with those of other generations of young Black people before the Civil Rights era and Black Power Movement” (p. 637). In this current political climate, where Black lives and everything associated with the Black Lives Matters Movement are being so blatantly delegitimized, it is paramount that not only African American history continues to be taught in higher education, but that there are also constant, improved pedagogical teaching practices to ensure the field’s long-term sustainability. In concert with Dagbovie’s (2006) central thesis, I am most interested as a university professor in making African American history relevant to the lives of my students. Because the modern college student is visually and technologically oriented, social media is a great teaching tool. This option can be used to put learning into practice. It can energize a traditional introductory African American history class and advance the discipline.

Social media is deeply ingrained in our personal and professional lives (O’Flaherty & Gee, 2012) and has transformed the way we communicate. We can be instantly connected with a global audience through a 140-character

tweet on the state of the affairs of the world, humorous memes shared on Facebook, cat videos posted on YouTube, or photos from a recent vacation posted on Instagram. Celebrities such as Rihanna, Kim Kardashian, and Snoop Dog have fully used social media to reinforce their brand, and they have amassed a large following. Most notably, U.S. President Donald J. Trump tweets as a means to bypass the mainstream media to disseminate his message to his followers. It’s not just celebrities who use social media. Everyday people and various institutions maintain an online presence. The social media platform Twitter, for example, played a significant role in mobilizing protests in the Arab Spring revolution in 2011 (McKenzie, 2014; Pollard, 2014). During the 2008 presidential election, the Barack Obama campaign effectively used social media to reach out to a broader, younger audience, thus making radio ads (and to a certain extent television ads) obsolete.

***I am most interested as a university professor in making African American history relevant to the lives of my students.***

As social media matured these past years, it has become an essential technological tool in traditional educational settings. For example, professor Brian McKenzie used Twitter in his class to reenact the history of the Paris Commune and the Battle of Stalingrad. His students assumed identities of historical figures for their respective Twitter handles and tweeted in real time using primary sources (McKenzie, 2014). Professor Elizabeth Pollard, a historian at San Diego State University, used Twitter in her World History survey course to allow students to create back channel during lectures and outside the class. The technique resulted in an interactive course in a class setting of 400 students (Pollard, 2014). Most notably, academic and educational institutions, professional academic associations, and educational policy institutes have created and maintained a social media presence to create learning communities, and to network and disseminate information.

The use of social media, from an educational perspective, is part of a long human tradition of crowd learning. Scholars Jon Dron and Terry Anderson (2014) state in their book *Teaching Crowds: Learning and Social Media*, “Historically, learning was nearly always with and from a crowd: methods, tools, customs, dances, music and stories, whether prototypical or fully formed, all played a role in establishing a collective, learned culture” (p. 5). Social media is an excellent tool to reinforce these old traditions of crowd learning. Accompanied with an identified and widely used hashtag to our social media posts, our ideas can go viral and be used and cited in social or intellectual discourse on array of topics. It is important for students, scholars, and laypeople to form and maintain communities on the web. Through community interactions, learning evolves, new ideas are created, where knowledge does not merely move in a “one-way” direction.

For those who follow American sports, popular culture, and race relations and politics, #ColinKaepernick was by far one of the most recognized hash tags on social media during the second half of 2016 and early 2017. During a preseason game in 2016, Colin Kaepernick, the former starting quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers, sat (and later throughout the season, knelt) through the playing of the national anthem of the United States as a sign of protest to address structural racism; particularly, he meant, police brutality against communities of color. In our digital age, Kaepernick's form of protest is especially timely. With the presidential election in full swing and the polarization of race relations increasing, the United States has been feeling the weight of pressing issues: White anxiety, anger at President Obama, police shootings and brutality against communities of color, the rise of White nationalism (colloquially known as the Alt-Right or Alternative Right), and the start of the #BlackLivesMatter movement. People turned to social media to either show their support and/or solidarity for Kaepernick or to express their disgust in forms of dog whistles and overt racist and nationalistic rhetoric. Using the hashtag #ColinKaepernick or the like, there is a wealth of discourses (commentaries, videos, and memes, among others) for students in an introductory contemporary African American history course. Students will be able to see how both the plight of African American athletes in history and broader issues in contemporary African American history parallel the Colin Kaepernick saga. They will see that the discourse associated with #ColinKaepernick is not just limited to sport history, but also to an array of issues in African American history that will reinforce the comprehensive knowledge from their class.

***This article will demonstrate that although the discourse surrounding Kaepernick is polarizing, nasty, and at times extremely racist, it is an excellent pedagogical strategy to help students put their learning into practice and engage with a wider audience on topics discussed in an introductory African American history course.***

This article will deconstruct social media posts associated with the hashtag Colin Kaepernick as a teaching strategy to help students enrolled in an introductory African American course. The aim is to put their learning into practice by encouraging them to actively engage with a wider audience on topics relevant to the course content. Because one of the primary challenges of crowd learning via social media is "mining" the high volume of posts associated with hot topic hashtags, this article will focus on a prominent theme associated with the discourse of Kaepernick. I will specifically explore the "Bad Nigger" archetype to draw parallels with Kaepernick. I will compare the commentary against Kaepernick with the rhetoric used to denounce the famous yet notorious boxer Jack Johnson (as well others). Johnson was the first African American

boxing heavyweight champion of the world (from 1908–1915). This article will demonstrate that although the discourse surrounding Kaepernick is polarizing, nasty, and at times extremely racist, it is an excellent pedagogical strategy to help students put their learning into practice and engage with a wider audience on topics discussed in an introductory African American history course. The article will specifically compare the rhetoric around Colin Kaepernick within the historical context of the plight of African American activist athletes. In this way, students can use social media to likewise make historical comparisons. Before I dive into the discussion, I will first examine why #ColinKaepernick is significant.

## Why Colin Kaepernick Matters

On October 30, 2016, I attended a campaign rally for Donald Trump that was held on the campus where I teach. Trump began his address with a critique of the National Football League (NFL), saying it had poor ratings. He invoked dog-whistle rhetoric by blaming Kaepernick for the ratings' decline—a move resulting in boos from the audience at the rally. Dog-whistle racial rhetoric is not new, and such strategies have been effectively used as a strategy to implicitly invoke racial anxiety by politicians as was the case in George Wallace's 1963 gubernatorial inaugural address and George H.W. Bush's infamous Willie Horton ad. Hearing Trump use this technique, I was taken aback to see a candidate for president use this tactic at a time when we are told we are living in a post racial society. I could not help but connect Trump's dog-whistle characterization of Kaepernick to the "bad nigger" archetype that was placed on former heavyweight champion boxer Jack Johnson over a century ago.

The Colin Kaepernick saga is, in effect, part of a long tradition of the American mainstream condemning African American athletes who challenge the racial social order. If one examines the sociopolitical order of Jack Johnson's time, one would find some striking similarities to the atmosphere of Kaepernick's world. Johnson's reign (1908–1915) coincidentally fell within the nadir of race relations in the United States. At the time, racial segregation was constitutional, therefore sanctioning Jim Crow laws (*Plessey v. Ferguson*, 1896). Approximately 3,200 African American men were lynched in the American South between 1880–1940 and approximately 1,500 during the Progressive era of 1900–1917 (Wood, 2009; Wigginton, 2006). Confederate monuments were erected in hundreds of communities to tell history through a "white southern perspective" (Mills, 2003, xvii). Jack Johnson's capturing of the heavyweight boxing championship was indeed timely, as he was viewed as threat to the social order. He had success and was living conspicuously well, affronting many Whites who did not believe Blacks could be equal.

Boxing, during the early twentieth century, was viewed as the essence of White masculinity (Romero, 2004). Johnson's lengthy reign vexed White America. The American press and boxing promoters recruited a series of "White Hopes" to defeat Johnson (Hutchinson, 2016). Additionally, Johnson's personal life was fair game for comment. He wore expensive, tailored clothes, drove fast

cars, did not defer to Whites in terms of racial etiquette, and married and/or had sexual relationships with White women (Wigginton, 2006; Burns et al., 2005). Jack Johnson was framed as a bad nigger. As noted in Al-Tony Gilmore's *Bad Nigger! The National Impact of Johnson*, a bad nigger was someone who "adamantly refuses to accept the place given to blacks in American society, and who frequently challenges the outer perimeters of expected behavior" (Gilmore, 1975, p. 12). The rhetoric in media as well as by everyday lay people sought to defame Johnson and framed him both overtly and covertly as a bad nigger.

Juxtaposing the sociopolitical order of Johnson's era to that of Kaepernick's, one can find similar characteristics. Within the last twenty-five years, 43% of right-wing terror incidents in the United States were at the hands of White supremacists (Anti-Defamation League, 2017). The number does not include the series of police brutality and killings of members of communities of color in recent years. It is as if today's U.S. atmosphere is open to and indeed endorses the mainstream right's unchecked violence against communities of color. That's troubling, but it is also in sync with anti-Black sentiment of the early twentieth century. The common narrative places the blame squarely on the victim. For example, Eric Garner and Michael Brown (of Ferguson, Missouri), both unarmed African American men, were killed by police officers and retroactively framed as responsible for their own deaths because, people said, they did not respect the authority of law enforcement.

Like Johnson, Kaepernick, an African American, played football quarterback, a position historically reserved for White men. When he became outspoken about Black inequality, he found that the media, politicians, and lay people condemned him for his actions—in effect, labeling him a *bad nigger*. He was framed as being unpatriotic, ungrateful, arrogant, and an opportunist. Donald Trump (among other political, media and sports pundits; particularly legendary NFL coach Mike Ditka) noted that Kaepernick should leave the country. He received death threats, and people burned his jersey in effigy. Kaepernick was delayed in signing to a team and is, in effect, blackballed from the NFL. At a March 2017 rally, Trump credited his rhetoric for NFL owners not signing Kaepernick to their respective teams. The teams, for their part, want to avoid further protests and Trump tweets as many of the fans feel Kaepernick was speaking against the United States.

At the same time, Colin Kaepernick has risen to popular-culture icon status because he used his platform as a professional athlete to spark a conversation on race. For many, he is the young generation's Muhammad Ali. Ali saw his boxing career come to a temporary halt because of his affiliation with the Nation of Islam and refusal in 1966 to be inducted into the military during the Vietnam War era. Ali, like Johnson and Kaepernick, did not conform to the status quo and was considered a threat to the American social order.

Both the social and intellectual discourse and the crowd learning surrounding #ColinKaepernick on social media provides an excellent opportunity for students to explore African American history collaboratively. For the

discussion portion of this article, I will provide pedagogical strategies surrounding #ColinKaepernick using subthemes that I plan to incorporate in future introductory African American history classes.

## Navigating #ColinKaepernick

To start the process of using crowd learning via social media, the first challenge is to "mine" through a high volume of posts. Look at hot topic hashtags like #ColinKaepernick—there is a huge volume of content surrounding that tag. What I am looking for is useful commentary where my students can interrogate social media posts, apply content skills learned in class, and engage with members of the online community on issues surrounding Kaepernick. For example, I looked for specific themes to illustrate how #ColinKaepernick can be used to draw parallels with the plight and public condemnation of African American activists in U.S. history. I will use subthemes that I can derive from the legacy of Jack Johnson as well as other activist African American athletes, such as "Reclaiming the Great White Hope" and "When Black Equality Is Viewed as Militant." Such subthemes directly connect Kaepernick to his predecessors.

### "Reclaiming the Great White Hope"

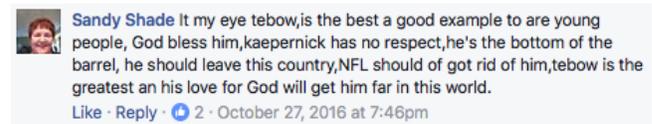
Perhaps one of the most interesting subthemes in African American history that is applicable to the present-day narrative is the White Hope archetype. When Jack Johnson defeated Tommy Burns in 1908 to capture the heavyweight championship of the world, a range of people, from reporters to fight promoters, sought out to find a Great White Hope to defeat Johnson. I will strongly emphasize in lecture supported by primary data that these reporters and fight promoters wished to reaffirm White supremacy at a time when race relations in the United States were already at a low point. I will specifically present to the class two primary documents in which members of the press vilified Johnson by promoting the Great White Hope mythology. For example, Jack London, a novelist and sportswriter for the *New York Herald* wrote, "But one thing now remains, Jeffries [the former, retired heavyweight boxing champion of the world] must emerge from his alfalfa farm and remove that golden smile from Johnson's face. Jeff, it's up to you!" (cited in Hutchinson, 2016, p. 25). Similar to sensationalized news posted on social media in the present day, London's piece was accompanied by commentary and caricatures designed to both dehumanize and delegitimize Johnson. The *Dallas Morning News*, for example, depicted Johnson in caricature—apelike, with thick lips and wide eyes—thus justifying White men's claim to biological superiority as the only ones worthy to be the heavyweight-boxing champions of the world (Gilmore, 1975). I will further emphasize in lecture that during Jack Johnson's reign, "promoters and the press exploited then-pervasive American mythology about frontier demigods and the purity of rural America. During this period, newspapers were replete with stories of Bunyonesque giants rising from America's western states to solve the Jack Johnson problem" (Hutchinson, 2016, p. 34).

I will then juxtapose some 100 years of the Great White Hope mythology to its present variant. In the twenty-first century, the quarterback is the most celebrated and highest paid member of the U.S. football team. The racial politics of who plays quarterback is grounded in the historical narrative that Whites are more intelligent and strategic than Blacks. The primarily White audience has attacked Kaepernick from the purview of the Great White Hope narrative. Using Heisman trophy winner and former NFL quarterback Tim Tebow, they have found their White Hope.

Commentary from social media shows students a modern use of this historical narrative. For their out-of-class assignment, I will direct students to interrogate select social media posts and provide a commentary of their thoughts and findings on the class private discussion board. I will specifically direct them to the Facebook handle "America's President Donald Trump," as posted on October 26, 2016: a photo (see Figure 1) juxtaposing the two footballers.

On my class's private discussion board, students will discuss similarities and differences between the two photos and accompanied commentary. The goal behind this assignment is for students to analyze such renditions of the Great White Hope mythology based on the images and

a gun-toting Black Panther member of the 1960s. Tebow wears an all-white uniform and is photographed taking a knee in profile with his head down. Few in the class may know that Tebow once starred in a Super Bowl commercial promoting the right-leaning Focus on the Family. I will provide some context to this by screening the controversial commercial to demonstrate Tebow's acceptance by the White mainstream as the embodiment of the Great White Hope. The social media commentary regarding the two athletes (see Figures 2 and 3) mirrors the anti-Johnson/Great White Hope narrative of over a century ago. While not explicitly racist, the commentary condemning Kaepernick is in step with the Great White Hope mythology and the anti-Black sentiments hurled at Johnson. Most notably these media commentators implicitly designate Tebow as a Great White Hope, while indicating that Kaepernick is not one of "us."



**FIGURE 2:** THIS IMAGE IS A SCREEN SHOT FROM SANDY SHADE'S FACEBOOK POST ON AMERICA'S PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP PAGE. THIS IS HER COMMENTARY FROM THE COMMENTARY THREAD OF COLIN KAEPERNICK AND TIM TEBOW.



**FIGURE 1.** THIS IMAGE IS A SCREEN SHOT FROM A POST ON U.S. PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP'S PAGE THAT SOUGHT TO VILIFY KAEPERNICK AND IMPLY TIM TEBOW AS A GREAT WHITE HOPE.

commentary. But more importantly I want my students to see how the discipline of African American history can be used as framework to understanding the present lives of African Americans as well as American society as a whole.

In the next class meeting, we will interrogate the social media posts and their commentary. By now, students in class will be able to both deconstruct the image and commentary and to ground it in the racial politics of Jack Johnson, boxing, and the Great White Hope mythology of the early twentieth century. Postings praise Tebow for kneeling and publicly expressing his Christian beliefs. In comparison, Kaepernick is kneeling, facing the camera, with a scowl on his face, donning an afro; such a hairstyle is reminiscent of a supposedly villainous image of

This focus on the commentary highlights the use of social media in crowd teaching. Whether the people posting know it or not, they are part of a larger conversation in which we can learn the narrative of the Great White Hope as it is used today and throughout history. Considering Jack London's call, cited earlier, for Jim Jefferies to stand up for the White race, I will point out that one commentator (see Figure 2), under the same discussion thread, questions Kaepernick's patriotism and playing abilities and resoundingly praises Tebow because of his evangelical Christian principles. Moreover, I will estimate if students think it matters on

social media that Kaepernick has proven to be the better quarterback with a much longer and more productive career than Tebow. Race is not explicitly noted, but the commentator seems to feel that Kaepernick is not one of "us," while Tebow embodies the best of this country because of his Christian values (and implicitly, his Whiteness).

I will then show students that this commentary is seconded in the same thread when another commentator simply states that Tebow is essentially a reflection of us (see Figure 3).



**FIGURE 3:** THIS IMAGE IS A SCREEN SHOT FROM SONIA BAPTISTE'S FACEBOOK POST ON AMERICA'S PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP PAGE. THIS IS HER COMMENTARY FROM THE COMMENTARY THREAD OF COLIN KAEPERNICK AND TIM TEBOW.

Students can also follow commentaries on the topic by high-profile members of the conservative media and sports world. For example, I will show them online at *Breitbart News* that former Boston Red Sox pitcher Kurt Schilling implicitly embraced the Great White Hope mythology under the guise of criticizing political correctness and the media (Hayward, 2016).

Finally, I will discuss with my class what the lessons the social media posts and the commentators are providing. At this point in the course, based on the image and the commentary's rhetoric, students can relate #ColinKaepernick (and by extension others) to the travails of Jack Johnson, African American life, and the overall American society in the early twentieth century. The images and the word choice from the select commentators mirror that of their predecessors over a century prior. Comparing contemporary rhetoric to that of the past, my students will be armed with historical content that enables them to be aware citizens as they dialogue online via social media platforms on these issues.

**"When Black Equality Is Viewed as Militant"**

Another subtheme we will investigate is "Black Equality Is Viewed as Militant" when examining the Black Power Movement during the late 1960s and early 1970s. I will specifically discuss in class the idea that race, sport, and social equality in U.S. history are directly connected. For example, the state of Mississippi had an unwritten law that forbade the intercollegiate competition of Mississippi's state-supported colleges against integrated schools. State officials feared that an integrated game would inevitably lead to integration in all aspects of life, thus debunking the myth of White supremacy (Henderson, 1997). Furthermore, it was more than just the integration of sports; it was the fear of social equality. As Russell Wigginton (2006) indicates, Jack Johnson "symbolized blackness," which Whites feared and vilified (p. 39). Because Johnson did not stay "in his place" as a Black man in the early twentieth century, his winning the heavyweight boxing championship of the world had the potential to inspire others to challenge the racial hierarchal structure.

In class, I will present my students with an 1910 editorial titled, "A Word to the Black Man," that was published the *Los Angeles Times* in the wake of Johnson's victory over Great White Hope and former heavyweight boxing champion Jim Jefferies. It was a reminder that the Johnson victory changed nothing about the racial social order. It reads:

Do not point your nose too high. Do not swell your chest too much. Do not boast too loudly. Do not be puffed up. Let not your ambition be in ordinate or take a wrong direction. ...Remember, you have done nothing at all. You are just the same member of society today you were last week...You are on no higher plane, deserve no new consideration, and will get none. ... No man will think a bit higher of you because your complexion is the same as that of the victor at Reno. (as cited in Gilmore, 1975, p. 44)

What did this editorial mean to Johnson's athletic successors during the Black Power movement, such as Arthur Ashe, Jim Brown, Muhammad Ali, and sprinters John Carlos and Tommie Smith? Over fifty years after Johnson's defeat, for African Americans, the U.S. Civil Rights Movement resulted in momentous transformations in U.S. society. However, resistance to change remained a constant. High-profile African Americans such as athletes (i.e. Arthur Ashe, O.J. Simpson) were put in situations where they could face reprisals if they challenged the racial status quo. Olympic sprinters and medalists John Carlos and Tommie Smith elected to challenge the racial status quo. In class, we will situate "When Black Equality is Viewed as Militant" through the experiences of Carlos and Smith to demonstrate how, through the parallel, my students could also understand the travails of #ColinKaepernick.



**FIGURE 4:** THIS IMAGED IS A SCREENSHOT FROM THE TWITTER ACCOUNT OF MRNEGROMILLIANT. HIS MAY 2, 2017 TWEET OF THE IMAGE IS OF A RE-CREATION OF THE ICONIC IMAGE OF THE 1968 SUMMER OLYMPICS IN WHICH AMERICAN SPRINTERS JOHN CAROLS AND TOMMIE SMITH RAISED THEIR FIST (BLACK POWER SALUTE) DURING THE PLAYING OF THE NATIONAL ANTHEM DURING THE PODIUM CEREMONY.

In what appears to be an anonymous Twitter handle, "MrMilitantNegro," we find a re-creation of the iconic image of the 1968 Olympic medal ceremony (see Figure 4), in which American sprinters John Carlos (right) and Tommie Smith (center) are on the podium giving the Black power salute during the playing of the national anthem. However, in this rendition Colin Kaepernick replaces Australian sprinter and silver medalist Peter Norman, stressing a powerful connection among African American activist athletes from the past to present. Similar to the early twentieth century, this image in social media offers students a powerful history lesson in which socio-political issues of the 1960s connect to the present day.

The commentary that accompanies this image complements the aim of the image. Like Kaepernick, Carlos and Smith were deemed troublemakers. During the medal-presentation ceremony, as they raised their fists during the playing of the national anthem, they were summarily booed by U.S. citizens in attendance. During lecture, I will ask students how what Carlos and Smith did is similar to what Kaepernick did. Now students can see that the sprinters sought to use their literal platform to address structural racism in the United States. Students might also explain that this was a time when the U.S. Civil Rights Movement reached a pivotal point and I may relate Carlos and Smith's trials to other events of the era, such as the assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and presidential hopeful Robert F. Kennedy; race riots in Watts (Los Angeles) and Newark, New Jersey; and the escalation of the Vietnam Conflict.

Some students may want to explore specifically the media portrayal of Black militancy and equality. I will direct my students to AP sportswriter Will Grimsley, for example, who referred in 1968 to Carlos and Smith as *militants* (Peterson, 2016). Based on Grimsley's rhetoric, I will challenge my students to interrogate this topic on the class discussion board by providing evidence of similar examples of such rhetoric from the media today in relationship to Kaepernick. Additionally, I will encourage students to interrogate the Twitter meme by examining why there are fears about Black equality. By studying #ColinKaepernick in comparison to the history of other "outspoken" Black athletes, it is clear that such fear continues to haunt this country.

## Conclusion

The discourse surrounding #ColinKaepernick is an excellent example of a pedagogical strategy to help students put their learning into practice and engage with a wider audience on topics discussed in an introductory African American history course. In this article, I have demonstrated that studying #ColinKaepernick shows students how his experiences mirrored those of his predecessors (i.e., Jack Johnson among others). By examining social media, students can draw contemporary parallels to historical events and narratives. It is true that because #ColinKaepernick is such a hot topic, one of the disadvantages of using him is that one ends up sifting through a high volume of data posted on social media platforms. Nevertheless, this exercise is also an

opportunity for students to engage with such data in an introductory African American history course where they can put their learning into practice by looking critically at the present compared to the past.

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# RADICAL TEACHER

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

## Radicalizing the Digital Humanities: Reimagining Environmental Justice Research and Teaching

by Stevie Ruiz, Maira Areguin, Eduardo Estrada, Jesus Jimenez, Diane Lopez, Karla Sanchez, and Janet Valenzuela



PHOTOGRAPH OF MEXICAN-AMERICAN YOUTH AT CAMP NORTH RIM OF GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK, COMPANY 818, CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS, RECORD GROUP 35, NATIONAL ARCHIVES, COLLEGE PARK, MARYLAND.

## Environmental Justice Collective

In Spring of 2017, a collective of students and their professor was awarded a grant to create a digital humanities research lab by the College of Humanities at our university. The “Digital Environmental Humanities Lab” is intended to provide undergraduate students with the opportunity to collaborate with a faculty member on a digital humanities research project. For this initial project, students were asked to code information related to environmental justice research using digital scanned copies of primary sources. The professor who led the research lab digitized copies of archival materials that pertained to Chicana/o enrollees in the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC established in 1933). Lab members and their professor shared in the co-authorship, analysis, and editorial work for this article about how mind maps were used to visualize data to incorporate digital tools into environmental justice research.

Students enrolled in this lab had completed environmental justice courses taught by the professor who led the environmental justice lab. Additionally, each of the students was a self-identified Chicana/o first-generation student who possessed no research experience in a formal lab setting. All students involved in the lab noted that after taking their environmental justice courses, one of their frustrations had been the lack of knowledge about Chicana/o involvement in conservation movements that preceded the Civil Rights Movements of the 1960s. In order to gain a complex understanding of Chicana/o involvement in the CCC, students relied upon state archival records collected at the National Archives as a means of reimagining Chicana/o relationships to the environment. To engage the imagination, students argued that it was essential to code data using digital humanities tools that were not traditionally used in the social sciences and humanities: mind maps. A mind map is a diagram that allows you to visualize information using brainstorming techniques. XMIND software is an application that enables students to sketch, analyze and visualize a thought process on ink or in a digital format.

***Students argued that it was necessary to utilize CCC archives as inspiration to transform the dialogue about environmental justice as it pertained to Chicana/os, since studies about conservation, climate change, and mainstream environmentalism were dominated by whiteness.***

The students were, as a group, invested in interdisciplinary theories and methods influenced by ethnic studies. They worked alongside their professor to shape the direction of the research. Initial questions concerned: 1) the lack of diversity in U.S. national memory as it pertained to the U.S. national parks and 2) the role urban working-class people of color have played in shaping the

contours of environmental justice. Students argued that it was necessary to utilize CCC archives as inspiration to transform the dialogue about environmental justice as it pertained to Chicana/os, since studies about conservation, climate change, and mainstream environmentalism were dominated by whiteness.<sup>1</sup> To take the most recent example, in the first seven months of his administration, President Donald J. Trump has withdrawn the United States from honoring the Paris Climate Agreement, authorized drilling oil at the Standing Rock Indian Reservation, accepted the resignation of Environmental Protection Agency’s Chief Environmental Justice strategist Mustafa Ali, and pledged the rollback of a number of environmental protections in the name of U.S. job growth. Our collective views his most recent policy changes as an assault on poor working-class families and American Indian communities. We view environmental justice research as significant because it recognizes the cultural capital that communities of color possess when it comes to climate resilience. Research on climate change has yet to recognize how communities of color remained resilient throughout U.S. history in dire circumstances including slavery, colonization, and imperialism.<sup>2</sup> Thus, when we recognize the contributions of environmental justice activists who come from culturally diverse backgrounds we illustrate the ways in which urban working-class communities belong in leadership positions that will help save our planet.

In lab discussions, students expressed a greater need to be reflected in curriculum about environmental justice. Discussions in the lab took place each week during the last twenty minutes as students reflected on their findings and participation. According to lab participant Diane Lopez, “in our research project, students want to recover lost environmental histories that have been racialized. The racialization of history displaces people of color from their involvement in any achievements and crises in environmental history. As a result, we are not able to imagine ourselves being affected by certain environmental catastrophes if we are not reflected as contributors in this history.”<sup>3</sup> The National Parks Service, for example, recently celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> centennial. However, the parks service erased many of the contributions blacks and Chicana/os have made to conservation.

How environmental history is narrated, remembered, and shared with communities serves the interests of institutions invested in particular narratives that historically celebrate whiteness. Lab participants viewed their involvement in this project as instrumental in challenging dominant narratives about to whom nature in the U.S. belonged and how it served the U.S. nation state. Conservation historians typically recycle the same narrative that the leaders of sustainability were predominantly white affluent men who wanted to conquer the wilderness. This often fosters attitudes that the “great outdoors” are places of refuge for hunting, fishing, and hiking.<sup>4</sup> However, urban working-class communities’ engagement with nature has been structured considerably differently. Careful consideration of Chicana/o farm workers’ movements to ban pesticides or environmental struggles involving African-Americans to end lead contamination in water remains largely unacknowledged. If environmentalists want

to include communities of color, the culture of conservation must change. Conservationists need to provide historical information that ties in movements for ecological justice in order to become culturally relevant to disenfranchised communities.

Lab participants understood that their position as first-generation students of color were significant because the ratio of students enrolled in humanities research labs at California State University, Northridge, located in Los Angeles County, who come from low income and historically disenfranchised communities is low. Most recent studies about minority student achievement gaps demonstrate that Chicana/os and Latina/os comprise less than 15 percent of bachelor degree recipients in the U.S.<sup>5</sup> These numbers are compounded by the fact that this demographic of students also face high rates of environmental hazards and toxins in their communities.<sup>6</sup> The same neighborhoods in Los Angeles where there are the highest push out rates among Chicana/o and Latina/o students also face the highest pollution burden indexes in the same city. For students who participated in this lab and grew up in Los Angeles County, this correlation was evident by the first day of the lab. According to lab participant Diane Lopez, "environmental justice aims to incorporate the intersections of communities' diverse identities such as race, gender, class, disability, and sexuality in order to uncover how these different axes intersect in shaping environmental outcomes."<sup>7</sup> In the mainstream environmentalist movement, there has been a lack of diversity as it pertains to environmental issues because they have primarily focused on the power of consumers buying in as a means of "going green".

***The same neighborhoods in Los Angeles where there are the highest push out rates among Chicana/o and Latina/o students also face the highest pollution burden indexes in the same city.***

Students saw their vision of environmental justice diverging from mainstream environmentalism because they viewed radical environmentalism as a way students as activists can address concerns over historical land dispossession, environmental racism, and shift the dialogue about sustainability by placing resource management into the hands of Indigenous peoples. To expand upon Laura Pulido's definition, environmental justice is a way to highlight how communities of color, low-income, queer, disabled, and deaf people are negatively impacted by environmental toxins, climate change, and pollution in their everyday lives.<sup>8</sup> Recent examples of environmental injustice include air pollution in close proximity to Chicana/o neighborhoods, unsafe drinking water in Flint, Michigan, consumed by African-Americans, Exide recycling battery plant's lead contamination in the Mexican-American neighborhood of Boyle Heights, and the 2016 North Dakota Access Pipeline conflict, which called into question Native-American sovereignty over land and water rights at Standing Rock Indian Reservation. From these examples,

students recognized that environmental issues require an intersectional analysis to call into question why historical events such as slavery, colonization and war continue to shape people of color and indigenous peoples' relationship to nature. When lab participants entered the environmental humanities lab, they were encouraged to draw upon the historical linkages of slavery, colonialism and capitalism to provide inspiration for their mind maps.

Access to digital tools in labs transforms students' relationship to research as a tool for empowerment. Many first-generation students struggle with issues of belonging, validation, and feeling included in the process of research. The students who participated in this lab knew that their voices were incorporated into a research process that would later be published by professors at their university. This experience was unique for undergraduate students because we are at a teaching university with limited resources. Many of our students come from low income working class backgrounds and balance multiple obligations, including full-time work schedules, undocumented immigration status, and commuter schedules due to affordability of living at home with family. Squeezing in time to voluntarily attend a research lab (without course credit) rarely occurred on our campus. Students who came to the lab were very excited, since these opportunities were rarely afforded to them as students housed in the College of Humanities at a state-level teaching institution. Indeed, their expertise as environmental justice scholars reached beyond the classroom because many had been exposed to ecological catastrophes in their communities. When we speak of communities in this geographical context, we hope that the spirit of the communities where students live and work is imported into the lab so that the voices of disenfranchised peoples are recovered into the analytical framing of the research that we worked on together.<sup>9</sup>

Since its inception as a field, environmental justice has located antiracist politics as central to understanding residential segregation, land confiscation, and divestment in order to address how communities of color grappled with food scarcity, natural resource management, climate resilience, and environmental degradation. From these debates, scholars, teachers, and community organizers have been instrumental in the *creation* and *sharing* of knowledge about environmental injustices.<sup>10</sup> For example, activists and researchers worked alongside one another to map cities using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) in order to identify spaces that were disproportionately impacted by high pollution burden indexes.<sup>11</sup> Environmental justice activists frequently worked closely with researchers in order to recruit students to become involved in local environmental justice activism. Service learning historically has served as a building block mission that assisted students in learning about how the community responded to problems that were highlighted in classroom discussions. From these experiences, students and professors have adopted non-traditional practices of learning and teaching, including centering the community as experts in their own knowledge about environmental injustice.

Our collective viewed the experiences of urban working-class communities who struggle against environmental injustice as an asset. Urban working-class communities possess what Tara Yosso identifies as experiential knowledge in tackling climate resilience, environmental health hazards, and a pollution burden that translates into funds of knowledge.<sup>12</sup> Students who participated in our environmental justice collective came with their own form of cultural capital because of the types of environmental injustices that their communities faced. Given the context of where they lived in Los Angeles County, many have already faced high pollution burdens beginning as early as elementary school years.

A bedrock of environmental justice is taking seriously the narratives from communities of color in regard to their experiences with environmental racism. In this context, radical teaching means shifting the epistemological foundation from Euro-centric theory into the hands of community members, activists, and community leaders. Environmental justice scholar Carolyn Finney, for example, argues that research about blacks, Chicana/os and American Indians' relationship to the natural environment must place their historical and racial formations in relationship to land policies of dispossession. Acknowledgement of the intersections of environmental history with how U.S. colonial authority was used to disenfranchise each community, respectively, via slavery, indentured servitude, land confiscation and immigration, opens the debates to include historically disenfranchised communities.<sup>13</sup> Environmental racism unfolds over time, shaping different communities' future relationship with nature as unequal. For communities of color who face the brunt of environmental injustice, it is significant to intersect history with lived embodied experiences in the present. This approach provides a way to radicalize information and knowledge production in the digital humanities.

## Civilian Conservation Corps Archives

In 1933, Franklin D. Roosevelt established the CCC as part of his work relief program supervised by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the U.S. Army. Under the New Deal, three million young men (no women) were recruited as enrollees in the CCC to work in U.S. national parks, fish and wildlife, and to assist in the building of national heritage sites.<sup>14</sup> Enrollees came from diverse backgrounds and included Blacks, Native-Americans, whites, and Mexican-Americans. An understudied

dimension of the CCC is the conditions and hostile work environments that urban working-class youth of color had to endure after enrolling in these camps. Our digital humanities project was an effort by the students to creatively articulate the importance of Mexican-American participation in CCC camps and to explore why their experience is valuable to an examination of environmental justice. For the students, the transformative power of environmental justice in part involves viewing themselves in the environmental history of the United States. One of the challenges they encountered was how to investigate a mostly white narrated history about conservation from a Chicana/o Studies perspective.

The historical memory of the CCC has been dominated by memories of white enrollees in the project of building national forests, parks, and trails to make a truly national park system democratic. At the outset, students understood that their role in the lab was to transform the historical memory about the racial landscape of the CCC in its contributions to the building of the national parks system. Because information about the CCC was recorded in documents located in the National Archives in



PHOTOGRAPH OF MEXICAN-AMERICAN YOUTH AT CAMP NORTH RIM OF GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK, COMPANY 818, CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS, RECORD GROUP 35, NATIONAL ARCHIVES, COLLEGE PARK, MARYLAND.

Washington, D.C., students argued that they had to read *against the grain*, as Anne Stoler argues, in order to capture the nuances, silences, and ruptures in the Chicana/o experience.<sup>15</sup> Careful attention was placed on dissident behaviors and practices that were taken by CCC members, whether punitive measures taken against them were documented, and how CCC officials discursively talked about racial taxonomies in camps as they pertained to Chicana/o enrollees.

Access to archives located in Washington, D.C., mediated by their professor, made students feel like they were a significant part of their professor's research. Some

of the insights that they gained included learning about how Mexican-Americans were treated in the CCC, a widely unacknowledged history that included discriminatory practices. The ethnic studies approach questions the uniformity of linear models of producing knowledge in environmental history research. Students commented that following this up by using non-linear forms of brainstorming activities provided them the opportunity to transform the multiplicity of narratives that were generated by mind mapping. Students created their own guidelines and expectations, which made their interaction with each document meaningful. It allowed them to document alternative histories that did not parallel the national memory of the CCC.

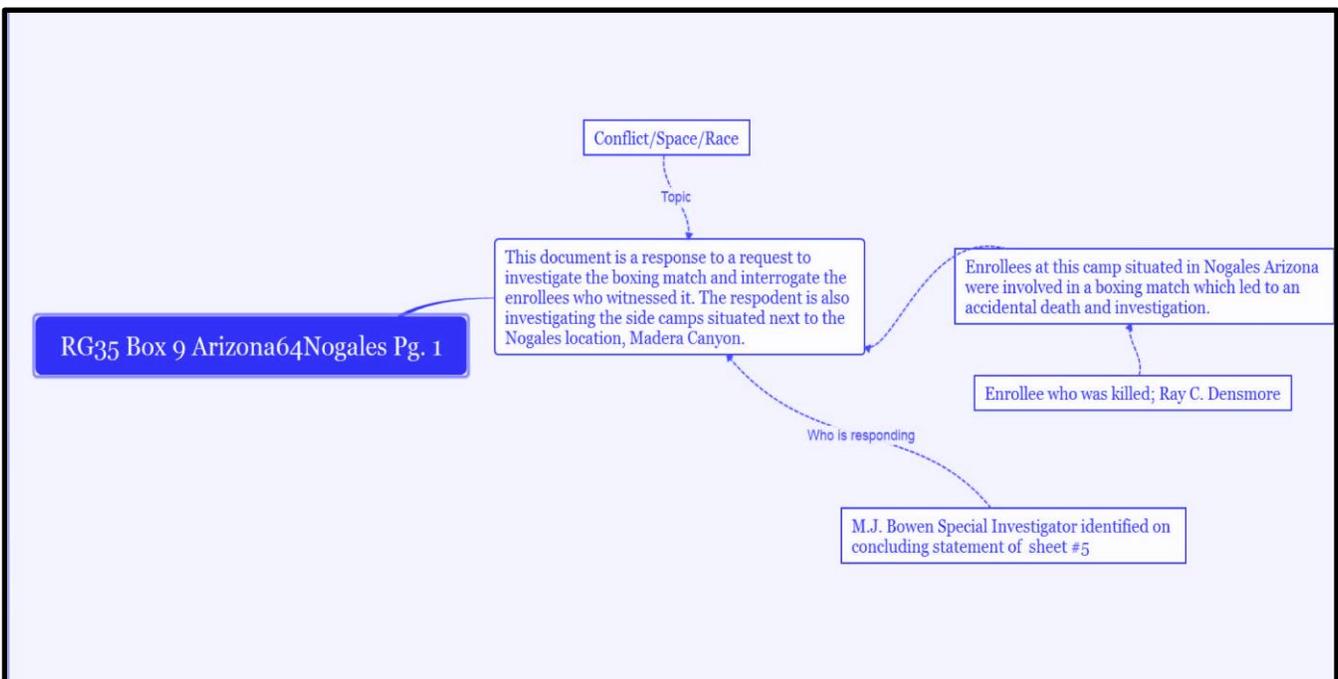
## Radicalizing the Digital Humanities

Using an intersectional methodological approach is crucial in informing the way we conduct research inclusive of the individuals who are typically excluded from environmental justice research. Intersectionality, notes Kimberlé Crenshaw, concerns itself with the acknowledgement of the various identities a person may carry at one time.<sup>16</sup> We employed this method by acknowledging how we, as students coming into the digital humanities, championed our identities to inform our research. This facilitated how we each found nuances within the archives which reflected our own lived experiences. As the humanities expands its interests into the digital realm, we view the intersections of lived embodied knowledge, and the multiplicity of overlapping race, class, gender and sexual identities, as central to how research and teaching accounts for these technologies in the classroom.<sup>17</sup> Scholars of digital humanities have yet to acknowledge that there still exists a digital divide between urban working-class communities of color and access to technology.

Our research allowed for the use of a digital humanities lab to analyze the exclusion of people of color in the narrative surrounding the creation of the national park system. Our analyses as individuals with varying positionalities and perspectives and the use of mind mapping software allowed us to shed light on the CCC. Indeed, we view environmental justice research as a means to recover knowledge about the CCC in order to fill in gaps within digital humanities and environmental history, both fields that continue to uphold a Eurocentrism that has been disregarded by environmental history and the digital humanities.<sup>18</sup> In this way, our research on environmental injustice in CCC camps hoped to aid in filling that gap within the digital humanities which concerns itself with mixing the digital technology and humanities but falls short on including diversity components.

Our environmental justice collective embraced the digital tools made available to us in the lab because we saw this as an opportune time to insert ourselves into digital humanities debates. As students who come from low-income backgrounds with little-to-no research experience, the ability to have a lab in the humanities was rare. Mind maps provided us with the ability to visualize our own thought processes and integrate a metacognitive approach rather than a linear approach.<sup>19</sup> With the use of diagrams about camp life in the CCC modeled from archival documents, we could visually express our own narrative into codified visual materials.

Students used diagrams, in-text codes, and linear dimensions to craft a historical narrative about the CCC. Typically, environmental historians are interested in change over time and the art of storytelling. The open source software, Xmind, allowed us to do both. Students took a central topic and then created subcategories to draw associations as evidence to support their main claims. Some of the topical codes that they collectively identified included 1) race relations, 2) conflict, 3) living conditions,



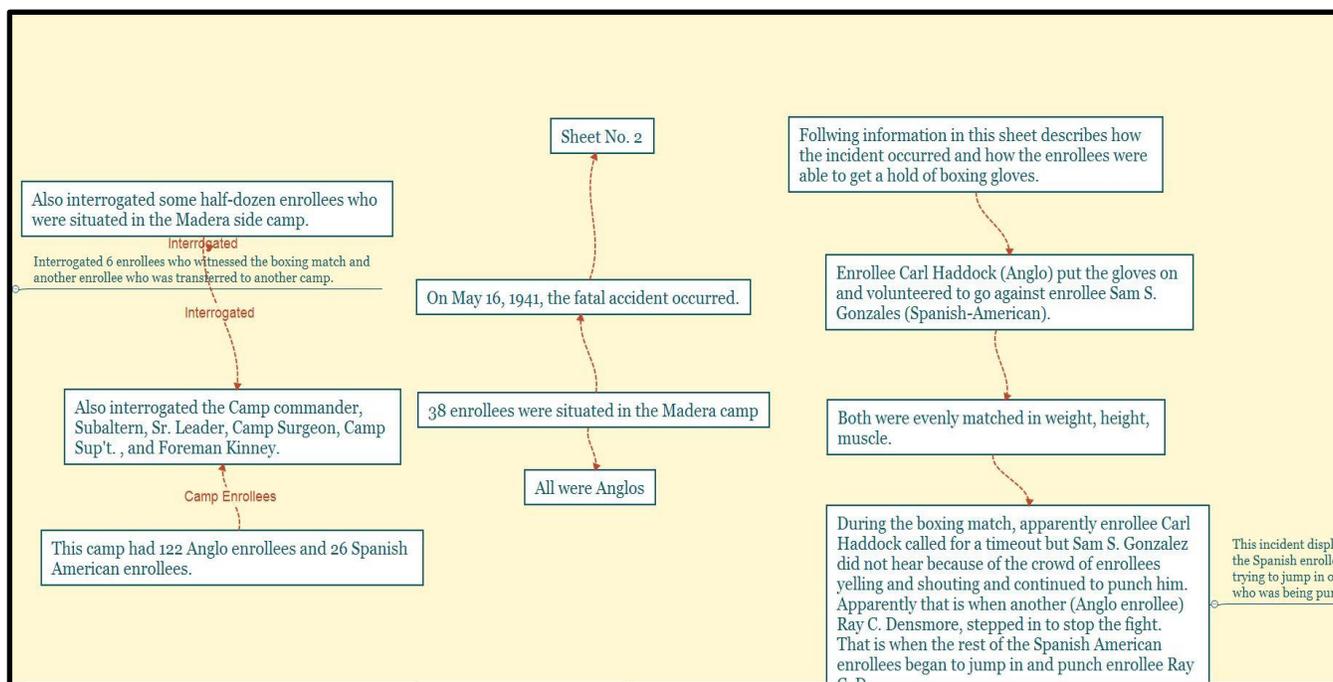
MIND MAP 1. THIS MAP REPRESENTS INTERETHNIC CONFLICT BETWEEN MEXICAN AND ANGLO YOUTH IN NOGALES, ARIZONA (COURTESY OF JESUS JIMENEZ)

and 4) nature. Branching from these main categories, students then drew associations to subcategories that were used to support their primary topic. As environmental justice researchers, we used these diagrams to craft a historical narrative about Mexican-American and other racial minorities' experiences in the CCC. Thus, prior to writing a conventional research paper, we found that brainstorming activities with the use of mind maps changed the ways in which we organized concepts and data taken from primary source material. As we coded documents based upon patterns that we saw in primary sources, we crafted narratives that were connected across different geographical regions and time periods. This was enabled because we visualized different phenomena in each camp based upon our findings as a collective.

Students focused on ethnic and racial biases that occurred in CCC camps. Careful attention was paid to inspection reports that involved interethnic conflicts in CCC camps. Camp Nogales in Arizona near the U.S.-Mexico border, for example, was comprised of 122 Anglo enrollees

and Mexican and Anglo enrollees that shaped the contours of their lived experiences in camps. Camp records illustrated how camp inspectors were invested in using violent altercations as evidence to racially classify Mexicans as inherently violent. As environmental justice researchers, our collective was attentive to the number of incidents of racial and ethnic altercations that occurred in camps. We found that, in interethnic conflicts in eight camps in the U.S. Southwest, Mexican enrollees frequently faced violence and intimidation perpetuated by Anglo enrollees.

Students who were interested in visualizing interethnic conflicts spent significant time recording the number of incidents, enrollees involved, and how racial stereotypes emerged within CCC reports. The visual tools that accompanied our research process involved collective brainstorming activities to translate information into a coded brainstorm map. Lab participant Jesus Jimenez, for example, illustrated that in Camp Nogales, there were clear racial divisions in camps that determined where enrollees slept, leisured, and socialized with one another. According



MIND MAP 2. DIAGRAM OF CAMPS INVESTIGATED FOR INTERETHNIC CONFLICT BETWEEN ANGLOS AND MEXICAN ENROLLEES (COURTESY OF JESUS JIMENEZ)

and 26 Mexican enrollees. In this camp, enrollees were tasked with the building of infrastructure that included the construction of trails, boundary fences, and telephone poles. On May 16, 1941, a white enrollee named Ray C. Densmore was accidentally injured during a boxing match with a Mexican enrollee. Densmore later died of his injuries.<sup>20</sup> The U.S. Army's response was to remove thirteen Mexican enrollees: five enrollees were dishonorably discharged and eight were sent to a different camp. The CCC declined to prosecute any Anglo enrollees. The incident at Camp Nogales illustrates how the ways in which camp inspectors recorded conflict between enrollees was racialized. Students noted the number of Mexican enrollees that were disproportionately punished compared to Anglo enrollees, that is, 13 to 0. CCC records demonstrated the ways in which rivalries unfolded between

to his mind map (mind map 1), there was a geography to the ways in which Mexican enrollees experienced discrimination via segregation. CCC records revealed practices of segregation and the ways in which race was a major factor in structuring social outcomes for enrollees. According to Jimenez's mind map, boxing matches between Anglos and Mexicans occurred in peripheral spaces in between cabins that were connected to internal territory disputes between enrollees. Drawing from the intersections of race and space, Jimenez viewed the altercation that resulted in Densmore's death as potentially tied to disputes over space within the Nogales camp. According to Jimenez's mind map, the spaces that were shaped by racial segregation shaped the contours of conflicts within camp life for Mexicans and Anglos. On a digital platform, mind mapping activities illustrated the

ways in which students identified correlations between space in shaping conflict and how space was shaped by race relations in camps. Race was central to how lab participants understood the political dimensions of life in camps. Mind mapping was a means to express these relations across different camps at an institutional level.

The integration of mind maps in our research helped us visualize the racial workings that occurred within the CCC, working across multiple federal agencies. Mind maps allowed us to talk about race at the institutional level by breaking down the incidents that occurred within the CCC. This allowed us to understand issues and policies that were implemented within the CCC due to these incidents and reports and to analyze the information and gather topics and ideas that were illustrated in the archives. Those topics included race, space, conflict, and punishments, which we expanded on in our research.



PHOTOGRAPH OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN YOUTH AT CAMP NORTH RIM OF GRAND CANYON, COMPANY 818, CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS, RECORD GROUP 35, NATIONAL ARCHIVES, COLLEGE PARK, MARYLAND.

Integrating mind maps into this research allowed us to illustrate structures of government at the federal and state level and to note who was in charge in the camps. By using mind maps, we could see how issues were handled in the CCC by commanding officials and the government. As noted earlier, expulsion from camps was one method the CCC used to discriminate against youth of color.

The students who examined archival documents concentrated on the spatial dimensions of urban youth of color's experiences in camps. For the purposes of this research project, students documented acts of discrimination in almost every state where Mexicans and Black enrollees were enlisted, including Arizona, California, Utah, New Mexico and Texas. This meant that race and class shaped enrollees' spatial experiences in camps by determining which bunks they could sleep in, work assignments, and restrictions placed upon their leisure time. In their diagrams, students frequently took note of

segregation, which became a primary code for our collective to work with. Though CCC officers pointed out that segregating black and Mexican enrollees might "cause problems for the U.S. Army," they quote one camp commander/administrator:

"Lieutenant Hastings does not hear, or expect any on account of such discrimination, as he believes these classes are accustomed to it."<sup>21</sup> The CCC inspectors' hesitation to segregate on the basis of race might have been due to changing inter-war attitudes about the negative appearance of segregation sponsored by a civil service program. However, as students identified segregation practices in assigned archival documents, they began to connect to institutional structures within the CCC nationally and how they functioned as a major component in the construction of the U.S. national parks system.

Mind mapping empowered students to reimagine race

and power relations across different scales. Mind maps, for example, identified numerous camps where Mexicans and African-Americans were segregated. Mind maps allowed students to take notes and synthesize information in a way that provided a better visualization of their thought process along with connecting ideas that Western Eurocentric traditional note-taking misses.<sup>22</sup> If there is no association, then there is no connection, thus no retention of memory and little critical thinking. Mind maps serve as an alternative avenue for learning and creating which can be vital when learning spaces such as the university can constrain variable methods of learning. Westernized traditional note taking often confines students

to particular learning methods that follow a linear system of thinking. A part of deconstructing these institutionalized methods of thinking is exploring other techniques that may be more amenable to the Chicana/o student population. We hope that this can capture the spirit of climate resilience so that Chicana/o and Latino/a communities can be better informed about our own history of environmental resilience as we face the history of discrimination within the CCC.

We engaged in critical analyses of our archival research by bringing in our own cultural experiences. For example, our lived experiences as Chicana/o students paired with the types of discrimination we have experienced in public education made our evaluation of the research more enriching. As first-generation Chicana/o students, we recognize the lack of resources our high schools historically were allocated in our communities, as

well as consistent harassment by immigration control. As we critically analyzed materials related to the discriminatory practices against youth of color in the CCC, it enabled us to translate our personal knowledge outside of our formal public education.

This lab provided us with the ability to radically democratize the space of the classroom. This radical democratization included how lab participants engaged with one another, how they viewed materials, and the physical seating design of our classroom. Typically, professors instruct from the front of the classroom, spatially organizing information in a unidirectional way. In our lab, we purposely arranged seats so that we physically faced one another in the lab so that all information could be shared as students walked their way from each laptop to the next. Students shared network passwords, retained public control over the mind map information, and publicly shared mind maps after each session with one another to view their findings. We didn't have a formal social media account to share information. Rather, we relied upon our physical arrangement of the classroom. We wanted to reduce asymmetrical relationships in the lab to spatially be attentive to how power was positioned in the classroom. No formal director was appointed for instruction, as our professor attended sessions when invited to provide greater context for the archival documents. We felt that this transforming of the design of the classroom was significant because it allowed us to work collaboratively in a hub.

Mind maps include the use of lines, colors, words, images, or symbols in the mapping process and therefore combine art and science. We view this as collaboration between technology, science, and art because of the creative expression mind maps allow that other brainstorming activities can't accommodate. Color schema, structure, and shape sizes, as well as images were determined by students. Western traditional note taking outlines tend to be scanned in a linear format, from left to right or top to bottom. Some scholars in digital humanities have noted that mind maps have proven to enhance the use of several cortical skills like numbers, imagination, lists, logic, rhythm, color, or speech, and these skills are operated by either the left or right side of the brain.<sup>23</sup> When both sides of human brain activity are engaged, researchers have found compelling evidence that students retain higher rates of information and that critical thinking skills are augmented.<sup>24</sup> Thus, there are cognitive reasoning and argumentation functions that mind maps illuminate from a biological standpoint that enables students to creatively express their engagement with research materials.

## Conclusion

Mind maps illustrate the power of undergraduate students' hidden potential to transform research and teaching practicum. As digital humanities initiatives become popular at universities in the United States, we hope that this research project serves as a model of the potential radicalism that professors and students can foster in labs, especially in its rebellion against oppressive

disciplinary borders as the humanities turns toward cultivating interdisciplinarity through the use of technology. The radical potential that we see illustrated by mind maps is one avenue among many technological tools that may be used in the digital humanities, including Geographic Information Systems (GIS), metadata storage, and digital public humanities, to serve the needs of underrepresented communities. Environmental justice research is enhanced by the perspectives of undergraduate students. Certainly, we hope that our research into CCC history will better inform Chicana/o and Latina/o communities of our own history of environmental oppression and resilience. We see the technology as a way to achieve a more democratic public education, and we acknowledge that the technology must accommodate the needs of poor working-class communities in their pursuit for environmental justice.

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# RADICAL TEACHER

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

## It's All About Eggs: Teaching Lifelong Learners

by Jyl Lynn Felman



THREE CHICKEN EGGS OF CONTRASTING COLORS, TIMOTHY TITUS, 2011

**A**fter thirty-five years of teaching college, I graduated to the “lifelong learning” classroom. It wasn’t a slow march down the aisle with the band playing “Pomp and Circumstance.” It was more like a huge leap spanning decades. I went from seminar rooms filled with twenty-year-olds to the over-seventy crowd, from young, unformed minds to hungry, opinionated adult ones. There were no requirements. Everything was an elective, including me. And I was teaching for free. I chose two vastly different Massachusetts cities for my pedagogical peregrinations. Each reflected parts of myself, Jewish and Queer, that I wanted reflected back. Hour after hour for days, I prepared as though I was teaching my first graduate seminar. I was sixty when I started. I’ve been teaching seniors for three years.

The first site is the Mosaic (name has been changed) Lifelong Learning Institute for LGBTQ seniors and friends. We meet in a donated, all-purpose space at a Unitarian Universalist church. Students pay twenty dollars for ten-week courses that meet weekly for an hour and a half in the morning or afternoon plus a lunch break with a speaker. No one is turned away for lack of funds. Courses range from Tai Chi to Social Justice Activism to Queer Literature. The students are working-to-comfortably-middle class. Some work part-time. Many live on limited income, have low-quality health care, and may rely on public transportation. Attendance is uneven due to illness and family caretaking responsibilities. Mosaic students are predominately white, cisgendered lesbians. They are partnered or single. They seek intellectual stimulation and want to break out of social isolation in a safe environment. As a lesbian myself, I have enormous freedom to be out and proud in this classroom. Even though I was out for years as a university professor, now I can be a big, bold, red-lipstick-wearing, high Jewish femme in black leggings and leather boots! And not be afraid of losing my job.

An Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) is the other program I chose and is formally connected to an elite private university. OLLI receives an annual grant from the Osher Endowment Fund and has to meet specific requirements set up by the national foundation. We meet in a remodeled building near the main college campus. The space was designed for the exclusive use of OLLI with four classrooms clustered around a meeting hall used for lectures and lunch. The majority of students are cisgendered heterosexual, Jewish, white women from middle-to-upper class. They are also proud grandparents of highly accomplished, affluent families. Some are widows or widowers.

The OLLI structure is set up like college with courses four days a week, offered in three session blocks daily with lunch lectures and Friday study-group meetings. Courses are academically-oriented covering philosophy, literature, classical music, art history, the Russian Revolution, the Civil War, politics and more. Students miss class for health issues, overseas leisure travel, and numerous visiting grandchildren. The biggest difference between Mosaic and OLLI is class and privilege. OLLI’s full program costs \$675 for two semesters including January programming. I had two friends on fixed-income who wanted to take my course (at OLLI) but couldn’t afford it. I asked the director if

there was a reduced rate. Although not advertised, partial scholarships are available.

OLLI has three full-time paid staff members while Mosaic is all volunteers. In OLLI, you first must become a member to take classes, which are taught by Study Group Leaders (SGLs) who are also participants. To apply I had to have a face-to-face interview with the executive director and write a proposal. At Mosaic, anybody who wants to offer a course can, once the curriculum committee accepts it. Having had to resubmit syllabi to both programs, I know the evaluation processes are seriously rigorous. The review was so in-depth that I was sure I was back in the academy! The trick was to learn how to write a lifelong learning syllabus, which needs to be short on intimidating theory and not over-loaded with requirements and deadlines.

Teaching seniors is my full-time political work and the place where I grow intellectually. I used to (in my twenties, thirties, and forties) go to abortion rights rallies and marched (often) “on Washington”. I gave speeches on radical lesbian feminism, racism and classism in the “Women’s Community.” I wrote essays and diatribes against patriarchy. In the past, my activism was outside in the streets, on panels at conferences, and on the page. Now, as a senior myself, I’ve “come in from the cold.” I am inserting my subversive voice into the weekly classroom.

***In the past, my activism was outside in the streets, on panels at conferences, and on the page. Now, as a senior myself, I’ve “come in from the cold.” I am inserting my subversive voice into the weekly classroom.***

Teaching seniors is different from undergraduates because the fragility of life is close by. Debilitating or chronic illness and the possibility of one’s own death or of a loved one is an acknowledged reality. Many young, middle-class students in their twenties often feel invincible and that they will live forever. Their sense of vulnerability is more about getting into the right college or graduate school, and having a four-point average. To some, getting a “B+” as opposed to an “A” is like getting an “F.” I’m different too, from when I first started teaching college thirty-five years ago. In my own way, I am more adamant and less flexible with seniors than I was with undergraduates. Like my present-day students, I have more confidence and am an established, published professional with a reputation. I am not climbing the tenure ladder and there is much less at stake.

For me the art of teaching well is political. Activist pedagogy that relies on critical inquiry and self-reflection is always at the core of what I do in the classroom. The constant negotiation of power and relationships, coupled with the exchange of knowledge among successful peers, is intensified with lifelong learners. There is a greater sense of being on an intellectual journey together. I am no

longer “just the professor,” but a whole person with a long, full life behind her. I also choose my courses carefully, and for the first time in my teaching career, on any subject that interests me. This is an academic freedom that I never had before, and I relish the chance to design new, boundary-crossing courses. I pick literature that neither program would normally offer, and that stretches the students beyond their life experiences. For Mosaic, my first course was on the life and work of Audre Lorde, the African American radical, lesbian feminist poet, prose writer and woman warrior. Next, I taught a mind-blowing (for me and the students) course on butch/femme identity, and just finished ten weeks exploring Pat Parker, an African American, butch lesbian, cutting-edge poet and performance artist who died of breast cancer at the age of forty-five in 1989.

My first course at OLLI was “Love, Politics, and Betrayal” on the work of gay, Jewish playwright Tony Kushner, who wrote *Angels in America*. The more conventional OLLI students had to confront gay men fucking in Central Park, the horrific reality of AIDS in the 1980s, and a closeted, Mormon character who eventually leaves his pill-popping wife. Plus, Ethel Rosenberg coming back to say Kaddish for the despicable Roy Cohn. Because no one wanted to be seen as homophobic in such a liberal democratic as-opposed-to republican environment, any unease with homosexuality remained unspoken. Only one student admitted having a lesbian daughter; no one discussed LGBTQ friends or relatives. I got the sense that the AIDS crisis was far removed from OLLI participants’ lives. The class welcomed the few personal details of my lesbian identity that I shared, appreciating that I was comfortable enough to talk about “being out” for over forty-five years. Confronting a main character who was a polymorphous angel who had heterosexual sex with a sick gay man while flying across the stage was much more challenging. Most of the class knew about, but had not seen, the play. One regular theatre-going student had never heard of *Angels in America*, even though it was a 1993 Pulitzer Prize winner (and a made-for-TV American Playhouse movie with Meryl Streep and Al Pacino). The class learned to truly appreciate Kushner’s genius when it came to craft and storytelling, although getting used to his nonlinear, spectacular epic style was daunting. The most resistance came when I dared to compare Tony Kushner with William Shakespeare. They asked, “How could a contemporary writer, with only one epic work completed twenty-five years ago, be put in the same category as Shakespeare who wrote thirty-seven plays and 154 sonnets; and whose work has endured for over four hundred years?” In the discussion, I had to locate *Angels* politically as a complex work of social commentary with brilliant literary feats, spell-binding dramatic moments and argue for the sheer magnitude of the seven-hour work itself, before the students accepted the comparison. We spent the first five weeks on *Angels*... and the last five on Kushner’s other plays, *Caroline Or Change*, *Homebody/Kabul*, and *Tiny Kushner*, a series of short plays.

Next, I taught *From Dreams to Nightmares: Five African-American Women Playwrights*, including Lorraine

Hansberry, Ntozake Shange, Suzan-Lori Parks, Lynn Nottage, and Katori Hall. For OLLI, the material went way beyond what the students were used to reading, challenging their understanding of race, class, gender, and sexuality. They had never analyzed the world through a “multiple lens” approach. At Mosaic, the students were primarily challenged reading across race and gender performance “roles,” because the subject matter related directly to their lives.

My intersectionality method makes everything I teach inherently political. I introduced Kimberle Williams Crenshaw’s theory (of intersectionality) to both OLLI and MOSAIC participants by explaining how systems of oppression, hierarchies of privilege and dominance impact identity while being simultaneously interrelated. Since they had been involved in feminism and social justice, the LGBTQ seniors had everyday experience with the effects of intersectionality on their lives, while the mostly Jewish students (at OLLI) responded through their framework of anti-Semitism. Analyzing the benefits of privilege was much more complicated at OLLI (than MOSAIC) because the discussion would inevitably have to turn to the socio-economic status and benefits of the class members. Not an easy place for them to go. But applying Crenshaw’s theory to the analysis of literature was a challenge for everyone.

In teaching seniors, as compared to college students, I relearned immediately how important a good, effective facilitator is. Even though I had always been a talented discussion leader, I found unexpected challenges. Seniors like to talk about their lives and often go off on tangents. There can be a lot of competition to speak, and learning to listen to each other is often difficult: there is always someone who likes to hog the limelight. Sibling rivalry runs rampant. I had to rein people in and set ground rules from the beginning: no sidebar conversations or going off on personal stories, no eating in class, and “please” don’t repeat (or pontificate on) what’s already been said. I had to state firmly that class etiquette requires no one can interrupt someone else, which can happen a lot if there is not a strong, fearless facilitator. I get a really good workout with seniors because they are voracious, serious, excited learners. Some OLLI participants are retired professors or experienced educators with strong ideas of their own about good teaching. At first I performed a high-wire act, afraid of falling any minute into a heavy net of aging pedagogical anxiety. Everybody, myself included, calmed down after a few weeks.

***I explain my radical pedagogy the first day and discuss that calling on people eliminates the same few from talking all the time, while giving the quieter students a chance to talk.***

Also, I call on students, which is always controversial in the beginning. I explain my radical pedagogy the first day and discuss that calling on people eliminates the same

few from talking all the time, while giving the quieter students a chance to talk. Anyone is free to pass if they'd rather not speak. I have gotten tremendous appreciation for this "hands-on" approach. People who aren't used to participating find out they have worthwhile opinions. There is also a tendency, when there are only a few men in the classroom, for them to take over the discussion while the women retreat. This was a problem in my college courses too and has to be addressed diplomatically. Seniors are full of life and energy, but working with them is very different. They have more confidence than undergraduates and speak with a lot of authority, voice, and agency. They're complex, mature individuals who are used to being in charge and take direction with some resistance. Initially, I was intimidated by their articulate, informed voices and felt I had to "prove" myself. This was especially true at OLLI because of its class privilege and institutional affiliation.

At OLLI I stood up, gliding around the room basking in the splendor of the pedagogical performance moment. At Mosaic, I was more relaxed from the start sitting in a circle surrounded by the whole class. I was so relaxed and fully my lesbian, femme self, that I didn't think I was working hard enough. I was nervous I wasn't "professorial" because I wasn't gesticulating and stomping around. But of course that wasn't the case. Teaching at Mosaic raised the question (for me personally) of how the classroom is changed when the teacher can be seen in her whole person. Among my LGBTQ peers, I didn't worry about being "seen" as too lesbian or even as a radical feminist. The very existence of a Queer lifelong learning institute is politically significant because Queer elders are usually invisible. At more traditional OLLI I am restrained in my queerness and more guarded in my performance. I don't want to be "dismissed" at the onset as having any kind of counter-normative agenda, even though I do implicitly. My goal is always to disrupt the status quo. The classroom is and always was my site for "revolution." Challenging the "dominant paradigm" in any learning environment is the treacherous goal I always set for myself. It's where I have the most impact on people while being vulnerable at the same time. Teaching resistance and critical thinking is like turning the "normal" world on its head to create self-awareness and motivate action. After teaching *From Dreams to Nightmares*, OLLI students were excited about attending plays by Black authors; and (after Audre Lorde and Pat Parker) Mosaic seniors wanted to read more cross-culturally. That's a successful revolution, in my educational paradigm.

***My goal is always to disrupt the status quo. The classroom is and always was my site for "revolution." Challenging the "dominant paradigm" in any learning environment is the treacherous goal I always set for myself.***

I learned the hard way about assigning too much reading. In college, assigning an entire book per week was

commonly accepted. But seniors live very busy, active, rich lives and memory is often problematic. When I first taught the course on Audre Lorde at Mosaic, I "merely" adapted my original, academic fifteen-week syllabus to a ten-week course. This didn't work. These were not full-time students and, due to age and fatigue, their ability to remember what they read was reduced. "Less is more" became my motto for homework assignments. Also, we read selected sections out loud. This works because it brings the reading front and center in the students' minds. In teaching plays, it was particularly successful to have the students read the dialogue out loud, so they could "hear" the rhythm of the language and the unique voice of the playwright. Some students were reluctant to read out loud, and balked in the beginning. I explained that you have to "hear" a play and speak poetry to fully comprehend each text. By the end of the semester, both sets of students performed at top level, and developed an appreciation of the craft of playwriting, poetry and the spoken word.

I was not prepared for the wide range of hearing ability in the lifelong learning classroom. I project easily, but the students often have difficulty hearing each other. Some people wear hearing aids, others do not. This is a sensitive issue. I had to ask everyone to speak up on a regular basis. Often, I had to repeat what had been said. I did not break up the class into small groups or partners (like I used to do) because of the inability of students to hear well when speaking in lowered tones. I also did not assign written work in or out of class. It simply would not get done because everyone was too busy with "outside" activities. In class, few took notes as compared with undergraduates who are copious note takers. My primary method was to ask questions to generate opinions. Listening and talking were the most effective learning styles.

I had a specific goal of what I wanted to cover and worked hard to stay on track. In many ways, my teaching was less improvisational than in the past. Seniors thrive on structure that is both fluid and predictable, which is a delicate balance. There has to be a road map with lots of scenic stops along the way. Lecturing for long periods doesn't work. Synthesizing the material regularly during class helped everyone stay "present" and enhanced comprehension. The senior environment is rigorous because the participants want to be there. Attendance is not mandatory. There are no required courses. So, the classroom becomes an "active site" by nature (due to years of lived experience) less than by the intentional nurture of the teacher. Energy and high intellectual exchange permeate discussions. There are no laissez-faire participants. My brain is "stretched" and I'm invigorated after each class. And exhausted.

The main challenge for me at both sites was to figure out how to teach cross-culturally to white students unfamiliar with diversity --whether race, class, sexuality or gender-- in their daily lives. In teaching *A Raisin in The Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry, I pushed the class to see the story as more than its traditional, reductive interpretation of a Black family striving to move out of the ghetto into a white, middle-class neighborhood. Most participants

thought they knew the play, although they hadn't read the actual script. A few had seen a production years ago. In early discussions, most of the class missed the universality of the play itself and were not able to see themselves in the characters' human desires and longings. They were merely reading about a Black family without any emotional connection to the plot.

I wanted them to connect with the craving for intimacy between Walter Lee and his wife Ruth, and to empathize with Beneatha's search for identity and Mama's hunger for sunlight and a garden. I chose the following excerpts as an example of a frustrated, married couple who have trouble communicating. I wanted Walter Lee's and Ruth's struggle to resonate with their own desire to be understood by a partner.

*Ruth: Walter, leave me alone! (She raises her head and stares at him vigorously then says, more quietly) Eat your eggs, they gonna be cold.*

*Walter: (Straightening up from her and looking off) There you are. Man say to his woman: I got me a dream. His woman say: Eat your eggs. (Sadly, but gaining in power) Man say: I got to take hold of this here world, baby! And a woman will say: Eat your eggs and go to work. (Passionately now.) Man say: I got to change my life, I'm choking to death, baby! And his woman say—(In utter anguish as he brings his fists down on his thighs)—Your eggs is getting cold! (from *A Raisin in The Sun*, by Lorraine Hansberry, Act One, Scene One).*

I talked about eggs. How the playwright uses food to show miscommunication and disconnection between people who love each other. We read scene after scene without any white characters and talked about how often Black or LGBTQ theatre-goers don't see themselves reflected back on the stage. Instead, they have to imagine their own personal narratives into the script while simultaneously watching the performance. We discussed W. E. B. DuBois' "double consciousness" concept, of always looking at oneself through the oppressor's viewpoint, such that Black audiences have to hold on to their own autonomy/selfhood when viewing plays that don't reflect their reality. This was a new concept. Many admitted that they didn't go to (or read) Black theatre because they assumed it didn't relate to their lives or was only about suffering, slavery, and anti-white bashing. No one wanted to feel attacked by going out for a night of theatre.

It took weeks for the students to feel comfortable speaking aloud in Black vernacular. Some were nervous about themselves as white people speaking Ebonics. I explained that they were learning a new language, much like studying Irish playwrights (Enda Walsh, Martin McDonough, or Edna O'Brien) who write in Irish dialect. In teaching theatre, the language of the play must be spoken (or performed) out loud to be understood completely. Self-conscious and embarrassed, they kept trying. By the time we got to *for colored girls who have considered suicide/ when the rainbow is enuf*, by ntozake shange, they were "singing" the blues and "signifying" from deep inside. They were "feeling" the play's power beyond what they

originally thought was its "limitations" and lack of relevancy in their own lives. They were not mimicking Black people or offensively performing minstrel, but were theatre students studying significant American playwrights. The distinction was clear to everyone.

When studying shange's life I discussed her middle class up-bringing and that houseguests of her parents included Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis, Chuck Berry, and W. E. B. DuBois. She graduated *cum laude* in American Studies from Barnard and got an M.A. from the University of Southern California. I explained that the sheer beauty and unique rhythm of *for colored girls...* is in the voices of the women characters, written in the style of a long choreopoem in Black urban street language. One student interrupted my introduction with a pointed, but genuine question. *How could shange, from such a privileged background, be able to write in Black vernacular?* I was unprepared for the question and taken aback by the query. Because shange's parents were highly educated (her father an Air Force surgeon and her mother an educator and psychiatric social worker) the student assumed shange didn't have access to Black experiences other than the lifestyle of the Black bourgeoisie. I explained that men (Tennessee Williams *et al.*) write from women's viewpoints and in female voices all the time, and that a good writer can imagine characters' lives different from their own. More significantly, I added that due to the history of segregation, Black people's neighborhoods were often mixed-class and/or that poor neighborhoods bordered more wealthy neighborhoods. And owing to restrictive covenants, over-priced mortgages and a racist banking industry, there was often movement between classes in any one Black family or street. The students were not aware of the extent of cross-pollination in the Black community. In thinking about the assumptions white students have about the lives of people of color, I realized that I was also teaching African American cultural history in addition to the plays themselves.

After that first class, I contextualized the plays, adding in Civil Rights history and socioeconomic information from 1959 to 2009. I located the readers in worlds they have little or no access to, and familiarized them with concepts such as structural racism, internalized self-loathing and the hierarchy of oppression. I had to work hard to keep the literature at the forefront rather than American race relations or racism. We discussed what it was like to see the Black experience from the inside, rather than always filtered through a "white" imagination. This was a new idea. We moved beyond the stereotypical characters of maids, butlers, and buffoons historically portrayed in the movies and on TV (*Gone with The Wind*, *et. al.*) The richness of each text continued to surprise the class. Not one play was alike in structure or content. By the end, the talent of the playwrights flew off the page and filled the students with utter amazement at what they had been missing out on before.

One issue that came up repeatedly was the portrayal of Black men by the Black women playwrights. Other than Walter Lee in *A Raisin in The Sun*, who goes through a total character transformation, most male characters (in *for colored girls...* *Intimate Apparel*, *Top/Dog Underdog*,

*Saturday Night, Sunday Morning, and The Mountaintop*) cheat on their wives/girlfriends, are emotionally and physically abusive, and/or don't have real jobs. Mystified and unsettled, much of the class wondered "why?" *Wasn't this male-bashing? Where were the happy Black marriages and good Black men?* they asked. Their reluctance to accept these portrayals as other than male-hating belied their understanding of the history of violence against Black men that was turned inward and taken out on the women of their own communities. Another issue came up concerning the legitimacy of the women playwrights to write the characters that were the most compelling to them as writers without making the characters palatable for a white audience. People did not want to acknowledge that Martin Luther King, Jr. (in *The Mountaintop* by Katori Hall) was less than a saint or the reality of abuse in some black women's lives (*for colored girls...*).

In contrast, in teaching the herstory of butch/femme identity in the lesbian community, I was teaching "living subjects" their own stories (including mine). MOSAIC students came out in the Women's Movement of the 1970's and 80's, or much later in life after years of heterosexual marriage (and children), in their 50's, 60's and 70's! Their present-day rejection of butch/femme as a positive identity related to a misunderstanding of the erotic underpinnings of lesbian relationships. They rejected the concept of "roles" outright. The class became very personal for everyone. When appropriate, I used my femme self and butch partner of nineteen years as an example. (Something I never did in OLLI.) We read selections from both *Persistence: All Ways Butch and Femme*, edited by Ivan D. Coyote and Zenna Sharman, and *The Persistent Desire: A Femme/Butch Reader*, edited by Joan Nestle. We discussed the "sex wars" in the 1970's and 80's, although most of the class had never heard of the 1982 infamous Barnard Conference on Sexuality where the legitimacy of pornography was challenged. Historically the lesbian feminist movement rejected butch/femme identity as a total parody of heterosexual, male/female gender roles. I talked a lot about how much this response was based on internalizing "The Master's" hetero-normative narrative and not about the actual erotic tension between two women attracted to each other. We discussed how "difference" versus "sameness" can be a turn-on and the reality that butch-identified lesbians were physically attacked (and are still) just walking down the street alone.

In contrast, femmes were seen in the past (and in the class) as "passing" for straight, benefitting from heterosexual privilege, and taken far less seriously than butch women. In the 1970's and 80's the gender binary was out and androgyny was in. By lesbian "law", big lumber jackets, plaid flannel shirts, navy-blue chinos and heavy work boots replaced the rigid gender imposition of tight-fitting A-line skirts, soft, pastel cashmere turtlenecks, and shimmering silk blouses. (This was especially oppressive to fulfilling my creative, sartorial self-expression, I opined half seriously and half in jest). Students remembered how freeing it was to give up wearing a bra, stop shaving, and having to feminize their appearance. No one wanted to go back to the constricting

roles of femininity and family that they grew up with in the 1950s!

I broke many silences about lesbian sexuality, dildos, and desire. I learned to talk about how, herstorically, "penetration" (see the work of Andrea Dworkin, Catherine MacKinnon, and Sheila Jeffries), or imitating the missionary position, was seen as politically incorrect and oppressive to women. Resistance (and outrage) to the use of the terms "butch/femme" was strong and continued throughout the semester. Most of the class was against labels of any kind. Fury at femmes for "selling out" their more masculine-identified sisters by wearing lipstick, high heels and revealing clothing kept coming up. It was difficult (for the students) to deal with, understand, and accept the contradictory realities of being feminist and overtly feminine. I felt on edge much of the time, like I had to prove myself as a "real" radical, lesbian feminist in spite of wearing lavender eye-shadow, burnt red lipstick and long, dangling earrings. Because the content of the course referenced the life experiences of the participants, they felt personally conflicted, much like my undergraduate female students when I taught Introduction to Women Studies.

***In teaching the work of African American lesbian writers Audre Lorde and Pat Parker the biggest issue was white privilege. Unlike OLLI, Mosaic participants talked openly about growing up white and having little contact with Black people.***

Although it was exhilarating to teach the course of my dreams, "Butch/Femme Identity" challenged me pedagogically. Believing the "personal is always political," I had to balance how much the students could talk about their lives, against how much theory to discuss. Mosaic class members felt extremely vulnerable with the material. Unlike the students at OLLI, they weren't intellectual outsiders studying another culture. They were the insiders themselves. This brought immediacy to the classroom that wasn't present at OLLI. One student who favored androgyny cried when talking about how she wasn't allowed to play baseball because of the gender rigidity she grew up with in the 50's. Another more Butch woman brought in a dress she was considering wearing for the first time in years. (What clothes to wear was an ongoing discussion topic.) Several students who came out in their late sixties (outside of the Woman's Movement and Feminism) refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of butch/femme identity in the lesbian community at all. The issue of social class came up, as we talked about the relationship of working-class identity and "masculine" women (*a la Stone Butch Blues* by Leslie Fineberg). Only one woman out of fifteen identified as a "butchy" femme with the emphasis on "butch." And one student was so upset by the material she dropped out. In the end, this wasn't just gender theory. It was real-life praxis.

In teaching the work of African American lesbian writers Audre Lorde and Pat Parker the biggest issue was white privilege. Unlike OLLI, Mosaic participants talked openly about growing up white and having little contact with Black people. Social segregation, the history of racism, and economic disparity were acknowledged outright and never minimized. There was a keen sense of anger about ongoing police violence. Mosaic students were not afraid to personalize the material and hold themselves accountable. This was a huge difference from OLLI. Students genuinely admired and respected the outspoken political work of each author. Both Lorde and Parker were accomplished, brave, radical artists who took tremendous risks in their lives. They were revolutionaries. They called out homophobia in the Black community and had long-term white lovers in an age when interracial relationships were dangerous and suspect. Their bravery inspired the class. One session, I asked what was a “revolutionary” act that each student had accomplished in her life, a question I wouldn’t ever have asked at OLLI. A woman said she had two illegal abortions; another was a research librarian who ordered “forbidden” books; and another adopted a Black child.

For the last session on Pat Parker I asked the class to write a short response to studying this amazing artist for ten weeks. I was hesitant to request a writing assignment—fearing that no one would do anything—but felt it was important in this context because so much of the writing touched the class on a deeply personal level. I wanted them to actively reflect on the experience. Anything would do, I said: free-writing, a rant, simple notes, even a few sentences. All but one student actually wrote something. Their words revealed Pat Parker’s impact:

*Personally, I found the poems that described her experience as an African American child in the South—learning self-hatred, witnessing people being hurt or lynched, being taught by her parents how to behave to protect herself—to be the most powerful. White people can never truly grasp this experience, but Pat Parker made the pain real for me in a deep way.*

*Her poetry also brought back lots of memories of my early lesbian days in the 70’s and 80s . . . politically correct clothing and all. There was humor*

*and pain . . . about non-monogamy and other issues of the day.*

Another student wrote a spoken word performance piece in homage to Parker’s style that brought the house down:

*I want to BE Pat Parker. Lay it on me, girl. Gimme some a your fine fire that tears me up with life raw and true. You drag those places we need to see right up in front a us. Gotta look. Gotta look deep. Hard. Close. All those words come in my skin and start raisin hell . . . Burn that muther down!*

*Changed me. Her bein out there for her girl. Speakin out for all the women hidin they real selves in a world hatin them for existin. Her ma’s words in my ma’s looks: What child is this?*

Teaching lifelong learners changed me profoundly. My respect for the aging process and for what seniors go through on a daily basis was expanded. Each time I enter the classroom, I vow never to let my brain go soft. Constantly, I wonder what unknown universes I can open for both Mosaic and OLLI, as I teach at the highest level of excellence in my thirty-plus year career. I see that I’ve risen to the task of teaching students I was never trained for and take great pride in my accomplishment. The work is particularly meaningful to me in the age of Trump; I participate in political action every day. Because the seniors themselves haven’t quit engaging purposefully, their presence in my life helps me fight off my own despondency at the decline in democracy worldwide and the wanton environmental destruction of the planet. When I close my eyes, I hear the entire OLLI class repeating out loud in unison the last words in ntozake shange’s play *for colored girls*:

*I found god in myself  
& loved her fiercely.*

*& this is for colored girls who have considered suicide/but  
are movin to the end of their own rainbows.*

*Amen, I say. Amen.*



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# RADICAL TEACHER

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

## Facing the Nakba

by Donna Nevel



FACING THE NAKBA, PHOTO COURTESY OF JEWISH VOICE FOR PEACE

From the editors: This piece is a combination of an article and annotated curriculum offered as a resource and model for flexible use by readers.

*"I support compulsory transfer. I don't see anything immoral in it."* (David Ben Gurion, Israel's first Prime Minister)

*"I agreed that it was essential to drive the inhabitants out."* (Yitzhak Rabin, Israeli Prime Minister)

*"Kill any Arab you encounter."* (Mordechai Machlef, Haganah Officer, Future Chief of Staff of the Israeli Army, April 1948)

[Quotes from *The Nakba: Sixty-Nine Years of Dispossession and Apartheid*—IMEU (Institute for Middle East Understanding)]

The story of the Nakba—the expulsion and dispossession of approximately 750,000 Palestinians, and the destruction of more than 400 villages, by the Zionist movement and then Israel from 1947-1949—has been well-documented by Palestinian as well as Israeli and other international sources. However, not only in Israel but also in the United States and within the American Jewish community, the story of the Nakba is often disregarded or ignored, focusing, instead, on the creation of Israel as a safe haven for Jews, without acknowledging the dispossession of the Palestinian people that began prior to and with the founding of the State.

We created the "Facing the Nakba" (FTN) curriculum specifically to engage with U.S. Jews, as well as a general U.S. audience, about the foundational event of what the state of Israel calls the War of Independence and what Palestinians call the Nakba (Catastrophe).

Since 2002, the Israeli organization Zochrot ("Remembering" in Hebrew) has attempted to deepen Jewish Israelis' understanding of the events that took place in the period before, during, and after the creation of the State of Israel and "to promote acknowledgment and accountability for the ongoing injustices of the Nakba." After a group of New York City activists attended a moving presentation by a staff member of Zochrot who came to the United States, several of us continued to meet to discuss how we could bring some of this important work to U.S. Jewish communities.

Inspired by Zochrot's work and that of the Palestinian organization, BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights, we—a group of five Jewish women, all of whom are educators in the United States—decided to come together to develop "Facing the Nakba" (FTN). Some of us had grown up learning about Israel as a "land without a people" and were immersed throughout our childhood and early adult lives in a Zionist narrative without ever having heard about the Nakba. As we began to challenge and explore our own views and become part of movements for justice in Palestine and

Israel, we recognized how critical learning about the Nakba was for our own political development and for understanding more about the consequences of Zionism on the Palestinian people. We also thought that this work would be meaningful for many activists and organizers within the organizations we were part of—Jewish groups committed to justice for Palestinians. We spent the next years creating curriculum that we hoped others in our communities would be able to draw upon to facilitate workshops and classes.

Through videos, slides, first-hand testimonies, historical documents, readings, discussions, and exercises, the FTN curriculum offers an historical lens for understanding the root causes of the call for justice for the Palestinian people. We believe that understanding the history that has led to today's reality is important not only for historical accuracy but for what it means for our own organizing and for the road to achieving justice.

We originally designed the FTN curriculum for Jewish groups and individuals interested in exploring and perhaps rethinking their positions on Israel and Palestine, many of which they learned, like some of us on the coordinating team, while growing up and studying in Jewish educational settings. In many cases, for those who are Jewish, it means unlearning and re-examining many of the stories we were told about Zionism and about the creation of Israel. But, soon after we created the resources, it became apparent that many who weren't Jewish but who had been raised in the United States were subject to the same gaps in education about Israel and Zionism and so it became clear to us that the curriculum and resources could be relevant for those outside Jewish communities as well.

The curriculum can also easily be adapted for more formal classroom use or for after-school workshops or other forms of community education. The variety of materials and exercises are designed to maximize many different forms and styles of participation, from adult education and synagogue classes to workshops in high schools and on college campuses.

The "Facing the Nakba" curriculum is particularly relevant for those studying what is happening in the Middle East; U.S. foreign policy; Jewish history and Zionism; Palestinian history; the relationships between Islamophobia and Israel politics; settler colonialism; and/or indigenous struggles. It challenges narratives that are part of dominant discourse and ideology in the United States and requires a deeply critical, reflective process of learning and engagement.

As Jews living in the United States and working on this project to bring the FTN curriculum deep within our communities and to hold ourselves accountable for making the Nakba visible, we wanted to be sure at all times to honor and draw upon the extensive work on the Nakba that has been done by Palestinians, whose lives and communities have been directly impacted by the Nakba until this day. Therefore, our resources and materials are heavily drawn from first-hand accounts and histories shared by Palestinians. We also received critical feedback

from Palestinian educators and historians with whom we shared our curriculum as it was being developed.

In developing the curricula, FTN has worked for the past few years together with PARCEO, a participatory action research center that provides training and resources in partnership with community-based groups and institutions working for justice. (I am also part of the PARCEO team.) PARCEO has supported the development of the curriculum to be as accessible as possible for different kinds of learners and for those entering with multiple forms of knowledge and relationships to the material. PARCEO also created a detailed Facilitation Guide to provide tangible support for creating an inclusive, welcoming, and accountable learning environment that will enable a wide range of participants in different contexts to have the opportunity to engage deeply with the curricula.

## The curriculum: an overview

The "Facing the Nakba" curriculum, which has seven sessions, begins with an exploration of participants' personal relationships to the Nakba and presents an historical overview of the events of 1947-1948. It includes testimonies through videos from Israeli Jews and from Palestinians who lived through the Nakba and addresses the question of how we interact with such personal testimonies. It considers how the Nakba impacts Palestinian life today, including in the Palestinian diaspora, and looks at issues related to Palestinian refugees, international law, and the right of return. Each of the sessions is ninety minutes to two hours in length.

The seven sessions include the following themes: Session 1: Introductory Session; Session 2: Encountering the Nakba; Session 3: the Nakba in History; Session 4: Testimony; Session 5: In the Archives; Session 6: The Right of Return; and Session 7: Art and Resistance.

The FTN website describes the seven sessions, their objectives, and methodology (excerpted to the right):



<b>"Facing the Nakba" Curriculum</b>	
<b>1 Introduction</b>	We welcome the group, introduce participants to the different sessions, set community agreements, and begin to explore the Nakba.
<b>2 Encountering the Nakba</b>	Participants think about their personal relationship to the Nakba, explore why so many of us don't know about the Nakba, and start to uncover where to look for that history through a slideshow and "found documents" activity using primary sources from 1948.
<b>3 The Nakba in History</b>	Through a slideshow and presentation of information, we present an historical overview of the Nakba: Palestinian life before the Nakba, the relationship between Jews and Palestinians, the impact of the Nakba in numbers, the UN Partition Plan, and the reasons Palestinians left their villages in 1947-48. Through group discussion, we ask, "How did we get here?" and develop a deeper understanding of historical context.
<b>4 Testimonies</b>	We see and listen to testimonies from Palestinians describing what life was like before and during 1948. We ask what "testimony" means, and examine how we feel when we hear people tell what happened during the Nakba. We may use academic texts, concepts, and empirical research to understand testimonies, but our focus is first and foremost on the personal experience and process.
<b>5 In the Archives</b>	This session includes close reading and small group discussions to offer time for participants to reflect on some of the information they have encountered in the previous sessions. Close readings and examinations will be of: the Israeli Declaration of Independence, Plan Dalet*, a testimony of a Palmach soldier, and the poems from two Palestinian poets, "I Belong There," by Mahmoud Darwish, and "There Was No Farewell," by Taha Muhammad Ali.
<b>6 The Right of Return</b>	Participants move from learning about the history of the Nakba to exploring the ongoing effects of the Nakba today and looking at who the Palestinian refugees are under international law and considering what would constitute a just resolution.
<b>7 Art and Resistance</b>	We reflect further on how the Nakba impacts Palestinian life now and begin to explore art as an act of cultural resistance in Palestine through various forms of Palestinian artwork and expression. We also reflect on the seven sessions as a whole and how we want to transform what we've learned into action.

\*"Plan Dalet" or "Plan D" was the name given by the Zionist High Command to the general plan for launching successive offensives in April/early May 1948 in various parts of Palestine. These offensives, which entailed the destruction of the Palestinian Arab community and the expulsion and pauperization of the bulk of Palestine Arabs, were calculated to achieve the military *fait accompli* upon which the State of Israel was to be based." (*Plan Dalet: Master Plan for the Conquest of Palestine*, " by Walid Khalidi, Journal of Palestine)

## Examples from the Sessions

Each session includes readings, exercises, testimonies, and time for reflection and analysis. In session one, which offers an introduction to the course and to the material, participants explore their own assumptions and knowledge base coming into the course.

In one of the early exercises, the facilitator asks for a show of hands from those who heard the following statements when they first learned about the establishment of the state of Israel:

"How many of you heard that ..."

1. "When the first Jews arrived here, Palestine was empty. A land without a people for a people without a land."
2. "Arabs came to Palestine to take advantage of the economy the Jewish settlers were developing."
3. "The Partition Plan was approved in 1947 because the world recognized that a Jewish state had to be established. The Jews accepted the Partition Plan, but the Arabs rejected it, which is why the war broke out. That's why they, not us, are responsible for its results."
4. "The Arabs who left their villages in 1947/-48 chose to do so at the behest of the Arab armies expecting to return after an Arab victory."
5. "The 1948 War of Independence was a war for survival. It was a war of the few against the many. Although we won, later events proved that we must continue to live by the sword."
6. "Jews and Palestinians have both been living on this land from time immemorial. Thus Israel has an equal claim and Palestinians must share the territory."
7. "The creation of Israel was another example of colonialism."
8. "World guilt about the Holocaust is why there is an Israel."
9. "Creation of Israel required the displacement of thousands of Palestinians."
10. "The creation of a national home for the Jewish people is based on international agreement in which Britain was charged with establishing a 'national home for the Jewish people' in Palestine."
11. "Palestinian refugees and their descendants are still in camps because Arab states have insisted it remains that way."

Participants then break into groups to begin to think more deeply about some of the following questions: • What was the story you heard when you began hearing a narrative (whenever that was in your life) of what happened in 1948 and the establishment of the State of Israel?

- Who told it to you?
- Had you heard different stories?
- Has this story changed for you? When? Why?

These questions and discussions serve to locate the participants' own starting points, histories, and understandings of the issue as they begin to engage with, and be challenged by, new material and historical evidence.

Following that exercise and to frame the sessions that follow, facilitators show a short video that illustrates the ongoing nature of the displacement of Palestinians from their homes and, to prepare for the next session, which offers a slide show of the history of the Nakba, participants are asked to read "The Dispossessed" by Saleem Haddad, and an excerpt from "Strangers in the House: Coming of Age in Occupied Palestine" by Raja Shehadeh.

The slide show in session two—on Encountering the Nakba—includes powerful visuals with extensive notes (excerpted below) included for the facilitators with each slide. These slides explain what the Nakba is; how Palestinian life has been erased; how Jewish localities took over Palestinian ones; and the ongoing process by which Palestinians lost their homes and land at the hands of the Israeli government.



"REMEMBERING OUR VILLAGE" BY BASHIR SINWAR, 1985

## Encountering the Nakba

Slide 1: What is the Nakba? "Nakba" is an Arabic word that means "great disaster" or "catastrophe." On November 29, 1947, the UN General Assembly approved a plan to partition Mandate Palestine between Jews and Palestinian Arabs to follow the end of the British Mandate on May 14, 1948.

Approximately 750,000 Palestinians were ejected or fled from some 450 villages inside the areas that became the State of Israel. The war's end found less than half of the Palestinians in their original homes—fewer than 150,000 in Israel, some 400,000 in the West Bank, and 60,000 in the Gaza Strip, with many more constituting a new diaspora. • Palestinians commemorate the Nakba on May 15, the day after the anniversary of Israel's Independence Day.

In this slide, for example, we see a 1943 photo of the tents and buildings in an early Zionist settlement, Kvutzat Yavne. The intention of the founders was to make the area near ancient Yavne the site of a religious kibbutz and a yeshiva. What we don't see in the photo is the nearby Arab village of Yibna. The country is typically portrayed as one that was clean, empty – a land without people for a people without a land – while, in fact, a substantial Palestinian society existed here living a rich life. You can see Yibna in the map below, part of a 1941 map of Palestine. In the late nineteenth century, a visitor described Yibna as a large village partly built of stone and situated on a hill. In 1944/45 there were 5,420 villagers living in Yibna and 1,500 nomads living on its outskirts. The map on the top left, prepared by the "Religious Kibbutz Fund" (1946), shows other Jewish localities in the Yavne area. Between 1948 and 1955, five other Jewish villages were founded on Yibna's land. The photo on the bottom left is from 1991 and it shows what remains of Yibna's mosque

Slide 2: Much of Israel bears traces of the Nakba, even if people aren't aware of them. These pictures testify to the ways in which Palestinian life has been overwritten and erased.

This slide shows a postcard of vacationers on the beach at Achziv Park; those ruins in the background are the remains of the village of AlZeeb. AlZeeb was captured by the Haganah's Carmel Brigade prior to the engagement of armies from other Arab countries in the 1948 War on May 14, 1948, as part of the same operation that resulted in the capture of the city of Akka (now Acre).

Slide 3: According to then Minister of Defense Moshe Dayan: "Jewish localities were established in place of Arab villages. You don't even know the names of those Arab villages, and I don't blame you, because those geography texts no longer exist. Not only the books are gone; the Arab villages are gone: Nahalal in place of Ma'lul; Kibbutz Gvat in place of Jibta; Kibbutz Sarid in place of Huneifis; Kfar Yehoshua in place of Tal Al-Shuman. Wherever Jews built, they built on land where

**What is the Nakba?**

"Nakba" is an Arabic word meaning "great disaster" or "catastrophe" (نكبة). It refers to the destruction of most Palestinian localities that existed in the area that became the state of Israel, and the expulsion of most of their Palestinian residents, from November 1947 to July 1949.

Top right: Kvutzat Yavne in 1943. Top left: A map from 1946 prepared by the "Religious Kibbutz Fund," showing Jewish localities in the Yavne area. Below: A 1991 photo of the remains of the mosque in Yibna, a Palestinian locality destroyed in the Nakba. Next to it is a portion of a 1941 map of Palestine showing the locality.

SLIDE 1: WHAT IS THE NAKBA?

**Encountering the Nakba**

How does one encounter the Nakba?  
There are places where one encounters the Nakba even without being aware of it.

Postcard: Vacationers on the beach at Achziv Park; remains of the village of al-Zeeb in the background. (Photographer: Werner Braun, Jerusalem).

SLIDE 2: ENCOUNTERING THE NAKBA

"Jewish localities were established in place of Arab villages. You don't even know the names of those Arab villages, and I don't blame you, because those geography texts no longer exist. Not only the books are gone; the Arab villages are also gone: Nahalal in place of Ma'lul; Kibbutz Gvat in place of Jibta; Kibbutz Sarid in place of Huneifis; Kfar Yehoshua in place of Tal Al-Shuman. Wherever Jews built, they built on land where Arabs once lived."

(Minister of Defense Moshe Dayan, 4.4.1969, from an article in Ha'aretz).

Most Israeli Jews don't know the names of the Palestinian villages because they were changed or erased completely when the state was established.

SLIDE 3: MINISTER OF DEFENSE MOSHE DAYAN QUOTE

Arabs once lived.” (In fact, the maps and texts do exist in various archives and collections, though often hidden from public view.)

Palestinian place names were often echoed in the new names Israel gave the localities (for example: Baysan – Beit Shean; Yaffa – Yafo; Bir alSaba – Beersheva; Yajur – Yagur; Ayn Hawd – Ein Hod). People in Jerusalem still call some neighborhoods by their Arab names despite the fact they had been renamed into Hebrew. For example: Talbieh (“Komemiyut” in Hebrew); Katamon (“Gonen”); al-Maliha (“Manahat”). Most Israelis don’t know that they’re calling these neighborhoods by their Palestinian names.

Slide 4: In these next few slides, you can see the physical replacement of the old Palestinian villages and cities with the new.

Slide 4 shows: Saffuriyya – Zipori, Slide 5. AlMusrara – Morasha, Slide 6. Ayn Karim – Ein Karem, Slide 7. Al-Lydd – Lod



SLIDE 4: SAFFURIYYA

After the slide show, ten images are displayed as part of a Museum Gallery with a series of notes and reflection questions printed below each picture. The pictures show structures and places that were Palestinian and are now Israeli and Jewish, giving the participants an opportunity to tangibly see and get a feel for what the dispossession has actually looked like and what the impact of it has been. Participants walk through the gallery with a series of questions to explore about the meaning of the images they are encountering.



A MOSQUE IN THE VILLAGE OF WADI HUNAYN. TODAY IT IS A SYNAGOGUE NEAR NES ZIONA (1987. PHOTO: RA’FI SAFIYA).



SCHOOL IN THE VILLAGE OF KUWAYKAT. TODAY IT IS THE YOUTH CLUB OF KIBBUTZ BEIT HAEMEK.



ALMAJDAL’S MAIN MOSQUE, WHERE TODAY THERE ARE GALLERIES AND ASHQELON’S MUNICIPAL MUSEUM.



THE ABU KHEEL FAMILY HOME OF THE VILLAGE OF SHAYKH MUWANNIS. TODAY IT IS THE TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY FACULTY CLUB AND A BANQUET HALL.

Throughout this and other sessions, we create the space and time for taking in and reflecting upon the materials and images being presented. For example, in session 3, *The Nakba in History*, there are several slides showing the History of the Nakba. The facilitator notes for the session address how to create that time for reflection and analysis:

Depending on the size of the group, you may want to make space for ongoing discussion during the slideshow. This section presents a number of topics dealing with 1948 that we usually don't learn about or know—about life before 1948, about the Nakba, and what happened afterwards. The slides and printouts aren't intended to provide a complete, comprehensive historical account of the period, but are intended to shed light on a number of potentially unknown aspects of the Nakba. Participants are invited to view all the information critically, including what is presented here, and everyone is invited to delve into it more deeply.

The facilitator notes suggest dividing participants into four groups and assigning each group one of the following categories: Palestine before the Nakba, Partition and lead-up to violence, Palestinian communities destroyed, Preventing return. Each group receives corresponding packets to help them develop narratives that explain what took place in their section: Palestine before the Nakba, Partition and lead-up to violence, Palestinian communities destroyed, Preventing return.

In the session that follows--Session 4 on Testimony--focusing on the power of testimonies, four different texts are located in four different "stations" placed around the room. The group divides into small groups and goes from station to station. In this session, the facilitator is encouraged to raise discussion of the power dynamics of testimony—how people may hear testimonies based on their own (pre)conceptions of who the teller is—including those voices that have been either marginalized or silenced.

During Session 5, *In the Archives*, participants devote time to looking closely at primary texts and documents to think about what they can and cannot tell us about the Nakba. That leads to a discussion in Session 6, *The Right of Return*, on what Palestinian life has been like since the Nakba, and particularly the experiences of Palestinian refugees. As we enter into this session, participants will be asked to think about this question: "What enduring effects on Palestinian communities do you imagine have taken place since the Nakba?"

As participants begin to think more deeply about the impact of being dislocated from one's home and land, the session moves to an understanding of the experiences of Palestinian refugees and the call for the "Right of Return." The use of video is particularly meaningful here to offer a visual perspective of those who lived through the Nakba and what that means for them today. Videos are shown from two refugee camps and another video is of Nakba survivors.

A facilitator note helps to introduce the right of return based on who the participants are:

Participants may still be experiencing discomfort or uncertainty about the Right of Return. If this is the case, use this optional framing to present the next activity to the group: We've now taken in a lot of information as we enter into discussion of the Right of Return. Right now we're examining what it feels like for Palestinians to think about the Right of Return. Though you may have to suspend some of your personal beliefs, we are inviting you to engage in this activity to explore questions of how the Right of Return might be actualized, and why it might feel important to Palestinians who are currently living in refugee camps or the diaspora because of the Nakba.

To continue to address the ways in which the Nakba impacts current realities and Palestinian life today, the final session of the curriculum, *Art and Resistance*, has as its focus creative resistance, which is so central to the Palestinian movement for justice. "Stations" are set up showing examples of creative resistance, including a series of posters from the Palestine Poster Project. Participants are encouraged to read through the material and consider guiding questions at the "stations" they visit. For example, questions include, among others: "How does this piece reflect on memory, loss, staying, forgetting? Where have you seen, heard, experienced myths collapsing through art? In what ways can art and storytelling erase, make visible, or change narratives and memory?"

As the curriculum draws to a close, using visuals from all the sessions and some guiding questions, the final session ends with a period of reflection about the overall experience. This offers an opportunity for participants to share their thoughts, hopes, and reflections on what they've learned and on how they might think about current realities moving forward. Also, recognizing that there are likely still many questions and a range of different thoughts, this process is framed as having been the beginning of a learning process, not the end.

## Facilitator Guide

Those using the *Facing the Nakba* curriculum might have a strong Jewish or Zionist education or come with little prior knowledge. Others may come with prior knowledge or with a fuller understanding of the Nakba. The facilitator guide is designed to support the teaching and learning of participants with different sets of knowledge and experience.

Given that the curricula may offer a new perspective for many encountering it and perhaps one that creates internal struggle, the facilitator guide is an essential part of ensuring a pedagogic process that enables deep learning, exploration, and meaningful reflection. As described in the guide,

The material offers firsthand accounts that may be in conflict with what some of us have previously heard about

the Nakba. We encourage critical thinking and reflection to enable participants to interact with the materials in different ways. To facilitate this process, we have created facilitator notes that 1) address possible issues/scenarios that may arise and 2) share some of our thoughts about the process of facilitation. Facing the Nakba curriculum was designed using a popular education or Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework—a pedagogy that recognizes that in this process we are all teachers and learners. Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a framework for engaging in research and organizing for social justice that is rooted in a community's own knowledge, wisdom, and experience. PAR recognizes that those most impacted by systemic injustice are in the best position to understand and analyze their needs and challenges and to organize for social change. This framework is helpful for Facing the Nakba facilitation, because it allows for participatory and experiential engagement with the material and with each other during the workshop sessions.

Accordingly, each session in this curriculum intentionally builds from participants' previous knowledge, concerns, and experience as they engage with the material and participate in discussions. Taking into consideration that participants will come to the learning process from very different entry points, the intention, then, is to build from those different backgrounds and experiences and previous education as we challenge ourselves to re-learn, to re-examine, to reflect, and to come to new understandings of the history and current day reality.

The facilitator guide includes a few guiding principles that are helpful to keep in mind when facilitating within this framework:

Foster an environment to build healthy, respectful relationships by developing clear goals and establishing the group's purpose together. Recognize who is in the room and remain conscious of issues of power, dynamics, different forms of expression so that all types of participation are valued equally. Guide the process while not dominating conversation. Work to ensure that all participants, including themselves, are integrated as genuinely as possible into the group. Balance the various dynamics and engage as both a teacher and a learner.

***Recognizing that for many who have been educated to believe that Israel was "a land without a people for a people without a land," this learning process is intended to open up spaces for new understandings and exploration of a history that has too often been ignored or distorted.***

The curriculum and process engaged in by those participating are reflective, intentional, and participatory. Each session includes a range of questions to foster deeper thinking and reflection. The sessions are also created to be as accessible as possible to a range of communities.

Recognizing that for many who have been educated to believe that Israel was "a land without a people for a people without a land," this learning process is intended to open up spaces for new understandings and exploration of a history that has too often been ignored or distorted. The use and highlighting of stories and testimonies through video and other readings are particularly valuable as part of this process. While these resources are readily available, they have most often not been included in Jewish educational curricula or in courses about Zionism and the creation of Israel.

## Addressing Challenges

As the curriculum has been, and will be, used in different contexts, some issues have arisen requiring thought and reflection about the best way to respond and interact with participants. I will describe a couple of the scenarios that have arisen and ones we anticipate as well as some of our thoughts about how to best address them.

In one case, at a pilot course we facilitated in conjunction with the Columbia University's Alliance for Historical Dialogue and Accountability, a member of the class who defined herself as a liberal Zionist challenged the material, particularly in the beginning sessions, with "This is wrong." It was clear she was steeped in Zionist history and considered herself an expert. The students for this pilot course were hand-picked to reflect a number of different political perspectives, and we recognized that the students with the strongest Zionist education had the most difficulty taking in new information that conflicted with the narrative with which they were familiar. We took all this into account as we continued to further develop the curriculum and facilitator guide.

In another course with Jewish pro-Palestine activists, participants who were quite open to the historical material expressed many conflicted feelings when it came to the discussion of the implementation of the Palestinian right of return and what was actually possible. During the initial discussion, everyone was clear that they supported the Palestinian right of return. But when we began the last part of the discussion—practicalities of return—the discussion shifted. Participants continued to support the right of return in principle, but were acutely aware of the seemingly insurmountable psychological/emotional obstacles to it from Israeli Jews. This grew out of their own experiences speaking to members of U.S. Jewish communities and experiencing the resistance even at the mention of the right of return. At the same time, because they are all long-time activists, they were also aware of how change that has seemed impossible can and does happen. We didn't have the chance to talk at that moment about how the groundwork for these changes took decades of activist work or how what seemed like a sudden tectonic shift wasn't really so sudden.

A number of other scenarios are described in the facilitator guide to help with these and other challenging situations that arise. In one example, one of the participants is not talking or participating in outwardly recognizable ways. This person may generally be quiet, or

is more quiet and withdrawn in relation to the sessions and particular group dynamics. In another example, a Jewish participant is overwhelmed with guilt and keeps bringing it back to her own processing and how hard it is to read that this was done by Jewish people in defense of the Jewish state. In each of these cases, we wanted to think about how to make it possible for those grappling with the material to not feel stuck, but, rather, to be able to grow from the process and meaningfully generate deeper thinking and analysis.

In the case of a person challenging the facts, part of our goal is to encourage people to open themselves to this new material and to try to engage with it as genuinely as possible. An empathic, sensitive facilitator can help create a process and environment in which participants will feel able to learn, struggle, and challenge themselves within a framework of accountability and openness to new material and to the issues being addressed. As articulated in the facilitator guide:

Encourage participants to look critically at our own understanding of the historical accounts and consider whether there are voices or perspectives that have been left out. If so, we can then reflect on how these testimonies might help us build a more inclusive understanding of both present and historical relationships in Palestine and Israel. Encourage participants to think about what action they want to take with the new knowledge they have, rather than remaining in state of guilt or feeling overwhelmed.

Further, being open to envisioning what is possible is a necessary part of the pedagogic process. In the discussion about the right of return, for example, this envisioning is rooted in the rights of those who have been forced out of their homes and land. It also involves challenging and exploring notions of who makes change and how change is made.

The facilitator guide also includes recommended tracks depending on who the participants are, their backgrounds, histories, and prior education. Since there are seven sessions, the tracks also provide the opportunity for those with less time to engage in particular exercises, activities, and readings that are most relevant. The guide includes recommendations for high school students, college courses, those who are organizers for justice, and groups identifying as “progressive Zionists.”

The project also created an extensive library to make it possible to read and research additional issues and areas of interest. The library includes readings and videos on the right of return; destruction of villages, partition plans; personal histories and testimonies; primary sources, and materials about the ongoing Nakba, among many others. That library is on the Facing the Nakba website.

Commitment to PAR is infused throughout the curriculum—encouraging not only an examination of history from the perspective of those who were directly

impacted by injustice, but also facilitating a collaborative process of engagement and learning together, rooted in people’s own histories, in each of the sessions. As part of the learning process, the importance of research coming from communities themselves is also centered as critical to developing an understanding and analysis of the Nakba rooted in lived realities.

## Conclusion

The Facing the Nakba curriculum tells the story of the Nakba and of the dispossession of the Palestinian people from their homes and land. We wanted to create an accountable, accessible curriculum for educators, organizers, and communities to draw upon in their classrooms and educational settings.

This curriculum speaks to our conviction that making visible the injustices of the Nakba, both past and ongoing, is necessary to achieving justice. Not incidentally, it speaks also to current organizing, including the Palestinians’ call for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS), which has as one of its commitments the right of return for Palestinian refugees. And it also speaks to the implications and relationship of the Nakba and the call for Palestinian rights to other struggles for social justice within the United States and globally.

While the Nakba is fundamental to understanding the experiences and lived realities of Palestinians before, during, and since the creation of Israel, it has been suppressed and ignored in Israel’s narrative of national emergence. And that one-sided Israeli narrative is what is echoed by many Jewish communities and others within the United States. We hope that the FTN curriculum will enable participants to engage openly and deeply in a learning process that promotes honest reflection, analysis, and action toward justice.

The full curriculum and facilitator guide can be found at <https://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/facing-the-nakba/>

In addition to the author, the Facing the Nakba coordinating committee members include Julia Kessler, Marilyn Kleinberg Neimark, Nava Et Shalom, and Rabbi Alissa Wise. The author draws upon the FTN curricula and materials, which were developed and co-written by the coordinating committee (listed above) with the support of two of PARCEO’s coordinators, Nina Mehta and Krysta Williams.

Finally, many people read and gave critical feedback on the FTN curriculum in the process of its development. A special thank-you to Nadia Saah and Jamil Dakwar.



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# RADICAL TEACHER

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

Poems

## Cindy Comes to Hear Me Read Gay Freaking Assholes: On Tolerance

by Jill McDonough



JILL MCDONOUGH, PHOTO FROM HER WEBSITE

## Cindy Comes to Hear Me Read

Cindy: not her real name. I met her in prison, and people in prison I give the fake names. I taught her Shakespeare, remember her frown, wide eyes, terror of getting things wrong. Her clear, arguable thesis on Desdemona's motives, Desdemona's past. The last days were hard on her, it taking visible work to see things could be worse. Imagine: I did. But now she's out! In jewelry and makeup, new clothes, haircut she chose and paid for. We hugged. We'd never hugged; it's not allowed. On the outside you can hug whoever you want. She told me she has an apartment now, a *window*, an ocean view. She has a *car*, she told me, and we both cracked up. The thought of it wild, as far-fetched then as when you're a kid playing grownup, playing any kind of house. She has a job. She drives there in traffic. Each day she sees the angry people. Sweet, silly people, mad—god bless them—at traffic. At other *cars*. She laughs, she told me, laughs out loud alone in her car. People around her angry as toddlers. Whole highways of traffic, everybody at the work of being free.

## Gay Freaking Assholes: On Tolerance for Skip Horack

When I was teaching writing camp with Skip,  
we both pretended that we had the skills  
to teach teenagers. Easy enough with smart kids.  
Psyched for free lunch—cafeteria-grilled  
organic chicken from farms with fancy names  
like *The Happy Clucker: Jenny's Farm in the Pines*.  
Oh, Jenny. We sat happy with our trays  
of tacos, soft serve, teasing. And then one time  
we overheard one kid call another *a gay  
freaking asshole*. We froze, tried not to laugh.  
Real teachers wouldn't tolerate intolerance. They'd  
say *Tolerance. Language. Bullying. Or Shut Your Trap:*  
who knows? They'd trade fun lunch for *a talk*, kids' tears.

We call each other *gay freaking asshole* for years.



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Teaching Note

Dear Solitary Black Student

By Mychel L. Estevez



COURTESY OF HUFFPOST.COM

Dear Solitary Black Student,

Some days I worry that I'm harming you. As I speak about society's negative stereotypes of African Americans and how our culture is built on racism my mind is on you and how what I'm saying may be impacting you.

I'm very sorry that you are a visible minority in our class. In a way, your aloneness makes you the visible representation of all that is wrong in our society: a society where 34-38% of the "correctional population" is Black in spite of Blacks making up roughly 13% of the overall population (NAACP, The Sentencing Project). I'm sorry your sister is no longer in class with us; I wish she hadn't been taken by the criminal injustice system. But I know that as much as I wish, the impact is hitting you so much harder and it must be harder still coming to a class where these systems are talked about, a class where the majority have no idea about these things that are an everyday part of your life.

I'm writing this because I've come to a point where my fears about hurting you and my commitments to you and to all of my students seem to be colliding and I'm questioning myself about whether what I'm doing is right. I know it's not for you to reassure and teach me; in a way, that's actually part of the problem. I don't know how long ago it was, but I made myself a promise consisting of my commitments to my students of color. Namely,

\*I would not tokenize, asking students of color to speak as if they are the representation of their race.

\*I would not ask certain students questions that I don't ask others. For example, when students are from different parts of the world, I won't ask where they are from unless they bring it up and want to talk about it.

\*I would say the hard things first, meaning I wouldn't leave it to marginalized students, or any students for that matter, to bring up difficult topics around racism, classism, etc. and systems like criminal (in)justice, education, economics.

While I recognize that there is always more work I can do, I think I do a pretty good job. But it's that last commitment that I'm having trouble with right now. I'm not questioning my commitment or the need for it. I think the Trump era we are living through is making me think about it more and more as this administration makes race and other marginalized statuses ever more salient and life ever more a struggle.

I'm stuck between not wanting to make you have to deal with these issues in my class because I know that they are literally your life and my need to bring awareness to the rest of the class ensuring that students know, undeniably, that these issues exist. That they understand that these issues are not as they appear in mainstream media, that they learn how to recognize privilege and oppression, that they learn to recognize and move beyond stereotypes and to question themselves, their beliefs, and their attitudes along with those of the institutions they are embedded in, and the larger culture itself. I cannot, in good faith, allow students to leave without at least attempting to foster these understandings.

But I believe that as I do this work I may be hurting you, which violates my general belief in doing no harm and working to mitigate harm that I may inadvertently cause. I don't know how to mitigate the harm in your case and in the cases of my other marginalized students. Sometimes, as I'm speaking, I feel your eyes on me. I always try to be careful and to question how I'm phrasing things. But now, with these thoughts in my head, I'm starting to stumble as I try to search for the right words to teach and impact some and mitigate harm for others. I'm afraid these stumbles reflect poorly on me and that students won't take my words as seriously, that I'm less affective. I need to do better but I hope you know that I'm doing the best I can every moment, that I never want the burden of educating others placed on you in class, and that I do what I can to not let it be. And that I'm regularly working to improve myself and how I teach.

Sincerely,

Your Instructor

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# RADICAL TEACHER

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## News for Educational Workers

By Leonard Vogt

News for Educational Workers has been a featured column of *Radical Teacher* almost since the journal's conception. With this and the previous issue of the journal, however, news items of interest to progressive and radical educators will be posted on the new *Radical Teacher* blog at <http://www.radicalteacher.net/>.

Other less time-bound items, such as books, film, journals, articles, and resources will continue to be featured in this newer, abbreviated News for Educational Workers column which will continue to be published with each of our forthcoming online issues.

## Film



FROM THIS DAY FORWARD

*From This Day Forward* tells the story of a love, and family, that survived the most intimate of transformations.

With her own wedding just around the corner, filmmaker Sharon Shattuck returns home to examine the mystery at the heart of her upbringing: How her transgender father Trisha and her straight-identified mother Marcia stayed together against all odds. *From This Day Forward* is a moving portrayal of an American family coping with the most intimate of transformations.

As the film evolves into a conversation about love and acceptance in a modern American family, it raises questions relevant to all of us. As individuals how do we adapt to sustain long-term love and relationships? Where do sexuality and gender intersect? And how do families stay together, when external forces are pulling them apart? For more information, go to

<http://www.bullfrogfilms.com/catalog/ftdf.html>.

## Books

Introducing a New Children's Christmas Story for Labor from Hard Ball Press!

Imagine if young children could read a book about a union that wins back the job of a worker unfairly fired for taking toys out of the trash. That's what they will discover in the sweet, inspiring story of *Good Guy Jake*, by Teamster Brother Mark Torres.

Take this new Christmas classic to your local schools, libraries, bookstores, daycare centers and pediatrician offices, ask them to offer the book to the children they

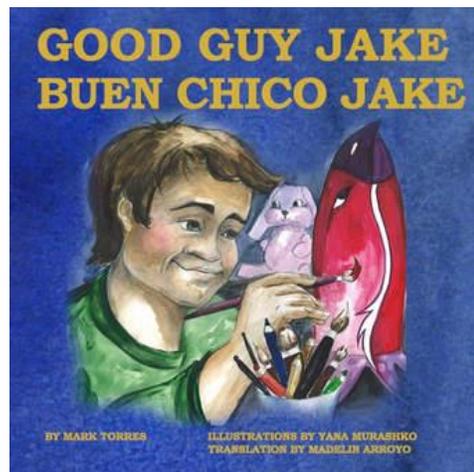
serve. The children will learn the real union story: advocating for social justice for working people. Help defeat the anti-union, anti-working class propaganda put out by right wing media and political hacks.

For years, sanitation worker Jake has repaired and painted broken toys he pulled from the trash on his rounds and given them to the children in the local shelter at Christmas. But one wintry day an angry motorist turns Jake in to the sanitation company for collecting toys. When Jake is fired for breaking city regulations, his union takes the case to arbitration. There, the union brings in a group of children, who show the judge the toys Jake gave them. They testify that the gifts taught them the true meaning of Christmas. The judge reinstates Jake, and the union announces a city-wide toy collection for all the children in all the shelters: the Good Guy Jake Toy Drive.

*Good Guy Jake* was written by Mark Torres, General Counsel with the International Brotherhood of Teamsters Local 810 in New York.

Release date: August 5, 2017; Price: \$12.50 paperback, \$20.00 hardcover; Age 4-10; 56 pages; ISBN: Paperback – 978-0-9979797-4-9; Hardcover - 978-0-9991358-0-8

Available from Ingram (with full return rights for booksellers), [Hardballpress.com](http://Hardballpress.com), and booksellers everywhere. **Generous discounts are available to unions and other social justice organizations.** 15% discount for orders of 10 or more.



GOOD GUY JAKE BY MARK TORRES

## Journals and Magazines

*Rethinking Schools* (Summer 2017 Vol. 31, No. 4) highlights a cover story on "Teaching Big Ideas with Little Children." The "Big Ideas" include articles on teaching young children about climate change, the trauma of war in Syria, sacred spaces, storytelling to build community, and the Vietnam War. The editorial introduction to this issue, "Teaching Social Issues and Global Conflicts with Young Children" is an excellent source of guidelines for how to make current issues developmentally appropriate and engaging for young students.

# rethinking schools

SUMMER 2017 VOL. 31, NO. 4

## Teaching Big Ideas with Little Kids

Linda Christensen  
on How Our Stories  
Build Community

Lyn Mikel Brown  
on Girls Against  
Dress Codes



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ULS *D-Scribe*

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# RADICAL TEACHER

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

## Contributors' Notes



"UTOPIAN CENTER FOR CIVIC LOVE" FROM PUBLIC SCHOOL (2017), AN EXHIBITION BY JIM DUGNAN OF STOCKYARD INSTITUTE, AND RACHEL L. S. HARPER OF SEEN + HEARD. PHOTO BY LAUREN MERANDA

**Pamela Annas** joined the *Radical Teacher* editorial board in 1978 and is currently section editor of RT's new Poetry feature. Now retired, she taught at UMass Boston for 35 years, focusing on 20th century poetry, American working-class literature, and writing courses for women. Her last six years at UMass she worked as Associate Dean of the College of Liberal Arts. Currently she is writing, teaching writing workshops, doing freelance editing, marching in protests, and dancing whenever possible.

**Nan Bauer-Maglin** worked for 27 years at the Borough of Manhattan Community College, CUNY where she taught developmental writing, composition, and women's literature. Then she became Academic Director of the CUNY Baccalaureate for Unique and Interdisciplinary Studies for nine years. After that, she became part-time Director of Special Projects at John Jay College and then worked for the City University of New York and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation documenting the development of The Stella and Charles Guttman Community College, CUNY. Upon retiring, she has volunteered with ReServe, Women's eNews, Global Action on Aging at the UN, The Whitney Museum, and Girls Write Now. She has edited *Cut Loose: (Mostly) Older Women Talk about the End of (Mostly) Long-term Relationships* and coedited: *Women and Stepfamilies: Voices of Anger and Love*; *"Bad Girls/Good Girls": Women, Sex, and Power in the Nineties*; *Women Confronting Retirement: A Nontraditional Guide*; and *Final Acts: Death, Dying and the Choices We Make*. In 2019 her book *Widows' Words: Women Write on the Experience of Grief, The First Year, The Long Haul, and Everything in Between* will be published. Her family consists of four children and twelve grandchildren; especially important among her circle of friends is her women's group of 37 years.

**Travis D. Boyce** is an Associate Professor of Africana Studies at the University of Northern Colorado. His research focuses on contemporary African American history and education, popular culture, and race and ethnic studies. His work can be found in various peer-reviewed journals as well as edited books. He is the co-author of the forthcoming edited book entitled *Historicizing Fear*, which is in print with the University Press of Colorado.

**Linda Dittmar** is a long-time member of *Radical Teacher*. Now retired, she taught 20th century literature and Film Studies at the University of Massachusetts--Boston for forty years. Her books include *From Hanoi to Hollywood; the Vietnam War in American Film and Multiple Voices in Feminist Film Criticism*. She taught in Israel and France and twice on Fulbright grants to India. An Israeli-American, she is currently writing a book about the Palestinians' Nakba of 1948.

**Mychel Estevez** is an instructor at Portland State University and the University of Portland. Her work typically focuses on gender and inequalities.

**Jyl Lynn Felman** is an international performance artist, playwright, and the author of three books, *Hot Chicken Wings*, a collection of short stories, *Cravings*, a memoir about growing up Jewish after the Holocaust, and *Never A Dull Moment: Teaching And the Art of Performance*. She has taught Women and Gender Studies at Brandeis University and Suffolk University. She was a visiting assistant professor in the Judaic Studies department and the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA. For more information see: [www.jyllynnfelman.com](http://www.jyllynnfelman.com).

**Margaret Morganroth Gullette**, the author of five books in age studies (the most recent, *Ending Ageism, or How Not to Shoot Old People*, Rutgers University Press 2017) and the editor of *The Art and Craft of Teaching* (Harvard University Press), writes about the Free High School for Adults in the USA and Nicaraguan press. She visits the school annually for six weeks and with her advisory committee continues to seek funding.

**Jill McDonough's** books of poems include *Habeas Corpus* (Salt, 2008), *Where You Live* (Salt, 2012), and *Reaper* (Alice James, 2017). The recipient of three Pushcart prizes and fellowships from the Lannan Foundation, NEA, NYPL, FAWC, and Stanford, her work appears in *Slate*, *The Threepenny Review*, and *Best American Poetry*. She teaches in the MFA program at UMass-Boston and directs 24PearlStreet, the Fine Arts Work Center online. Her fifth poetry collection, *Here All Night*, is forthcoming from Alice James Books.

**Donna Nevel**, a community psychologist, educator and co-coordinator of PARCEO, is a long-time organizer for justice in Palestine; against Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism; and for justice in public education. She is a member of the coordinating committee of Facing the Nakba; a founding member of the Network Against Islamophobia and Jews Say No!; and was a co-founder of Jews for Racial and Economic Justice (JFREJ).

**Stevie Ruiz** is an assistant professor in the Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies at California State University, Northridge. He is completing his book manuscript project entitled, *Stewards of the Land: Race and Environmental Justice in the American West*. Maira Areguin, Eduardo Estrada, Jesus Jimenez, Diane Lopez, Karla Sanchez, and Janet Valenzuela were students enrolled in the lab.



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