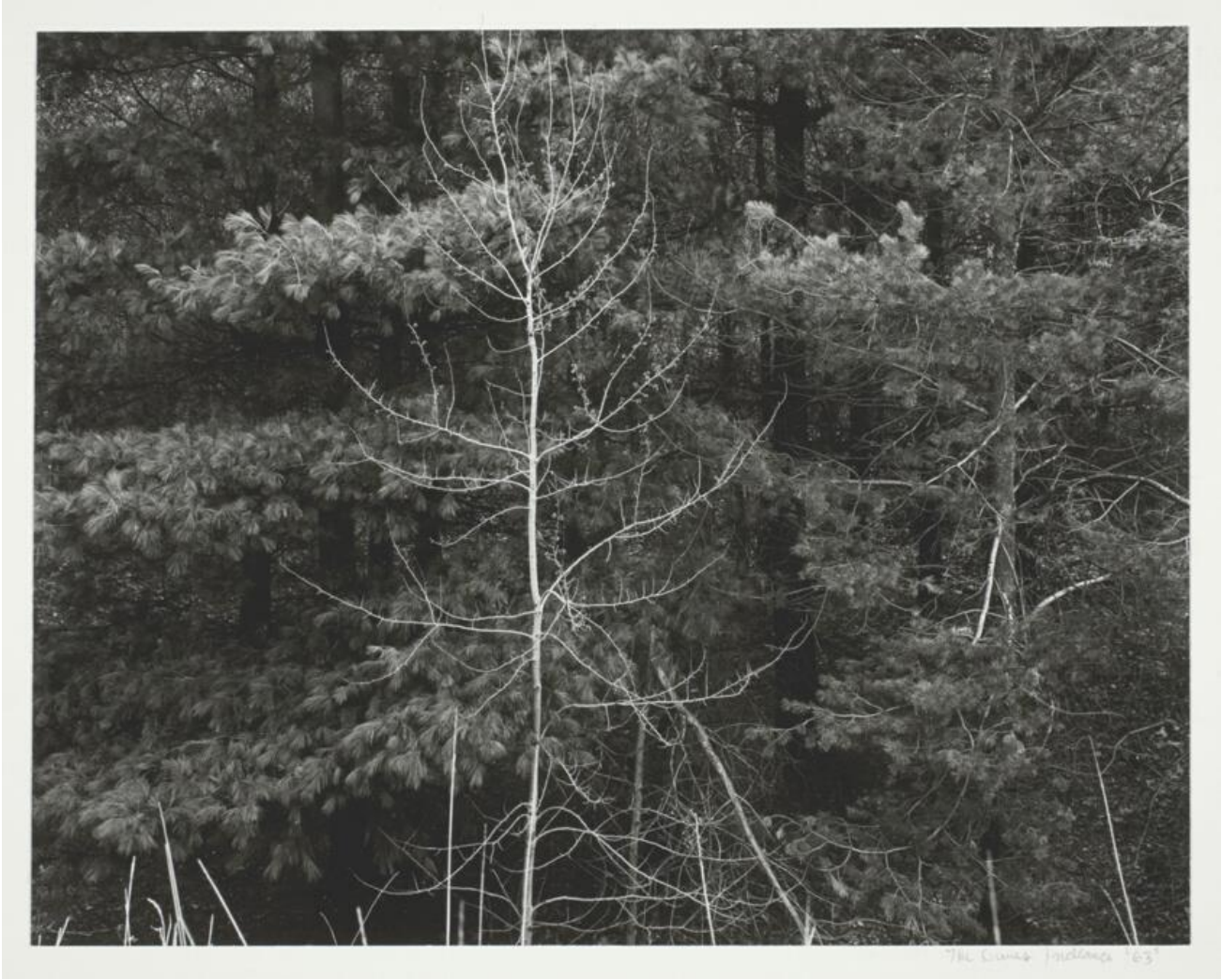
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A Call for Speculative Syllabus Writing

by Nicole Weinberg



THE DUNES, INDIANADATE- 1963 ARTIST- ROBERT EARL WILSON

Introduction

Universities in settler colonial contexts such as the United States are institutions characterized by land-grabbing, accumulation, and the overarching expansion of settler colonialism (la paperson, 2017). Consequently, in such contexts, the university's syllabus must also be understood as a colonial technology. Far from a neutral institutional document, the syllabus is a means in which the politics of teaching are made explicit through a series of inflexible rules such as due dates, attendance requirements, and grading policies (Ohmann, 2004/2022). In my own experiences in higher education in Texas, I've noticed a growing and concerning pattern of universities implementing increasingly standardized templates for instructors' syllabi. And yet—I still wholeheartedly believe that the syllabus genre holds generative possibilities for instructors to exercise their narrative agency and build otherwise worlds in and beyond education.

Over the past decade, *Radical Teacher* has continued to give the syllabus genre frequent and intentional space through publishing full syllabi related to innovative courses (Branner and Page, 2013; Hentges, 2013), as well as featuring articles with teachers' critical reflections on their syllabus writing (Avery, 2020; Nolan, 2021; Rodriguez, 2018). My current purpose in writing is to add a selection of imaginative ponderings for what a syllabus might look like in a more just future world to this already fruitful conversation. As such, this work lives somewhere on the boundary between what is currently imaginable and possible for our syllabi and what *might* be possible through engaging radical imagination(s). I hope the reader—perhaps a syllabus-writer themselves—will find this article evokes a response, whether that be inspiration for what they might consider, do, or dream of for their syllabus writing in their own teaching context(s).

This article will not direct the reader on how to write a syllabus better, nor how to craft a more critical syllabus—not directly. This is, in part, because writing a critical syllabus requires proceeding in a way that honors the multitude of relationships in university settings, including (but not limited to) the relationship between instructor and student, instructor and community, and instructor and Land. Those of us who call ourselves critical pedagogues write syllabi in a wide variety of institutional, relational, geographical, and political contexts; as such, the process of improving these relationships will look different across syllabus-writers. (Re)claiming your own narrative agency in syllabus writing is deeply dependent upon those factors, and as I write this, I am sure that the most liberatory syllabus that *you* can write in *your* context is more liberatory than I, as I am writing this, can even imagine. I hope that after reading this article, you will begin/continue to imagine what that might be, have discussions with others, and take action.

Framework

I begin by positioning myself to this work as a white, female co-conspirator, a term which I use in reference to Ekpe and Toutant's (2022) intersectional, anti-racist co-conspirator framework (I-ARC). Per I-ARC, a co-conspirator is committed to dismantling racism, coloniality, and intersecting dimensions of oppression in all forms. Being a co-conspirator includes a fundamental commitment to dismantling settler colonialism in all forms, which I am situating as the root form of oppression in this analysis. To describe my specific stance to opposing settler colonialism, I'd like to borrow the term *anti-coloniality* from Sabzalian (2019), rather than appropriating the term *decolonize.* My reasoning for this choice is twofold: first, that I am not collaborating on this writing project directly with Indigenous communities nor I am Indigenous myself; and, second, that this project does not include *direct* and *tangible* advocacy toward the redistribution of Land toward Indigenous nations. To me, an *anti-colonial* stance seeks to stop the harm of coloniality in higher education, making space for and moving in solidarity with those who are working toward decolonization. Taking an anti-colonial stance as a co-conspirator requires action beyond writing and theorizing. I must fulfill my role through solidarity and tangible action in everyday life. For me, the syllabus is one tool I use to pursue fulfillment of this responsibility, and perhaps syllabi might come to serve this purpose for readers as well.

Writing from the far-right political context of Texas, I am increasingly aware and concerned about rhetoric and policies directed at dismantling diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) offices and initiatives in higher education. The prevalence and pace at which harmful narratives about social justice work in schools are proliferating in the media can leave us, who pursue more just futures, sometimes feeling alone in this work. I know that I—and perhaps my colleagues as well—often feel tempted with hopelessness for a better future world. The I-RAC framework is a reminder that an essential part of my role as a co-conspirator is to refuse the temptation of jadedness with/in advocacy work. As Ekpe and Toutant (2022) illustrated, a co-conspirator must firmly believe that a more liberatory future world is possible and work confidently and in community as such. In this way, I believe a co-conspirator is also responsible for engaging radical imagination(s).

Radical imagination(s) are fundamental (re)imagining into what the most liberatory vision of a future world might look like. I use the term similarly to how Benjamin (2024) defines "collective imagination," describing "when we imagine different worlds together, writing shared stories and plotting futures in which we can all flourish" (p. x). I use the plural "imagination(s)" to honor the notion that more than one vision of a liberatory future exists, and that what is liberatory to one person or group might be oppressive to another. The term itself has roots in Black abolitionist freedom dreaming (Davis, 2003; Kelley, 2022; Ladson-Billings, 1994/2022), Afrofuturism (Toliver, 2023) as well as Indigenous (Halle-Erby, 2024; Hickey, 2019) and queer (Bannon, 2021; Helmsing, 2022) futurities. As such, radical imagination(s) requires collective and diverse dreaming into the otherwise, and shared inspiration to make this constellation of emancipatory dreaming possible. I am writing to invite radical imagination(s) into our syllabus writing, and conversations about syllabus reforms.

Stories of the Syllabus Genre

Syllabi are more than institutional documents; each syllabus is a narrative, and syllabi together constitute a genre. The syllabus genre utilizes a specific set of rhetorical and aesthetic tools to tell a particular story, and through naming these we can identify strategies to subvert them. In other words, it is time that we—broadly meaning instructors committed to liberatory teaching practices—approach syllabus writing as a genre-bending project.

Syllabi often present a narrative featuring a specific set of relationships between the students and instructor(s). For example, syllabi may utilize rubrics and grading policies, which can feature such terms as *unsatisfactory performance* or *academic probation.* Such rhetorical maneuvers serve to story students as in a deficient, or even carceral, relationship to the instructor as well as the institution. This framing of deficiency also gestures towards the embedded ableism in colonial ideals. Syllabi also often include strict attendance policies that penalize students for missing a certain number of classes, without much room for exception. Such policies story certain students, for example those with chronic dis/abilities or caregiving commitments, as either unfit for the college classroom or as needing to sacrifice their personal or family well-being to complete the course. In both examples, the instructor is storied as a sort of warden, the one who surveils compliance with these policies and enacts punishments if they are not followed.

Additionally, syllabi often story the relationship between the student(s) and the institution—including the Land the institution occupies. Syllabi often include mission statements of the university, or the specific unit in which the course is hosted. Such mission statements often include vague references to the university as ultimately working—and having always worked—in service of the *greater good*, or even *democracy*. The assumption that all universities inherently have a positive impact on society is demonstrably false, since the construction of many universities required the occupation of stolen Land and exploitation of labor from enslaved people. Furthermore, the majority of institutions of higher education were designed to exclude any aspirant student who was not a white male. While it is increasingly common for universities in North America to make statements of Land acknowledgement, Stewart and Yang (2021) reminded us that such statements of recognition are only first steps, rather than inherent acts of decolonization. As such, a syllabus should not just *include* a Land acknowledgement but *engage* with what that acknowledgement means in the context of the specific university, surrounding Indigenous communities, and course of study. This engagement should go beyond the syllabus itself, but extend into class discussions, and gesture toward contemporary contexts of political struggle and action.

Many syllabus-writers, if they are to engage intentionally with syllabus writing for the purposes of equity at all, have paid attention to the story told by their course readings. This story is the relationship between the instructor, the course, and the field. Through the particular assigned course readings, a syllabus tells a story about what knowledge is of most worth. Too often, this story is told as one that centers the intellectual contributions of white, English-speaking males from affluent backgrounds. It is this aspect of the syllabus—the reading list—in which instructors committed to liberatory pedagogies have most often held themselves responsible for telling another story. This is an invitation to continue and expand that intentional effort, as well as to apply such dedication to equity to the rest of our syllabus writing.

The ways that syllabi tell stories are through both rhetorical and aesthetic elements. Rhetorical elements include language—especially used to describe students, instructor(s), the institution—and Land. Aesthetic elements may include the traditional tables and charts, or even the lack of visual depictions of the local community or scholars whose ideas are central to the course. In many ways, syllabi exemplify what jagodzinski (2010) terms designer capitalism, an "aestheticaization of life" by corporations which dominate aesthetic representations so that it is "increasingly more difficult to hear and see alternative views and representations" (p. 33). In a similar thread, the rhetorical and aesthetic elements of syllabi have been so purported by land-grabbing universities that it is nearly (un)imaginable to consider higher education without them in the specific conventions in which they exist.

While I've described some of the stories that the syllabi often tell, and touched on the ways they accomplish this, syllabus-writers must not submit to determinism. In other words, there is an element of narrative agency yet untapped to its full potential that can use syllabi to tell other, world-changing stories, and that is *you,* the syllabus-writer. As the syllabus-writer, you can—and *must*—use your syllabus to tell another story. Whichever story you tell, know that it cannot be neutral; while there are many ways to take an anti-oppressive stance in your syllabus writing, the refusal to engage intentionally at all with syllabus writing is complicity to ideological bases of the colonial machine of higher education.

If syllabi are a genre, then critical pedagogues must approach syllabus writing as a genre-bending project. We must (re)claim our narrative agency, both within and beyond the limitations of academic institutions. If the syllabus is already an active agent in building and sustaining colonial worlds, then the worldbuilding can be *shaped.* Just as Lauren in Octavia Butler's (1993/2020) *Parable of the Sower* wrote, "all that you touch you change," so is each instructor already shaping what the syllabus genre is to become in the future (p. 3). Of course, the future of the syllabus genre can certainly be shaped to work for or against the aims of social justice work. And yet, the challenge I pose for the reader is to consider ways to (re)center their own narrative agency in the syllabi that they have written or are currently writing.

Speculative Syllabus Studies

It is important that I make distinction in the way that I am advocating for instructors to engage with narrative agency in syllabus writing. Several past syllabus reform efforts aimed at more equitable experiences in education have existed in the form of narrative reflections upon one's own syllabus (Avery, 2020; Fyfe, 2023; Zidani, 2021),

discourse/content analyses of syllabi (Cole, 2023; Gallo et al., 2022; Luh et al., 2023), or syllabus-review protocols (American Psychological Association, 2021; California Community Colleges, 2022; University of Southern California, 2020). In the current work, I am honoring those efforts as well as naming them as largely based in the *practical* rather than the *imaginative*. Both are necessary. For now, I am inviting instructors to engage with what I have previously termed "speculative syllabus studies," that being "a call to action for scholars and syllabus-writers to think about the syllabus as a genre-bending project" (Weinberg, 2025, p. 24).

In my previous work, I identified three core shifts from the way syllabi have been previously discussed to speculative syllabus studies. The first of these is a shift from reactionary to imaginative. By this, I mean that speculative syllabus studies is an invitation for syllabus-writers to think beyond minor changes to their reading list or language in their syllabus. In this way, I stated that speculative syllabus studies is "a shift from 'how to' to 'what if,' an experimental space of the imagination" (Weinberg, 2025, p. 24). Rather than identifying aspects of syllabus writing that are marginalizing to students and working backwards to reduce the harm that these have caused, speculative syllabus studies is future-oriented, beginning with the radical liberatory potential of education to transform lives.

The second aspect of speculative syllabus studies is a shift from the incremental to the radical. By *radical,* I mean a fundamental uprooting of current systems of oppression toward the emancipation and liberation of all people. While past syllabus reform efforts have often taken tangible, small steps toward a less harmful syllabus (e.g., adding at least one scholar of color in the reading list), speculative syllabus studies is a call for a fundamental reworking of what syllabi are and can become. Finally, and most importantly, the third shift is from the decontextual to the relational. This shift is away from a one-size-fits-all approach to syllabus reform regardless of geographic, political, and community contexts, and towards a re-imagining of syllabi that is deeply rooted in the context(s) of the students, the instructor(s), the institution, Land, and current events.

Speculative syllabus studies does not give easy answers, but rather presents challenging thought work for activists and teachers to consider. And as such, the remainder of this paper considers exemplars of syllabus-writing efforts taken from movement work that point toward greater possibilities in what a syllabus might become in a more just future world. As exemplars are defined as things serving as typical examples or models, I want to emphasize that these exemplars are not perfect, nor the end goal. They do not inherently represent *best practices* in education, or syllabus writing. Rather, they represent inspirations for us to experiment with. Together, they might push thinking forward in considering how they might go even further to fundamentally uproot our ideas of what syllabi are.

Learning from Syllabus Subversion

While speculative syllabus studies demands creativity and engagement with radical imagination(s), it does not require that we start from scratch. As long as there have been syllabi, their micropolitics have been protested, subverted, and co-opted by students and instructors alike for more just purposes. As such, I've chosen three exemplars for syllabi that push the boundaries of the university classroom and invite us to consider syllabi in the broader scope of our critical pedagogical aims. I use the term *exemplar* to describe these efforts, neither because they are representative of the end goal of liberatory syllabus writing nor because they are perfect in their conception or implementation. Rather, I see each of these *exemplars* as ideas based in our current reality for critical pedagogues to chew on, play with, and (re)shape to meet their own pedagogical goals for syllabus writing. As such, I invite the reader to notice their responses to each of the exemplars and consider what aspects of each might be useful for their classroom contexts.

Exemplar #1: Dr. Sandra Styres's Literacies of Land Course

Dr. Sandra Styres (2018) describes the Literacies of Land: Narratives, Storying, and Literature course she has taught at the University of Toronto. In this experiential and discussion-based course, Styres engages "First Voices in culturally aligned and place-conscious texts, stories, and oral traditions" in order to engage students in developing critical consciousness around their own relationship to Land and place (p. 25). As such, the course integrates "literary texts, media, and oral studies" featuring the diverse voices of Indigenous peoples from past and present (p. 34). Importantly, Styres sees herself as decentered as the teacher of this course, since "land is the primary teacher" (p. 34). All of the readings and discussions in the course Styres teaches are oriented on the specific Land in which the course is held; subsequently, Styres often asks her students: "Now that you know what you know, how will you use it to inform your personal and professional practices?" (p. 34).

While the course Styres (2018) described does indeed have a print-text syllabus in which she is the syllabus-writer, I'd argue that truly Land *is* the syllabus for her course. In this way, her course syllabus is a replication of Land-as-syllabus, and the syllabus-writer is not only Styres, but also Land-in-relation-to-Indigenous-people-and-Nations.
Viewing Land-as-syllabus, the *students* are not limited to the ones enrolled in Styres' course; rather, they also include anyone interested in developing their critical consciousness around Land, place, and decolonization. The story that Land-as-syllabus tells is one of relationality, that being the interconnectedness between ourselves—as students—and other human and non-human forms of lives, and non-living things.

Additionally, in considering Land-as-syllabus, one must not be so quick as to parrot the institution's Land Acknowledgement in the syllabus as a printed or virtual document. This, too, has become in some disciplinary or institutional contexts a routine and mundane act of passivity and often lacks the critical engagement or authenticity needed to enact what Styres (2018) calls "an unsettling process of shifting and unraveling the tangled colonial relations of power and privilege" (p. 30). Bringing attention

to the specific Land in which education takes place, down to the building, or walking to the Land acknowledgment on a university's grounds and having critical and reflexive discussions about the history of the Land is one way to start to enact what Styres (2018) terms as "placefulness," but also is susceptible to becoming a mundane, passive, or performative way to engage with anti-coloniality.

Land has little in common with the syllabus genre; at first thought, Land might not appear as a syllabus at all. Land-as-syllabus is a concept that pushes our thinking radically forward, as Land—being first teacher—refuses compartmentalization into specific topics; the knowledge of Land—its history and relationality to all forms of life—is untamed. There is no beginning and end to Land-as-syllabus, only an iterative and emergent process of awareness, listening, understanding, and action; by action, I mean actions that are congruent with a respect for the relationality of all of life, especially of the relationality of the self to the Land in which one occupies, and the active commitment to dismantling settler colonialism. In terms of *whose* imagination Land engages, Land is an inherently intersectional teacher, demanding we listen to diverse voices telling their stories—especially in relation to violent histories and dispossession. Land-as-syllabus demands that those developing a critical and reflexive relationship between themselves and Land be willing to sacrifice their own benefits from settler colonialism in order to create more life-affirming relations between living beings. In other words, Land-as-syllabus demands action in our daily lives.

Land-as-syllabus is radical, as it uproots the purpose of education to one of becoming in better relation to all of life, starting with considering what that might look like. Land-as-syllabus is imaginative, as it aims to build future worlds in which we are in the right relationship with Land, Indigenous peoples, and all forms of life. And, still, Land-as-syllabus directly engages Indigenous Voices and their imagination. Through telling stories of violence and Indigenous dispossession, Land-as-syllabus inherently problematizes settler colonialism and refuses Indigenous erasure. Since Land-as-syllabus requires the centering of Indigenous voices that tell the story of Land, it creates opportunities to craft alliances that address differences and recognize Indigenous ways of knowing. Land-as-syllabus imagines a world in which relationships between peoples, Nations, life, and Land are reciprocal and respectful.

While land acknowledgements are often reactionary to the violence of settler colonialism, Land-as-syllabus is imaginative because it centers the source of all life and relations, Land, as the first teacher, as well as Indigenous voices. Land-as-syllabus is radical, rather than incremental, because it is a fundamental move away from institutionalization of knowledge and toward Indigenous ways of knowing. Land-as-syllabus is relational, rather than decontextual, because it centers place, positionality, and relationality. The prospect for Land-as-syllabus interferes with the placeless-ness and landless-ness of the syllabus. The location of knowledge production is no longer themselves, but in the Land. And this knowledge, especially for those such as myself who are not Native and not highly literate in reading Land, is rendered as always-already important, urgent, and sacred. In practice, Land-as-syllabus requires students to have difficult conversations with/in their university settings.

Exemplar #2: Dr. Roberts and The Black Lives Matter Syllabus Project

In 2014, Dr. Frank Leon Roberts was a professor of African American Studies at New York University (NYU); it was during this time that he—like many others around the nation—joined the community in protesting the police murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. In a May 2020 video, Roberts described how his role in the protest led to his—along with many other activists'—temporary incarceration; during this time, he and other activists began exchanging the names of books, authors, and activists whose writing inspired their philosophy on the #BlackLivesMatter movement. Roberts (2020) recounted that, upon describing the courses he taught at NYU to one young activist, the young activist remarked he would love to take Roberts's course but could never afford it. Roberts stated that this interaction ignited his desire to create "non-traditional learning spaces for the circulation of radical ideas" (2020, 2:28).

Roberts gained public recognition in 2015 for his African American Studies courses at NYU (Whack, 2015), which increasingly engaged directly with the growing #BlackLivesMatter movement. In the following years, Roberts not only continued to teach courses focused on protesting police brutality—and making the syllabi available publicly—but also embarked on #TheBlackLivesMatterSyllabus Tour, which ran from 2017 until approximately 2019. During this tour, he spoke at various universities in the United States about how Black radical thought could push the #BlackLivesMatter movement forward, and he facilitated community dialogue on the movement. Through a combination of these speaker events, community dialogues, and teaching in university settings, Roberts aimed to bring his pedagogy more public-facing, facilitating the flow of conversation outside of institutionalized academia and toward community members already engaged with emancipatory work.

By engaging the term *syllabus* with the growing #BlackLivesMatter movement in the years leading up to 2020—at which time the movement gained global prominence—Roberts shifted the audience of his syllabus writing from students at his university to the community. Specifically, he aimed to engage community members—especially current activists for the #BlackLivesMatter movement—in critical conversations relating Black radical thought to current events regarding police brutality against Black people and subsequent violent responses to demonstrations against this violence. The story being told by this *syllabus* is that, through re-engaging Black radical thought work, the #BlackLivesMatter movement can be further energized to enact tangible social change.

Borrowing from the syllabus genre, Roberts's project focused on the discussion of ideas, including key readings of the Black radical intellectual tradition. Other ways Roberts's project conformed with the syllabus genre include: 1) centralizing the *course* around a single *teacher* and 2) having specific dates and times for meetings—although these were in different places and with different community

members. Subverting the syllabus genre, Roberts's *syllabus* is not a document, but a movement to complement a movement. Rather than centralizing his teaching around a decontextualized topic, the foci of the *syllabus* was a pressing political concern, the #BlackLivesMatter movement. The project also subverts the syllabus genre in its aim; that is, rather than being designed for students to complete a singular course and receive a grade, the collective goal is liberation—specifically from police brutality.

The aesthetic elements of The Black Lives Matter Syllabus Project included imagery of protests and organized resistance to police violence (Black Lives Matter Syllabus, n.d.). In photographs of the tour, he is often wearing casual clothing rather than a suit and tie. Rather than lecture halls, the photographs on his website depict open-forum and roundtable discussions, as well as crowds. The rhetorical language used to describe the *students*—that being the community audience—of The Black Lives Matter Syllabus Project—stories community members as already knowing and involved with activist work. This entails Roberts's purpose of connecting activists to additional thought work from the Black radical tradition as well as bringing them into relation with each other. The community-facing rhetoric is displayed by terms in the marketing for these events such as "freedom tour" and "together we will win" (Black Lives Matter Syllabus, n.d.). In this way, Roberts engaged the classroom as a site of protest but also engaged in protest spaces as a classroom, to further fuel the movement.

In terms of *whose* imagination is engaged with Roberts's project, it is clear that his teachings centralized Black voices but unclear the degree to which his teachings were intersectional. Any discussion of the #BlackLivesMatter movement surely engaged Angela Davis' work on incarceration in the United States; however, I don't see a clear centering of queer and/or female voices from the information available online. This troubles me because the #BlackLivesMatter movement was founded by three Black women, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi (Green, 2019). two of whom describe themselves as queer: From the information that I have, I don't see them reflected directly in his project. Nevertheless, I was not there and, for the purposes of this specific article, am focused particularly on what Roberts's work might inspire, rather than explore possible critiques.

From the information available to me about Roberts's work, I am unable to discern whether systems of coloniality were directly opposed as part of the speaking events, discussions, or materials. For example, this work could relate to anti-coloniality if anti-Black police violence were related to violence against Indigenous peoples by police, historically and in current events, Indigenous abolitionist thought and Indigenous peoples were included meaningfully, and there were a clear opposition to the dispossession of Indigenous Lands, especially at each of the universities in which an event took place. I would say *whose* imagination is engaged is that of Roberts, as well as the Black radical intellectual tradition—loosely defined. It is important that we see prominent activists within a lens of the community in which they work; in this way, Roberts does not represent the destination of syllabus writing, but rather one example of how syllabus writing might move differently.

This work is radical in that the #BlackLivesMatterSyllabus reorients the purpose of education to directly and collectively opposing power, specifically in directly opposing police brutality toward Black people. This work is imaginative because the rhetoric frames racial justice as possible and inevitable, including an end to police violence. Roberts's #BlackLivesMatterSyllabus project advocated for a future in which Black people are not subjected to police violence—either via institutionalization, anti-Black policies, or direct racism.

In terms of how this work pushes forward our imaginations of syllabi, I see ways in which it pushes syllabi to be more imaginative, radical, and relational. While the project is reactive to current events, it is proactive and imaginative in that it responds to these events of police brutality with protest, intellectual transformation, and community organizing. It is radical as it changes the audience of the syllabus from students enrolled at a university to community members—specifically those involved in activist spaces. It is relational as Black intellectual thought is taught in relation to specific current events, especially specific instances of police brutality, and in the contexts of community organizers.

Exemplar #3: Intelligent Mischief's Black Utopian Media

One of the most visible ways in which radical imagination(s) are engaged in movement work is through the arts, including the visual arts, music, poetry, and multi-media art forms. One organization that is actively involved in cultivating Black radical imagination(s) through creating digital and online communities is Intelligent Mischief. Intelligent Mischief is a creative multimedia studio that comprises a website, social media pages (including Instagram), and various art immersive and visual art exhibits across the United States. Intelligent Mischief (n.d.-b) describes their own work as for "a global archipelago of Black utopians" who are an "interdependent network of sovereign places cultivated by people motivated by the power of Black love" (para. 3).

I came across Intelligent Mischief through friend in my doctoral program, who sent me their Instagram page as inspiration while we were collaborating on a professional development session for in-service teachers on Afrofuturism. The Intelligent Mischief Instagram page (n.d.-c) primarily utilizes digital collages, which often blend historic photographs representing the Black diaspora with Afrocentric and futuristic artistic elements. This juxtaposition of photographs from the past—often depicting Pan-African political organizing in Africa, the Caribbean Islands, and North America—with the spectacular—such as space, psychedelic coloring, futuristic technology, or nature—portrays the resilience of the African diaspora as well as a sense of optimism regarding the future of historically marginalized communities. The centrality of Pan-African symbolism, through architecture, patterns, clothing, and Black people, portrays a sense of the fantastical, inspiring pride and awe in the history and future of Pan-African cultures and communities. In each of their Instagram posts, a thoughtful and imaginative question is artistically spread across the creative imagery, some of which include:

- What if we restored our connection to our ancestors, the land and our intuition?
- What if we treasured accountability and repair as a means of navigating conflict in our relationships?
- What if we created more beautiful worlds at the meeting place of many movements of resistance? (Intelligent Mischief, n.d.-b)

Other aesthetic elements of Intelligent Mischief's work include representations of Black women and Black queer, or gender non-conforming people. The primarily rhetorical element in their work is questions, which utilize such collective language as "we" and "our," suggesting community and peoplehood. Many of the questions and representations posed by Intelligent Mischief are anti-colonial, as they pose direct contestations to colonization. For example, one specific Intelligent Mischief (2025) Instagram post asks: "What if dreaming wild together could prevent colonization of the future?" Such artful provocations may foster alliances through an intersectional approach, although the visual nature of the art often takes both aesthetic representations and rhetorical questions in more of a global or national, rather than local, context.

Intelligent Mischief has a highlighted reel on their Instagram account at the time of this writing entitled, "Syllabus". This seems to have been created during the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and is subtitled, "what to read during quarantine: a Black radical imagination syllabus" (@intelligentmischief, n.d.-b), listing several books relating to Black and queer futures. It isn't just the highlighted reel calling itself the syllabus which subverts the very nature of what a syllabus is and can be, but also the entirety of the interconnected social media work, art, movement work, and community-building that the organization does.

In the case of Intelligent Mischief, the organization functions itself as a university, in which the *syllabi* are the works of media and art. The *syllabus-writers* are the artists/activists, and the students are the Black diaspora, as well as perhaps allied groups seeking new futures beyond oppression. The artists—as syllabus-writers—seek to inspire students—being the Black diaspora and allied groups—to imagine different ways of being in relation to themselves, each other, African cultures, and the Earth. These are situated within a context of a history of struggle and resilience. Borrowing from the syllabus genre, Intelligent Mischief utilizes reading lists and even the word *syllabus* in their highlighted reels. Subverting the syllabus genre, Intelligent Mischief teaches through artistic and inspirational imagery and poetic questions, inviting thought and reflection. The questions asked are without assessment, without one answer, but capable of producing many answers—and more questions. This is a syllabus that seems to exist *through* time, as images of the past are interwoven with futuristic ideas and elements, fostering a present of hope and imagination.

Intelligent Mischief is radical in that it questions the possibilities of what art and education might be and do. It is imaginative in that it engages Afrocentric imagination(s) and Afrofuturistic imagery with collages paired with questions. Intelligent Mischief in many ways cultivates the imagination of the African diaspora. In relation to anti-coloniality, Intelligent Mischief directly suggests alternatives to coloniality. The more just future being built by Intelligent Mischief is one centering intentionality, relationality, community, care, and love. This work is more imaginative than reactionary in that it does not seek directly to 'fix' the world we currently live in—or the way we approach education or syllabi. Rather, it seeks to envision a more just future world using art and rhetorical questions. This work is radical rather than incremental as it seeks total emancipation—and encourages us to push our thoughts forward on what that might involve. This work is relational—rather than decontextual—to an extent; that being, it draws upon historic images and cultural representations of the African diaspora. Yet, it still does not have a clear relationality to one specific place and time, or community. A syllabus-writer can take inspiration from this exemplar in terms of the public-facing nature of the syllabus, the decentralization of movement work and idea production, the centrality of art to the radical imagination, and the centering of questions that open up new, more beautiful world(s).

Final Thoughts

In his song, "Syllabus," rapper Starlito (2009) stated, "Look here, this how's it going to go… this the syllabus." As long as there have been syllabi that perpetuate narratives in service of racism and settler colonialism, artists, advocates, and students have been talking back. Whether you, as a syllabus-writer seeking otherwise futures, look toward Starlito, Roberts, Styres, or Intelligent Mischief for inspiration, remember that, especially for those of us who have the privilege to teach, we must write syllabi that work in tandem with our critical pedagogies.

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