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

Critical of/with/for DEI: an Introduction

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Protect DEI…?

Maybe you too felt ambivalent when you saw the images.

In Texas, a person holds a sign that reads "DEI till I DIE" in swooping, hand drawn lines that are accented with the familiar stencil of the Black Power fist.[1] In Michigan, a group of people draped in keffiyehs and rainbow flags raise signs that read "Protect DEI," "DEI makes UM the Leaders & the Best," and "Hands off DEI," the latter statement framed by the blood red handprints that are a staple in anti-war demonstrations.[2] At a protest in Florida, two people grin as they display a banner that reads "PROTECT D.E.I.! INCREASE BLACK ENROLLMENT! DEFY DESANTIS / HB 999!" Elsewhere at the same protest, another pair holds a banner, emblazoned again with the Black Power fist, that reads "PROTECT DIVERSITY EQUITY & INCLUSION."[3] In North Carolina, a person attending a Board of Trustees meeting holds the gaze of a camera and twists their body to make visible a sign that states "DEI IS THE WAY."[4]

Perhaps you have seen others. Or maybe you've carried similar signs yourself. Images like these have become common over the last year as legislative attacks on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion programs and offices have rapidly spread across the United States. Now that we are several weeks into the Trump administration's use of "DEI" as a sort of epithet, it is almost guaranteed that there will be more.[5]

On one hand, as a group of critical educators, we are inspired by the images of young people mobilizing in defense of their desire to learn and, in the same motion, articulating that desire to past and present social movements. Their recirculation of symbols associated with Black Power, LBGTQ+ rights, anti-war protests, and Palestinian peoplehood demonstrate the extent to which these students understand education as a crucial node within the broader circuit of liberation struggles. But, on the other, we pause at the way these images suggest that students route their desire through and rally their desire around an administrative function that is frequently mobilized *against* the radically redistributive visions of social movements. Of all the things targeted by a politically and culturally resurgent rightwing, is the institutional form of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion truly what requires defense? Does the act of tethering radical symbols to exhortations to protect an institutional office constitute a canny response to the reactionary activists and political operatives working to turn "DEI" into a phobic object? Or does it accept and extend such associations in the service of official institutional defense?

We pose these questions not to criticize the protestors, who likely wish to simultaneously build on the work of earlier movements and protect DEI as an actual place: a room with a number that they can find in a campus directory, an office staffed by minoritized people who treat other minoritized students, faculty, and staff with care and dignity. Shawntal Z. Brown, one of the roughly 60 University of Texas at Austin employees who was abruptly laid off as the college sought to comply with SB 17, Texas's law that bans DEI offices and programs at public schools, gestures toward these desires when she says, "the immediate aftermath of all this anti-DEI legislation is people really saying, 'I'm hurting, I lost a mentor, lost a class I really love, I lost a space that I really enjoyed being in, or graduation's not the same'."[6] When these protesting students state their desire to protect DEI, we hear them demand to keep a radical history alive and to prevent the human fallout that results from the conjunction of legislative assault and administrative capitulation.

Rather, we pose the questions above to mark an ambivalence that runs throughout and animates this issue of *Radical Teacher*. In our original call for papers, we described this ambivalence in this way:

> Offices and officers of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) occupy a peculiar position in both educational institutions and the broader discourse surrounding the politics of schooling today. Tasked with using often limited resources to give their institutions a progressive public face, these workers also, according to rightwing activists and politicians, have captured and corrupted public education itself, transforming everything from the kindergarten classroom to the college seminar into an incubator of leftist thought. In the face of these contradictory constructions, this special issue invites submissions that perform two interrelated tasks: first, that critically assess the work of DEI in contemporary educational institutions; and second, that use this critical assessment to explore, imagine, or propose different curricular, institutional, and relational possibilities of laboring for equity in and around the classroom … from the lesson plan to the hiring plan, from the office to the institution, and more.

Since we wrote this call, as well as throughout the process of writing and corresponding about it, the contradictions bearing on DEI have only deepened. One of the first occasions where we witnessed this was in the House Committee on Education and the Workforce's hearings of college presidents on December 5, 2023. These hearings, titled "Calling for Accountability: Stopping Antisemitic College Chaos," underscore the erosion of higher education's autonomy and its proclaimed commitment to free expression under the weight of legislative and political forces. This moment revealed a cruel irony as campus leaders were interrogated on their alleged failure to adequately respond to anti-Semitism on their campuses by a congresswoman who has campaigned on positions echoing the Great Replacement theory.[7] Though one cannot deny the difficulties Arab, Jewish, and Muslim students experienced on college campuses in the midst and wake of this upheaval, the interrogations nevertheless lay bare the hypocrisy of the political right, which weaponizes identity and accountability selectively. The fact that it was primarily women and women of color college presidents who were called to testify before Congress -- and then, in multiple cases, asked or pushed to resign[8] -- further exposes a failure within higher education: an inability or unwillingness to protect the structural imperatives of racial and gender equity within

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its own governance, leaving leaders from historically marginalized groups disproportionately exposed to public scapegoating and political manipulation.

In the months since this event, the scrutiny that DEI offices, programs, and curricula sustained from the political right have transformed into a full legislative attack. Even schools in states that have not introduced anti-DEI legislation have read the cultural and political winds and begun stripping references to "diversity," "equity," and "inclusion" from their offices and policies. At the same time, it has become harder to muster even half-hearted defenses of DEI from the political left in the face of a year that has witnessed institutions of higher education rhetorically mobilize laudable ideals and practices of diversity -- like dialogue across difference, belonging, empathy, and more -- as they suspend, arrest, harass, surveil, evict, and (at least on one campus) train sniper rifles on students protesting Israel's genocidal campaign against Palestinians and the investments of their universities in Israel's war machine.[9] As we write this introduction, it remains a real, unresolved question whether anyone committed to feminist, anti-racist, and socialist pedagogy should expend intellectual and physical energy defending any part of an administrative apparatus that, despite the efforts of individuals within it, has laid bare its willingness to exercise its punitive powers against those who refuse to turn away from atrocity.

Under these conditions, the possibilities for practicing what we have called a critical DEI seem quite remote. And yet it is for these same reasons that we must ask what sorts of possibilities for learning and struggle open up within the present. The rest of this introduction and the articles that make up this issue are preliminary materials toward such an inquiry.

Between backlash and frontlash

The idea for this special issue came about as a result of our daily work within an academic center dedicated to supporting teaching and learning. Since its founding, the Center for Engaged Pedagogy, which derives its name from the scholarship of bell hooks, has performed work that bordered on and sometimes directly supported Barnard College's diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives.[10] Barnard, a small liberal arts college in New York City that was one of the original members of the Seven Sisters consortium of women's colleges, has long had a professed commitment to inclusive education. The Center's efforts have always existed in close proximity to that commitment, which it has served by coordinating faculty communities of practices on anti-racist and queer pedagogies; by collaborating on an institute for department chairs that explored asset-based approaches to racial equity in hiring, curriculum development, and service; by organizing a speaker series on critically inclusive approaches to designing and teaching core courses; by facilitating student feedback into and contributions to the pedagogical culture of the college; and by helping interpret and moderate community discussions of campus-wide studies, like a National Assessment of Collegiate Campus Climates (NACCC) survey, among others. After the Center's inaugural executive director became Barnard's Vice President for Inclusion and Engaged Learning and the college's Chief Diversity Officer (CDO), our work began to more clearly intersect with -- and, in the case of our first director, directly represent -- the vision of diversity, equity, and inclusion at the college.

During this time, we began talking about how, if our labor as researchers, teachers, and staff was going to connect so directly to DEI, we wanted it to do so differently. We started this discussion well aware of two countervailing arguments against our aims: on one hand, there are the critical studies of how institutions absorb the energies of emancipatory dreams and redeploy them for very different ends; and, on the other, there is the skepticism that those committed to dismantling practices and pedagogies that have enabled previously-excluded people to attend college express toward any program even loosely connected to justice work. Still, we asked ourselves whether it would be possible to practice what we called a "critical DEI": one that was transformative of the institution rather than incorporated by it; one that was proactive in advancing just structures, practices, and values rather than attempting to catch up to problems; and one that was invested in collective decision-making rather than bureaucratic control.

In retrospect, it is clear that what we were navigating at the time was an inchoate sense that the pedagogical and institutional project of DEI has to contend not only with rightwing backlash (which is easy to anticipate) but also with a liberal "frontlash" effect. We draw the term frontlash from Joseph Darda's *The Strange Career of Racial Liberalism*, where he charts the ways that policymakers, social scientists, educators, and other mid-century liberals curtailed the redistributive, materialist tendencies within the civil rights movement. Liberal frontlash, as Darda describes it, is a kind of boundary-setting in advance that "[urges] trust in time … [and insists that] racism [constitutes] a time-limited crisis to be addressed with time-limited remedies."[11] While Darda's project is historical (it is mainly concerned with the dynamics and narrative structures of racial liberalism as a form of state antiracism in the wake of World War II), we find a similar articulation of liberal frontlash in the work of scholars who have contributed to the emergence of critical university studies in the twenty-first century. Ariana González Stokas, for example, theorizes a similar boundary-setting dynamic from the position of the CDO:

> Although CDOs or diversity efforts are invited in [to universities], they are permitted to participate only under a framework of knowing difference, *one that seeks to organize, define, place, and patrol the boundaries of efforts concerned with antiracism or anti-oppression*. … [Not] only is diversity an unproductive concept for radical social transformation, but its conceptual genealogy reveals an epistemology of difference that has always been a tool to organize nondominant groups for the benefit of those in power.[12]

Roderick Ferguson also observes that the sharply delimited, institutionally frustrated roles that CDOs find themselves performing are a consequence of how the diversity office came to be. "Rather than a result of student demands, we might more accurately think of diversity offices as the administrative and bureaucratic response to those demands," he writes, drawing a genealogy of DEI that traces its origins to the Nixon administration's Scranton Commission and the report it generated after national guardsmen and police murdered protesting students at Kent State University and Jackson State College.[13] Notably, Ferguson observes how, through a series of rhetorical displacements, the commission's report constructs student protestors themselves as threats to tolerance and diversity. To mitigate student demands and the "threat" they represent to a nationalist understanding of tolerance, the report recommends that colleges incorporate "the ombudsman method" within their bureaucratic machinery: "As diversity was literally turned into an administrative specialization, it moved further away from what students in the 1960s and 1970s intended when they radicalized forms of difference such as race, gender, class, and disability for revolutionary transformation."[14] According to Ferguson's genealogical account, DEI should be regarded less as an office subject to frontlash than as its institutional embodiment.

The critiques of frontlash that Darda, Stokas, and Ferguson offer are, as Stokas in particular notes, ones that the people who are employed to carry out diversity work are often highly attuned to and invested in. The idea for this special issue was motivated, in part, to understand what it means, looks like, and feels like to labor between backlash and frontlash. How does diversity work continue, for better or worse, under these partnered dynamics? Is it possible to rearticulate diversity work and the pedagogical relationships that sustain it in light of the entanglements of frontlash and backlash? While we each as editors had our conflicting and conflicted answers to questions like these (perhaps, reader, you detect the ambivalence that runs not only through this issue but through our account of how we came to it), we also saw the creation of this special issue as an opportunity to hear from others about the ways they think and act as radical teachers in this conjuncture.

Even though we noted above that rightwing backlash against DEI is easy to anticipate, it is worth briefly observing the distinctive character it has taken in recent years. It is essential to recognize that this backlash is born of a history of conservative efforts to dismantle programs like affirmative action, roll back policies like desegregation, and destroy secular institutions like public schools. We can extend such a history back at least as far as the mid-1960s with then-Governor of California Ronald Reagan's attack on tuition-free education in the University of California system, which, as Melinda Cooper observes, was one part of his broader effort to "link the California property tax with excessive government spending and, by implication, racial inclusion."[15] As she further argues, the racial project of fomenting white anxiety about government spending was articulated through a conservative politics of gender and sexuality, staged through "the lens of a family drama with Reagan himself cast in the redemptive role of stern father" who was needed to discipline the wayward student radicals "who had allegedly moved on from free speech to free sex."[16] More recently, the genealogy of this backlash would have to include the coordinated projects and personnel of well-funded conservative think tanks like the Claremont Institute, the Discovery Institute, and the Heritage Foundation -- the latter of which is responsible for producing the Project 2025 initiative that, by all appearances, is setting the agenda of the second Trump administration. A central figure here is Christopher Rufo, the conservative activist who rose to prominence by riding on the coattails of parental discontent with school closures during the coronavirus pandemic. He is by now infamous in the United States for his role in turning "critical race theory" into a phobic object -- an effort he has not been at all shy to describe: "We will eventually turn [critical race theory] toxic," he has written, "as we put all of the various cultural insanities under that brand category. The goal is to have the public read something crazy in the newspaper and immediately think 'critical race theory'."[17]

But for all of Rufo's self-serving bluster, what is peculiar about the character of this backlash is how shapeshifting its targets have been. Those who have been following activists like Rufo might recall how rapidly their attacks on critical race theory transformed into disgust with the existence of LGBTQ+ (and especially trans) teachers and teaching materials and now appears as a more diffuse disdain for DEI programs and diversity workers. What unites the mercurial vision of this backlash, especially as it has become wedded to the despotic entrepreneurialism of Silicon Valley within Trump's coalition, then, is its anti-solidaristic character. In a recent essay for *The New Yorker*, Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor puts it this way:

> It is easy to dismiss D.E.I. programs as ineffectual, because in many ways they have been. But that raises the question of why the right is so determined to undermine and dismiss them. It is because these widely varied efforts represent a commitment to integration, to opposing bigotry and racism, to offering an invitation to belong. Maybe that seems corny in our deeply cynical and dour society, but given the pervasiveness of loneliness and depression, we should look at improving these efforts, not subverting them. The problem with D.E.I. is not that it went too far but that it has not gone far enough.[18]

In this regard, the backlash against DEI represents a broader assault on interdependence as such, an assault that sees an affront to the rule of fathers and bosses in everything from an office that helps first-generation low-income students stay enrolled in college to a public school teacher who believes gay and trans students' lives are worth living and their histories and forms of cultural production are worth studying.

If anti-solidarity is the character of backlash, then what are the characteristics and consequences of frontlash, particularly as it manifests in the context of diversity work? The literature that shapes our

understanding of this question has built upon Sara Ahmed's foundational book, *On Being Included*. This book, which draws on Ahmed's experience of being recruited to do diversity work and her interviews with staff who carry out this labor, provides a phenomenological account of institutional obstinance. She offers the pithy observation that "the feeling of doing diversity work is the feeling of coming up against something that does not move, something solid and intangible," a feeling embodied in the image of a brick wall that several of her interview subjects invoked when they described their experience of their work.[19] The brick wall, then, is one manifestation of frontlash -- a hard boundary that diversity workers run into repeatedly. The experience of the brick wall that stops movement is also, counter-intuitively, produced by the peculiar mobility of the word "diversity" itself, which Ahmed observes is picked up and deployed in incommensurate ways by a broad range of institutional actors. (Indeed, over 10 years since the publication of this book, we witness a similar incommensurability in the way the political right weaponizes "viewpoint diversity" as it targets both DEI programs and fields of research like Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, critical ethnic studies, and sociology.) The context for the mobility of "diversity" and the proliferation of brick walls is, as Ahmed and others observe, the corporatization of higher education: "diversity has a commercial value and can be used as a way not only of marketing the university but of making the university into a marketplace. … [As] a management term … [diversity] becomes something to be managed and valued as a human resource."[20]

Other scholars have articulated liberal frontlash's confluence of marketization and recalcitrance from complementary angles. Like Ahmed, Tamura Lomax observes what happens when the language of diversity, equity, and inclusion becomes a matter of convention rather than transformation, a set of common refrains rather than an orientation toward justice. In an essay published in *The Feminist Wire*, she writes of the problems that DEI's institutionalization presents for Black women who are committed to a specifically black feminist understanding of knowledge production and power. "[For] those of us who experience the *need* for DEI or are DEI hires, trigger words [like sensitivity, belonging, grace, love, value, or generosity] are perplexingly predominantly ideological." She continues:

> Black women in academia carry a particular kind of burden. The university needs us for diversity, and we need to work. Yet, our collective labors, visible and invisible (including the emotional), and our relationships to power, hardly rise to the level of data. That is, while non-Black women get to just focus on their research, writing, and teaching, Black women spend our weeks being celebrated for diversity while fighting for equity and inclusion in real time. And we still must produce -- while functioning as miracle workers and healers tasked with uplifting entire institutions that don't love us. Regrettably, for those who don't know any better, this is an honor. … Most of us understand that the continuous pressure to do work that no one else is expected to do is pathological, exploitative, and exhausting.[21]

The working conditions that Lomax identifies build on a line of black feminist and woman of color feminist critiques of education that have brought into relief the ways that the three terms bundled together in DEI -- diversity, equity, and inclusion -- can mask the tensions between them. As she notes in the quote above, Black women's inclusion in universities under the rubric of diversity often entails less the recognition of their equal stakes in the life of the institution than their intensified exploitation as reserves of service and mentorship labor. Amber Jamilla Musser similarly weaves together an analysis of the shifting valences of diversity in educational institutions and a critical account of the "affective notes that diversity produces" as she finds herself subject to the interested gazes of search committees, colleagues, students, and administrators who perceive the way her "body signals diversity" and the various opportunities her inclusion opens.[22] In both cases, these black feminist and black queer critiques of the university's divisions of material and symbolic intellectual labor point to the limits of what Lomax identifies as DEI's commitment to a strategy of "moral suasion" over and against a practice of participatory justice or redistribution. For our purposes, we can derive an important consequence of frontlash from these authors' accounts: when the official valorization of diversity follows the patterns of commodified inclusion, it produces those people who are difference's bearers as an institution's exhausted underside.

A similar concern motivates Adam Hubrig, Jessica Masterson, Stevie K. Seibert Desjarlais, Shari J. Steinberg, and Brita M. Thielen, the co-authors of "Disrupting Diversity Management: Toward a Difference-Driven Pedagogy." Approaching diversity's contradictions from the fields of composition studies and disability studies, these authors identify the institutional affirmation of diversity as a mode of dominant pedagogy, or "a way to manage and assimilate difference into existing systems, rather than to engage it as a disruptive, dynamic, relational process."[23] While echoing Lomax's and Musser's arguments about how institutions value difference (and the people who represent it) as an accumulable good, these authors also sketch the contours of an alternative approach to diversity that they call "difference-driven pedagogy." In particular, their articulation of a difference-driven pedagogical approach seeks to counter the tendency of institutions to use their DEI offices and diversity workers as an informal crisis management team. "Rather than viewing moments of tension around difference as isolated problems to be mitigated through one-off programs or public relations strategies," they write,

> a difference-driven pedagogy attends to the way difference arises, and may be deliberated, in local contexts in relationship with others. Whereas a view of difference as a problem to be mitigated focuses on managing or containing the situation, often removing it from history and structures, deliberating difference makes disruption a resource for questioning and changing our understandings.[24]

Their work underlines how another characteristic form of frontlash -- DEI as a public relations technique -- might be refused by asserting difference less as a property to be known, disciplined and valorized than as a dynamic that is in flux and that exposes us to ourselves and one another, making it possible to deliberate on what "we" are collectively.

We dwell on these manifestations of frontlash -- specifically, commodified inclusion and crisis management -- because, as we will discuss in the next section, the essays that make up this special issue diagnose them from a number of historical, theoretical, and practical angles. However, we also dwell on frontlash because recognizing its manifestations may provide an instructive lesson for radical educators in the face of a growing moment and movement of backlash.

It appears that at least two strategies have emerged among diversity workers and those committed to a pedagogy of difference as they labor under the onslaught of rightwing attacks on equality. The first is to ameliorate: this strategy seeks to clarify DEI's purposes, correct politically motivated distortions of what DEI offices and diversity workers do, and defend DEI's outcomes. One compelling iteration of this strategy is the recently published "Truths About DEI on College Campuses," coordinated by the University of Southern California's Race and Equity Center.[25] From a different angle, we might also recognize the recent report from the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) that makes a case for the compatibility between academic freedom and DEI criteria for faculty evaluation, as another convincing iteration of amelioration.[26] Without entirely subordinating DEI visions to the goals of the institutions housing them, those who deploy this strategy do largely position their work as an ally to and partner of educational institutions as such.

The second strategy is to circumvent or exit: this one seeks to move the epistemological and political mobilization of difference outside of formal educational institutions entirely, to maintain the radical critique of DEI as an embodiment of frontlash, and to create relationships of solidarity among those who are categorized as the institutional bearers of both fetishized and feared difference and those who hardly figure in institutions' self-representation at all (non-instructional staff, neighbors displaced by expanding campuses, and more). The work of Sara Ahmed, who quit her job as a university professor but has continued to agitate for a capacious, feminist practice of difference through her cultivation of complaint collectives, remains a compelling example of this strategy of circumvention and strategic exit.[27] Another is the recent articulation of abolitionist university studies by Abbie Boggs, Eli Meyerhoff, Nick Mitchell, and Zach Schwartz-Weinstein, who outline a vision of collective research and action that launches from the premise that universities are, first and foremost, engines of dispossession, serving the function not of enlightenment but of "the accumulation of lands, lives, resources, and relationships."[28] Those who deploy this strategy take a powerfully antagonistic orientation toward formal institutions, whose failure to embody the professed ideals on which they profit or through which they legitimize their governance over knowledge production is assumed from the start.

There is much to recommend in both of these strategies, from which we have learned a great deal. As you will see, versions of each also make appearances in this issue. Indeed, it strikes us as obvious that both are essential as we move into a new political and epistemological conjuncture. But if the strategies of amelioration and circumvention are necessary, it is less clear that -- either on their own or in conjunction -- they will be sufficient to weather this moment. As a case in point, we completed the first draft of this introduction just as Meta, the parent company of Facebook, announced that it will halt all its DEI initiatives as a result of the shifting "political and media landscape" signaled by the then-incoming Trump administration and that it will specifically *allow* "allegations of mental illness or abnormality when based on gender or sexual orientation" on its platforms.[29] It is striking, then, that such moves -- which, in describing the exact forms of harassment they will permit, implicitly endorse them -- leave nothing to ameliorate and that whatever exit is occurring will very likely happen on the terms of those who only ever had the most cynical, profit-driven understanding of what diversity, equity, or inclusion represent. While we wait to see how many educational leaders will follow Meta's example of cravenly capitulating to the explicitly hierarchical politics of Trumpism (and to be clear, educational institutions are not lacking in authoritarians), it is evident that we will need to find, cultivate, and coordinate many strategies among those who remain committed to both the critique of institutionalization and a redistributive politics of difference. The essays that follow provide a mapping of what some of those strategies might be.

Critical DEI

The essays that constitute this special issue both reflect critically on DEI and take steps toward elaborating a critical DEI within, around, and beyond the classroom. While they reflect a range of pedagogical investments, start from various disciplinary and interdisciplinary formations, and work through distinct historical and geographical situations, they are broadly united in understanding the social relationships of teaching and learning in an expansive way: that is, not simply as a relationship that is made for a semester or quarter at a time, but one that is forged through activism, artwork, language acquisition, administrative preparation, and more. Three central threads weave their way through the issue.

The first thread is made up of pedagogies that counter the institutional malpractice of DEI. Arjun Shankar's contribution, "Developing Annihilationist Strategies: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Racial Capitalist University," examines the emotional toll that students of color experience as they navigate

predominantly white institutions and the ways these schools fetishize and manage them as bearers of racial, sexual, gender, and national differences. Taking a class he offers on global racial capitalism as its starting point, he provides a mapping of commodified inclusion in the university and goes on to describe the deliberative process by which he and the students enrolled in his course made the collective decision to join a protest happening on their campus. Along the way, Shankar identifies the pedagogical affordances of what, in line with anti-caste and anticolonial thinkers, he calls "annihilationist impulses and strategies," or that ensemble of practices and orientations that students "need to protect themselves as they seek to overturn systems that produce so much of their unwellness."

Dipti Desai's essay, "Collective Art Activist Practice: A Pedagogy of Hope," continues this thread from a different location: that of the art classroom. In particular, Desai discusses the process of collaboration in art education and identifies some of the ways that, in her own class, she engages with students in a self-consciously collective process of artistic ideation, creation, and evaluation. In particular, she examines how the process of collective pedagogy within an art activist context (and especially the multisensory forms of engagement it requires of both students and instructors) strains against the educational, affective, and relational limitations that neoliberal policy and commonsense impose on how universities produce students as citizens. While stressing the importance of and challenges associated with such difference-driven pedagogical approaches as relational vulnerability and shared decision-making, Desai identifies what she calls a pedagogy of hope as a counter to narrow constructions of difference within contemporary universities.

The final contribution to this thread comes from Nathaniel D. Stewart and Malaika Bigirindavyi, who co-author an essay reflecting on the process Bigirindavyi went through as a graduate student in Stewart's class creating a proposed rubric for holding pre-service principals accountable to serving Black, Brown, and Indigenous students. They approach the importance of creating pedagogies that counter educational malpractice on three overlapping fronts: combatting the creation of DEI-informed evaluation tools for public school administrators that mask and perform lip service to hard-fought DEI principles rather than making systemic changes to those students' educations; connecting DEI as practice in public higher education and primary/secondary schools; and offering a dialogue that models the kind of radical pedagogy it also argues for. This layered approach invites educators at all levels to look for opportunities and relationships that will prioritize and listen to Black, Brown, and Indigenous students and faculty in challenging and important contexts.

A second thread that emerges in the issue concerns pedagogies that work within institutionally sanctioned DEI practices, but do so through new frameworks or in counter-intuitive ways. In their essay, "Climate Humanities in the L2 Classroom: Radical Possibilities for an Uncertain Future," Francisca Aguiló Mora and Almudena Marin Cobos call for the integration of Climate Humanities within and across Second Language Acquisition curricula, including in introductory and foundational language courses. In response to common approaches to the integration of climate as a theme or topic within Second Language Acquisition textbooks or lesson plans, Aguiló Mora and Marin Cobos demonstrate the political and ideological investments that inhere in our teaching materials, including the decontextualization of the sociopolitical context within which meanings emerge. They bring a critical DEI framework to language acquisition pedagogy to decentralize the English language in the discourse surrounding climate change and to account for the extractive and colonizing habits and histories of hegemonic languages. The implications of this shift also radicalize the pedagogical strategies of their classrooms: if English is decentralized and other languages are welcomed into the space of learning, students, in Aguiló Mora and Marin Cobos's approach, become co-mentors with valued expertise.

Chandani Patel's essay, "DEI as a Practice of Assembling: Translation and Transformation," reflects on Patel's personal journey as a DEI practitioner and her transition from various higher education contexts to a preK-12 independent school in Utah. Through multiple examples of how she sustains the slow and incremental work of struggling for change, Patel connects personal experience and wisdom to the principles of radical pedagogy to meditate on the possibilities and challenges of a "DEI from below," which she defines as a responsibility for equity and justice shared and distributed across the school rather than centralized within her office alone. As a DEI from below, but also from within, Patel invokes la paperson's concept of the "scyborg" to refigure the labor of DEI work as one that works patiently to build capacity for change in others while repurposing and appropriating the resources of the institution to work against the perpetuation of the status quo.

The final thread dwells on histories of activism in and around educational institutions, the ways these histories furnish a critical awareness of DEI in the present, and how these histories might inform pedagogical and political practice. Anthony C. Alessandrini's essay, "Multiculturalism's Genocide: A Brief History of Administrative Repression and Student Resistance," works backward from present -- and specifically from the vicious techniques that institutions of higher education have used to repress students engaged in Palestinian solidarity activism -- to interrogate the traditional stories of DEI's origins within student activism. Alessandrini shows how DEI offices and the ideology of multiculturalism that ascended in the late 20th century represent less the victory of student demands than the imbrication of the logic of institutional inclusion with the logic of campus militarization. However, as Alessandrini argues, the recognition of this history today should compel us to both excavate and realize the traces of those radical student demands for education that were only incompletely repressed when they were transformed into a bureaucratic function.

The issue concludes with Abena Ampofoa Asare's essay, "DEI in a Time of Genocide or Re-Calling June

Jordan's Years at Stony Brook." In this contribution, Asare offers a telling counterexample to our current moment in which DEI offices and officers are largely silent or suppress speech and activism about the Palestinian genocide on US campuses. In stark contrast, Asare writes about how SUNY Stony Brook was a source of financial, intellectual, and pedagogical support for June Jordan from 1978 to 1989, when she was "whitelisted" by publishers for her vocal support of Palestinian rights. Unable to publish for over a decade, she needed teaching work and intellectual freedom. Under the leadership of Amiri Baraka, Chair of Africana Studies, Stony Brook offered her both. Asare uses archival work to bring forward Jordan's words from that time to offer lessons to university workers and students committed to speaking about Palestine as part of their vision for DEI.

The pedagogical strategies and institutional critiques that these authors offer do not exhaust what a "critical DEI" might be. Indeed, when we first began using this phrase, we deployed it as a heuristic device for aiding liberatory analysis, which we understood may include the action of radically refiguring the significance of the phrase or discarding it entirely. As we have edited this issue, it has become clear that the essays serve as interventions that double as invitations: what they ask us to confront and themselves map is what a pedagogy of difference can be and do at a moment when critical consciousness and action are hemmed in from multiple sides. But as the essayist, poet, and organizer Kay Gabriel observes in her essay "Inventing the Crisis," which examines why the right wing architects of a moral panic about trans youth have been laser focused on disciplining teachers and teacher unions, "the task for people who care about the political success of both trans people and the working class is *to manifest the political coalition that the right is already attempting to neutralize*" (emphasis added).[30] Confronted by a politics of anti-solidarity on one side and an anti-politics of commodified inclusion and crisis management on the other, the essays here use the prompt of "critical DEI" to return us to the urgent question of how we cultivate interdependence in our teaching and our politics.

Notes

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[12] Ariana González Stokas, *Reparative Universities: Why Diversity Alone Won't Solve Racism in Higher Ed* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2023), 19-20; emphasis added.

[13] Roderick Ferguson, *We Demand: The University and Student Protests* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 26.

[14] Ferguson, 27.

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Developing Annihilationist Strategies: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Racial Capitalist University

by Arjun Shankar

UNIVERSITY AS FACTORY? NO! BY JOSH MACPHEE VIA JUST SEEDS OPEN ACCESS GRAPHICS COLLLECTION

In late Fall 2022, I sat with several agitated students after one of my Wednesday discussions for a course I teach on "global racial capitalism" at Georgetown University. The class had been one of the most challenging for me, primarily because it was ambitious in its breadth and politics, covering examples of racialized inequity globally and therefore tracing the histories that shaped regionally specific versions of racism as they intersected with projects of accumulation. The students in this class, the majority of whom were students of color, were driven to make the most of their opportunity to learn from the course materials, much of which sat in opposition to their required International Relations course materials in economics and political science. Moreover, they were quick to let me know that this course was the *only* explicit elective course on race and capitalism in the entire School of Foreign Service (SFS), Georgetown's international relations school. Because I had taught most of these students in earlier courses, was advising many on their senior theses, and spent long hours chatting with them as part of my role as faculty director for the Center for Social Justice on campus, we had developed a strong culture of close reading, political critique, and applying our learnings to what was happening at Georgetown and in the world beyond Georgetown; text-to-world and text-to-self connections I encouraged as part of the pedagogical praxis I had developed previously as a 9th grade teacher.

In class that week, we had been discussing the ways that labor in the university is stratified and organized on racial and gendered lines. We analyzed many examples, including: how women of color are expected to do more service and mentoring at the expense of their research; the way staff, often working-class people of color, are consistently invisibilized even as they do the majority of the labor that keeps the campus running; and the way that adjunct faculty, a majority minority group on most campuses, are expected to do triple the labor of teaching students for much lower pay.[1]

However, some of the students felt that we had not adequately addressed the many ways in which *student* labor on campus was stratified on racial and gendered lines. They began to discuss how exhausted they were, feeling the weight of what they perceived as extremely unfair expectations placed on them as women of color on a campus that was sorely lacking in infrastructure and policies that would allow them to flourish. Two of my students, Annaelle and Saleema, a Haitian American and Ghanaian American student respectively, told me about the constant requests to join student diversity committees. They were especially irritated at being conscripted into the university's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion projects that required that they entertain potential incoming students of color and entice these students to come to Georgetown by praising the culture on campus and by demonstrating their thankfulness for the opportunities that the university had provided them. Even though they knew these performances were mostly fake, they felt compelled to say "yes" when asked to do this service by senior administrators because, whether or not it was stated explicitly, it was taken for granted that they should want to take on these labor roles to make the campus community a better place "for all students".

As Saleema told me, "We do all of this labor with no compensation because we are students. Meanwhile the school keeps promising to give the Black Student Association space and a budget, but I've been here for four years now and haven't seen anything. There are literally twelve Black students in our graduating class and yet our school wants us to be in every photo op they can find. It's messed up." In her telling, the excess labor placed upon students like Saleema is almost completely unrecognized and doubles and triples the pressures placed on them even as they, like their white counterparts, are expected to perform well in their classes and join the ranks of successful Georgetown alumni with prestigious jobs in the future. Indeed, this prestige politics is especially stark at Georgetown, a university at which the median family income is over $229,000 and where over 20% of students come from families in the top 1% of income earners (compared to only 3% from the bottom 20% of income earners).[2]

At the same time, students like Saleema are imagined as consumable objects "of color." They are meant to bring diversity to the campus and teach their fellow students how to be more "tolerant" and "inclusive." In other words, making the place better for "all students" really meant making the PWI (Predominantly White Institution) a better place for its whiter and more affluent populations. This also meant they were required to be hypervisible in university publications so that the university could prove its moral fortitude and belief in the value of a diverse student body, an optics that was ultimately about bringing in more money.[3] Indeed, the university has begun to function largely as a corporation in which profit motive has significantly superseded student learning. This model has meant universities view their board of trustees and their endowments much like corporations view their shareholders. In this model, generating profit and accumulating more wealth is the priority and money that is used towards university functionings must be justified through the logic of profit. Students also become commodities in this scenario: those whose families are from the top 1% may be future donors and are therefore valuable, while those who come from low-income backgrounds are deemed "sunken costs" unless they are willing to help the university show its great benevolence and diversity, which, in turn, should also facilitate donations.

That same week, Saleema and Annaelle were also joining their peers for a sit-in in front of the president's office to protest the lack of action by administration after a white student had hurled a racist slur at their friend. They, along with several of their co-organizers, had developed educational materials and talking points, and organized this sit-in while also attending their classes and doing their readings and everything else required of them as students. The extreme amount of labor had tired them out, especially when this kind of racist occurrence only made it clearer that the campus was not a safe place for them.

Saleema and Annaelle's story is, unfortunately, not a particularly unique one. On the four PWIs where I have worked, I have seen so many students just like these two, working to change institutions that conscript their labor within the rhetoric of "diversity and inclusion" even as the university does not adequately protect them from racist and gendered violence. Indeed, over the two years since, these issues have only worsened, especially in the aftermath of clampdowns on dissent by university students across the country who are speaking out against the violence experienced by Palestinians in the wake of Israel's ongoing genocide.[4]

What was and is most disheartening for me as an instructor was the emotional toll all this labor was taking on my students. I continue to see students struggle with exhaustion, stress, anxiety, anger, and depression as they try their best to challenge systems that persist in excluding and marginalizing them. In the rest of this article, I situate the story of my students in the university as a racial and gendered capitalist institution which requires and deploys diversity initiatives as part of its strategy to maintain its accumulative potential. Using several examples from my experiences with students on Georgetown's campus, I show how such strategies produce an excess emotional stress for students of color, and women of color in particular, who are forced to participate in this form of labor on campus. I will then turn to the kinds of strategies – strategies which I term annihilationist – that we might deploy in our classrooms in order to begin to teach students the skills they need to protect themselves as they seek to overturn systems that produce so much of their unwellness. I evoke "annihilation" to center anti-caste and anti-colonial traditions that challenge the university's rigid hierarchies and stratifications. While the examples in this article emerge from my observations as a professor at Georgetown's School of Foreign Service and the particularities of its institutional structures, I want to stress from the outset that the kinds of phenomena I am outlining here are endemic to many, if not most, of the universities in the United States.

Part One: The University as a Racial Capitalist Institution

The university has been understood as a racial capitalist institution that is predicated on the stratification of labor along racialized and gendered lines. In the words of Lisa Lowe, racial capitalism refers to the way that "capitalism expands not through rendering all labor, resources, and markets across the world identical, but by precisely seizing upon colonial divisions, identifying particular regions for production and others for neglect, certain populations for exploitation and still others for disposal."[5] In Lowe's definition, (neo)colonial categories are always already racialized, linking particular bodies to a perceived (in)capacity for labor and therefore determining their potential exploitability and/or disposability. In this sense, a study of racial capitalism captures specific dynamics related to the racialized stratifications of labor.

Historically, in the Americas, the university was first conceived as a site for white elite sociality that was funded by franchise colonialism in the British colonies and built by the labor of those who were brought to the Americas as part of the transatlantic slave trade.[6] For example, many universities, including Georgetown, enslaved people and expropriated indigenous land even as they educated the leadership meant to maintain America's white supremacist future.[7] Only in the last five years has Georgetown even begun to recognize this history of slavery and its continued impact on the university through initiatives such as their Slavery, Memory, and Reconciliation initiative.[8] Given the many continuities between these violent pasts and the present, Williams and Tuitt call for a "plantation politics framework" that focuses attention on the policies and values that maintain the university's racist stratification; the psychological warfare experienced by people of color, especially Black students, faculty, and staff; and the immense amount of emotional and pedagogical labor that marginalized students, faculty, and staff offer, especially through rebellion and protest against systemic racism on campus.[9]

At the same time, the academic industrial complex has also been understood as a means to deal with the "surplus" populations produced as part of racial capitalist systems.[10] Over the course of the past thirty years, universities have continued to expand across urban spaces, accumulating land that is deemed "surplus" because it is not appropriately tethered to the circuits of financial capital and facilitating the displacement of people, most often Black and brown people who are living on that land.[11] Second, while the university is regarded as a place where students learn to grow into adulthood, increasingly students are expected to stay in school longer and longer, accumulating more degrees with the promise of eventually obtaining a lucrative job. In this regard, the university functions as a "holding station" for children who would otherwise place strain on a job market that does not always have room for them, *especially* in the context of a U.S. economic regime that has slowly increased the social security age and created the conditions in which adults must work for many more years before they can safely retire.[12]

By keeping youth in school and encouraging them to study for longer and longer periods, the university increasingly functions to solve this problem of surplus labor while *also* placing them into massive amounts of debt, which effectively locks them into doing work deemed "productive" in relation to financialized capital. In fact, the university has become one of the two or three most entrenched sites of the modern debt economy, forcing students to think about loan repayment as they begin to apply for their first jobs. Tuition at universities rose by 35% between 2008 and 2017 even though faculty salary has remained largely stagnant and tenure track positions account for fewer and fewer faculty jobs. The rise of the debt university has also meant that the lucrative STEM fields have taken primacy over all humanities and social science fields, resulting in the slow erosion of gender studies and ethnic studies programs.

What students want to know, in this context, is inevitably forced towards these anxieties: *How do I get a job? What courses do I need to take to get there? How do I get the grades I need? Who do I need to know to get ahead? How do I get a leg up on the competition?*

In an earlier article I focused on identifying several ways in which campus culture and institutional frameworks produced student unwellness. [13] Primarily, I saw the impacts of the debt economy embedded in a strong and constant feeling that one ought to be busy, productive, and oriented towards the future, whether one knew what they wanted in the future or not. In other words, the ideal student, was perpetually busy and perpetually working. As one of my former students told me, "Amount of sleep becomes a competition. Number of executive positions held becomes a competition. Longest time spent in the library becomes a competition. Doing nothing after class on a Tuesday is an oddity on this campus, and students are committing themselves to things because they thought that's what they were supposed to do… We are going to work ourselves to a breaking point, and it won't prepare us for success in the real world. Yes, extra work can lead to extra money, but is that the point of being an adult?" At Georgetown, this kind of impulse is exacerbated by the fact that the Washington D.C. area internship culture means that all students are constantly writing applications for jobs they don't want or, at the very least, don't know if they want. Indeed, students have come to my office with so much stress about these potential future jobs that I have to remind them that they are already highly successful and that college is one of the last times where they should be able to explore and learn freely.

Of course, in an increasingly difficult job market and with the pressures of massive debt, the idea of exploring freely and idly, to pursue what one loves to learn and to ask questions based on curiosity feels very far from reality. In fact, in this context of heightened competition, traditional forms of white masculinity are seen as a necessary social good, as men and women who are willing to be cutthroat and willing to do whatever it takes to win are rewarded in classrooms, in future job prospects, and in their feelings of self-worth.

Running in parallel to this financialization of the university has been an exponential increase in Diversity and Inclusion initiatives as PWIs have had to at least acknowledge that they have a racism problem and a lack of real diversity on their campuses. Universities have increasingly leaned on the representational question of *"Who is in the room?"* -- one of the key vectors through which global multicultural, late liberal social change agendas have been constituted, assuming that those inhabiting particular racialized positions will solve the problem of racism by their very presence without having to reckon with deeper structural and material issues.[14] In turn, the university requires racialized subjects to join its ranks in order for it to give off the perception that it no longer has a problem and therefore can continue to accrue capital. In this regard racial difference is seen as a necessary commodity for the university and produces new labor expectations. For example, in the past three years, Georgetown's School of Foreign Service hired the first Dean of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the school's history and initiated a new faculty committee called the "Global Anti-Racism Committee," upon which I have served the past three years.

This strategy has had a threefold result. First, it has facilitated a process of "elite capture" in which racialized elites have been able to find upward mobility within DEI projects by taking advantage of the assumptions associated with their essentialized identity and "embodied diversity".[15] These racialized elites tend to have the same approach to change as their white elite counterparts, focusing on projects of accumulation rather than projects of redistribution. Second, and as a kind of janus-face to elite capture, the rightwing has systematically attacked DEI and the broader "identity politics" infrastructure by claiming that these initiatives destroy meritocracy, the ideals of what the university should teach, and how the university should look. Third, and most importantly for the argument I am making here, the commodification of difference has also meant that racialized people at the university are *all* expected to take on these roles and do the labor of diversifying the university. Moreover, when faculty and staff seek to challenge the structures, policies, and values of the institution that maintain racist and gendered inequality, the workload is enormous.

Students like Saleema and Annaelle have also been conscripted into this project, ambitious students who want to see the university include more people like them, even as they are constantly feeling the emotional impacts of a system that, for all its rhetoric of diversity, continues to protect institutional structures, systems, and values that only propagate white supremacy and their dehumanization.

Core curricula, for example, tell us a lot about the political ideologies of universities, revealing who and what is deemed valuable, and what values should be maintained at all costs. Indeed, as Toni Morrison presciently wrote, "Canon building is empire building. Canon defense is national defense…"[16] The Georgetown School of Foreign Service core curriculum is a case in point. In order to fulfill the Georgetown core, students must take microeconomics, macroeconomics, international finance, comparative politics, international relations, and a philosophy course entitled "Political and Social Thought," amongst five others. Strikingly, while the capitalist university generally celebrates itself as a place of choice, in this case, the SFS is purposefully limiting choice.[17] In turn, they are forcing students' curiosities towards ideas that the school deems the most relevant for students to know as they enter into future careers.

In "Political and Social Thought," for example, students are instructed to read and understand the same old white men that we have come to take for granted as the pillars of western civilizational thinking – Plato, Hobbes, Rousseau, Locke, Kant, Rawls, to name a few. When students learn about these figures they inevitably question what relevance they have to the 21st century. My students of color ask why they should be reading authors who were undoubtedly and absolutely racist, and whose

philosophical foundations were predicated on and meant to maintain institutions like slavery and colonialism. Kant, for example, while sitting in his bathtub in a village in Germany, postulated that there were four distinct races of human beings, basing his claims on obvious racist stereotypes regarding Black and Asian peoples.[18]

Why, my Black and brown students ask me almost once every week, do we have to read authors who had these kinds of views *or* if we have to read them why aren't those aspects of their work prominently included in the conversation? When students do challenge their professors in this way, seeking to unsettle a canon that, by now we all know needs complete and total reworking, they get responses that are demeaning or dismissive, or sidestep the issue by stating that their classes will have one session on race in the upcoming weeks so they should stop asking so many questions irrelevant to the discussion that is ongoing. Afterwards, when these students come to my class, they wonder what these responses say about how their professors think about them and their value?

In this sense, *how* one can be curious is linked to questions of *who* can be curious and who continues to become an object of curiosity on college campuses – a question which inevitably reveals the way that people of color, women, queer folks, and others on the margins are further constrained in their ability to ask questions that concern them and to feel at ease on a campus that continues to disempower them. In this context, how could these students *not* feel extreme anxiety, depression, and disgust in spaces which clearly tell them that they do not belong and, if they want to belong/succeed, require a rewiring of their nervous systems so as to not take offense to ideas that were originally written as part of a white supremacist view of the world.

This curricular approach also impacts less marginal students, likely white, likely affluent, who are allowed to stay unaware of the inequality that is happening all around them. In fact, it creates the conditions for their dehumanization by keeping them ignorant about the fact that they are participating in a system of extreme inequality. This too is a form of psychological violence.

Similarly, the excess number of courses in economics tell us that students are anticipated to join financial institutions and/or other highly capitalist institutions. In these economics classes, students are taught to value neoclassical economic theories that originated in the 60s and 70s in the United States which deem economics a science predicated on mathematical equations. In these classes, students constantly wonder how plugging numbers into equations helps them to understand how labor, trade, taxation, inequality, or any other number of political economic phenomenon work in the world. When we discuss this in my classes, we come to understand that abstraction allows economics to fulfill its role in maintaining stratified societies, prioritizing Malthusian concerns regarding resource scarcity and population control, working at the behest of elite interests, and sidestepping the questions of inequity that the students want to grapple with.

In such a context, students feel violated because they are taught economic theories without any discussion of the impact accumulation has had on human beings and, if they do discuss these impacts, suggest that they are simply an unfortunate byproduct of the market and not the consequence of human action. Moreover, for marginalized students these ideas mark that they do not belong on the campus and that if they want to be included and succeed they will have to agree to that which has led to their own ancestors' dispossession. This culture can, in turn, produce extreme anxiety.

As one of my students Katherine, a first gen college student from rural America, explained, "Before I even got done with my first week of school I got an email from one of the admin offices telling me 'not to worry about being on scholarship.' It was weird because before that I wasn't worried; after that, I kind of was…"

In this case, in trying to "support" first gen students the university is actually already locating them as a potential problem, issue, or deficiency that, at best, will need more help and at worst will impact their precious graduation statistics. In these cases, locating the issue in the individual student both sidesteps the fact that a place like Georgetown is one of the most elitist universities in the United States (the aforementioned family income is over $200k), and that it requires systemic change.[19]

These are but a very few of the examples of how the university is a place of extreme inequality that is perpetuated even as the rhetoric of multicultural diversity and inclusion has become one of its hegemonic framings. At best, the idea of DEI visibilizes individual students and even provides them some recognition for their good work while maintaining separation between each of these students, creating the conditions where students of color are required to stay atomized if they want to find mobility within the institution.

Part Two: Annihilationist Strategies

What can we do within such institutional contexts? And how do we get students to begin to see their individual positions as connected? How, in other words, can we help students create solidarity and therefore resist that which they are facing?

Solidarity requires relationships, empathy across difference, and the real work of learning from one another to advocate together against the violent system we live in. Here I am drawing on Roseann Liu and Savannah Shange's conception of "thick solidarity." For them, thick solidarity is "a kind of solidarity that mobilizes empathy in ways that do not gloss over difference, but rather push into the specificity, irreducibility, and incommensurability of racialized experience." Thick solidarity resists the superficial urge to connect with others under the universalizing rubric that "we have all experienced suffering." Instead, thick solidarity asks us to take radical political and economic histories seriously so that we can move toward the much more nerve-racking, uncomfortable conversations that help us to learn how to show radical care for one another.

Indeed, I have so many students, especially my most politically aware students, who already feel like they want to change the world so fast without having the basic frameworks and understandings of history to know why we have the problems we have. I remind them that the history of colonial violence was predicated on a hubris that one should and could change the world and already knew how. So, I ask them to take a step back and remember we have a lot to learn and that they might not already know how different experiences of racialized violence might feel or why historically particular racist stereotypes have attached themselves to different regions or communities. This is what we have to start to become aware of before we move forward.

These kinds of solidarities move well beyond the classroom, especially the liberal classroom. They especially push against facile calls for "dialogue" that so-called "liberal" politicians and academicians continue to promote, which silo conversation to the classroom and denude such conversations of any potential for future action. Those calls for "dialogue" are embedded in a politics of "both-sides-ism" that refuses to take into account material conditions, power relations, and colonial histories in determining what constitutes "fair" and "just" speech. In fact, such calls for dialogue are most often intended to silence those fighting for justice while allowing oppressors room to voice opinions that are most often racist, sexist, and/or intended to maintain projects of accumulation. Recently, this pernicious version of dialogue has been pushed across university campuses to police pro-Palestinian activism. In these calls for dialogue, senior leaders often insinuate that protest, encampments, and the like are not the best way for students to have their voices heard or their concerns addressed. Instead, administrators argue that students should be willing to meet, listen, hear both sides, and follow university protocols to get any demands met. In almost every instance, such calls for dialogue have been a means to curtail protest and prevent change, merely providing the façade that the university attempted to meet student demands before eventually violently putting down protest with the help of the carceral state. What is hidden in these discussions of dialogue is that the university has large stakes in maintaining relationships with many powerful and rich Zionist donors, who influence university presidents and the overall university policy regarding "dialogue" about Israeli violence against Palestinians.

By contrast, the kind of solidarity building and political learning I am calling for requires that in-class teaching be connected with the experiential learnings that can only come from joining those who are pushing explicit change agendas. This is why, most of all, I want my students to learn from all those activists and organizers who continue to shape our world. I want students to learn how to organize themselves and, as Charisse Burden-Stelly advocates, to "join an organization, contribute to that organization, and strive to embody and concretize its ethics and principles." I myself wish I had undertaken the rigorous study to join and contribute to radical organizations earlier in my life, and it is a task I am only now fully embracing.

But, and this is most important for me, in this process of learning from those who have done this work better for longer, I want my students to slowly but surely cultivate annihilationist impulses and strategies.

By focusing my discussion on annihilation, I am evoking two strands of thought that set the foundation for what I hope students receive in the classroom as they start to expand their imaginations of what might be possible in the future. First, and most directly, I use *annihilation* in the Ambedkarite sense – related to the great Indian leader, writer of the Indian constitution, and anti-caste activist Dr. B.R. Ambedkar – to refer to the project to annihilate the evil and violent system of global caste. While caste has principally been associated with Hinduism and the Indian subcontinent, which is indeed one of the most violent caste systems in the world, caste critique can help shed light on a how intransigent hierarchical systems function in a number of contexts and are founded on grading of and devaluing certain laborers.[20] Indeed, the US academy illustrates the ongoing entrenchment of the academic caste system, one in which the elite university professor is graded above the public university professor, the tenured professor is graded above the adjunct professor, the scholar from the Global North is graded above the scholar from the Global South, white students are graded above students of color, and one in which these gradations of laborers are also reinforced by the working conditions of these laborers. In turn, I want students to challenge those with authority at every turn, especially by questioning why certain academic laborers have so much power over what they learn and how they learn and why other laborers are deemed less valuable and are even stigmatized.

Second, I use annihilation in the Césairean decolonial sense – related to the Martinican decolonial theorist Aimé Césaire – to refer to the project to annihilate the evil that is colonial Western civilizationalism and its knowledge formations. This version of annihilation requires a constant reckoning with the neocolonial and scientific racist legacies that fix human beings to particular, narrow bodily capacities and has perpetuated a cultural ideology that our capacities are innate, inherited, and pregiven. When I start to observe and trace fixedness, I find manifestations everywhere, and I am coming to believe that it is one of the most difficult things for me to challenge in myself, in my conversations with students in the classroom, and in conversations with family and friends. The fixing of capacities is, for me, so pernicious because it makes us feel that nothing can be different and that who we are is who we are forever.

What I find most striking and sad is just how much students, and to a lesser extent faculty, feel like they are somehow completely without agency. Statements like, "We never question the status quo," "we aren't allowed to do anything," "don't know how to make things happen," were perhaps always intertwined with feelings of anxiety, despair, and paralysis.

Therefore, what I think we require, as students and as people, is to cultivate our annihilationist strategies, which requires, in turn, a different kind of curiosity, one

that, as Perry Zurn describes, is a "curiosity at war." The task of a "curiosity at war," as Zurn explains it, is one of collective study, collective questioning, collective learning, collective challenging of one another outside of the confines of our colonized institutional frameworks.[21]

But really, what do a curiosity at war and, more broadly the cultivation of annihilation strategies, *look and feel like*?

As I watched students protest against genocide in 2022, I was forced to think again about what these questions look like in action during an earlier moment of activism. After the racist incident on campus, students, including Annaelle and Saleema, staged a week long sit-in in the president's office and an hours long march during what should have been their study week for finals. The students were protesting because one of their peers had had a racial epithet hurled at them while sitting on a bench in front of their dorm. Specifically, the perpetrator yelled, "Death to all n-words." The student, a first gen, queer, Black student, went through the supposedly appropriate protocols to get redress for the violence they had faced. However, after six months, nothing had happened and, in fact, the perpetrator had been protected and the university "lost" any video footage that might have supported the victim's claim. Over the course of the six months the student faced further violence within social media spaces that ridiculed them for coming forward and diminished the violent impact on their ability to survive on the college campus.

So, after the intense silence from the university, a group of supportive students planned a sit-in over the course of the week and, as it so happened, the first day of the sit-in fell on our last day of class, during which we had planned to go over the many different political ideas we had been learning. At the beginning of class, the students wanted to know if we were going to the sit-in and point blank asked if all of the things we were learning in class were just theoretical or actually about doing the kind of radical change work they imagined. They asked how we could sit out while others protested after reading the likes of Sara Ahmed, Frantz Fanon, Walter Rodney, and so many other revolutionaries whose theories are about changing how we live in the world.

Over the course of 30-minutes we discussed why we should go and I asked them to make arguments collectively based on what we had learned over the semester.

There were several strands of collective discussion that hinged on the ability to cultivate our annihilationist strategies.

First, one student hesitatingly confessed that her first instinct was to not go and that the reason was because she had initially felt that this was just another instance of the university not supporting its students and, in her words, "what did this particular student really expect?" She then, in real time, worked through this instinct, recognizing that this was part of the silencing and defeat that systems of racial capitalism require and that this was a thought she needed to annihilate from her mind before she could get to the real work of social change.

In turn, many other students discussed other versions of what we term "colonized" mindsets that were preventing them from joining. Some students grappled with the fact that this may have been their first sit-in, that this was the first time they were beginning to understand how important their participation was – especially if they were not directly impacted by this kind of racist violence. Others had to challenge their view that the "right" way of dealing with racism was through institutional means and began to use some of our readings to help them articulate why taking space, making noise, and pushing into direct action was the only way forward.

I myself had to admit to my students that my first instinct was about my job. I confessed that I wondered if my participation in a sit-in with them – and maybe more worryingly the images that might be taken during the sit-in – could jeopardize my position as a non-tenured professor. This I knew was one way that the university maintained the silence of its professoriate. But then I asked: Was my job more important than the well-being of a student? I wondered how many professors would show up at the sit-in and, as it turned out, on that day I would be the only one.

Several students evoked W.E.B. Dubois and Sara Ahmed to point out that the student in question had become a problem for the university because they had spoken out about the problems occurring at the university.

One student, Zan, became visibly agitated when telling a story of overhearing two students in the library who were not participating in the protests but taking a break from studying. He explained that those students questioned the "clarity" with which the protest goals were being articulated and the reasons why students were protesting in the first place. He finished by exclaiming, "it made me so angry, I was like, look right on that wall, literally the exact statement of why we are protesting is written for everyone to see!"

Zan's statement got us to think about a different strand of annihilation. On the one hand, we started to reckon with the fact that seeing is not believing, but really, believing is seeing. We came to the understanding that these students could not even see what was in front of their eyes because they were already predisposed to thinking that student protest was unnecessary. This led to broader discussion of ways of understanding why police brutality videos, for instance, were not believed by so much of the public despite the fact that supposedly the evidence is right in front of our eyes. How do we annihilate the belief in a need for absolute proof, Zan asked, and what does this mean for how we raise awareness beyond the kind of paradigms we imagine should convince others?

Second, Zan made most of the class reflect on the way the university space was structured – this was after all the library, a place where all students were welcomed to study. And yet, they realized that this space was a space meant to maintain the campus as a white space,

which allowed for these kinds of discourses and in many ways made the space unsafe for students like Zan.

Finally, Saleema again argued that they were doing all this extra labor that was invisible and undervalued, even as they were expected to do as much as everyone else in their classes. The psychological consequences are real. For example, Sanchi, one of the other students who organized the sit-ins, emailed me desperately, asking for an extension on her final paper. In an emotional email, she said she was extremely behind and couldn't focus as she was still thinking about all that happened, how to support her classmate further, and just how violent the university environment was. She explained that none of her other professors gave her an extension or acknowledged the importance of the work she and her peers were doing on campus.

Then after they had discussed these ideas and many other ways that the university functioned as a key cog in the system of racial capitalism, we left to sit in together in the president's office.

Conclusion

During our discussions that day, one of the primary questions that arose over and over was whether our doing this sit-in would make any actual change or whether the university-as-racial-capitalist institution would find a way to squash the entire situation without making any changes or redressing any of the grievances.

As the days went on, we found that the student protests did have some impact and the school did acknowledge that a hate crime had occurred, that they had mismanaged it, and that there was an incredible amount of work to do in order to make the campus even just a bit safer for students of color, and Black students in particular. While these acknowledgments are at least somewhat significant, what I reminded students before we left was that even if the sit-ins "failed" and the university did not respond as they should have, what was forged was an increase in our collective consciousness and a set of learnings around how we support one another and how we cultivate annihilationist strategies when we recognize the suffering of others as part of our own collective suffering.

No matter what, I reminded them, whether they are in the university or not, they are still living in a racial and gendered capitalist system and the struggle will have to continue. The project of annihilation is not a one day or one week or one month activity, but one that has to become a part of our everyday.

I think about this often these days, having now also witnessed and participated in the pro-Palestinian student encampments that emerged all over the country to protest genocide. These student protests challenged the university to take a stand, to divest from Israeli investments, and to show solidarity with those experiencing extreme violence at the hands of an occupying force. The encampments themselves were a place of exhilarating community of protest based upon political education that students had received both inside and outside of the classroom. They were also, in most cases, crushed by university administrators more concerned about university fundraising than their students' demands. In so many cases, including the encampment at George Washington University which I was most connected to, the aftermath seemed so demoralizing. For many students who stayed in the encampment and had given so much energy to get their university to change, they were left re-strategizing as to what to do next as we continue to fight against an occupation that is nowhere near an end.

This tension, as Lakota scholar Nick Estes contends, is the nature of political struggle. He evokes the figure of the mole to help explain the depth of conviction required to continue collective action. "The mole," he writes, "is easily defeated on the surface by counterrevolutionary forces if she hasn't adequately prepared her subterranean spaces, which provide shelter and safety; even when pushed underground the mole doesn't stop her work… Hidden from view from outsiders, this constant tunneling, plotting, planning, harvesting, remembering, and conspiring for freedom – the collective faith that another world is possible – is the most important aspect of revolutionary struggle. It is from everyday life that the collective confidence to change reality grows, gives rise to extraordinary events."[22]

Estes's description sits very closely to what I mean when I talk about annihilationist strategies and what I think is required as we push against a system that is meant to erode our hope and capacity to change anything at all.

Notes

[1] Munshi and Willse, "Foreword", xx

[2] https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/projects/college-mobility/georgetown-university

[3] Christen A. Smith discusses the way that violent images of Black peoples in Brazil circulate constantly and actually render them, "hypervisible and invisible simultaneously" (176). In this case, the constant need for DEI based representational optics similarly renders Black students hypervisible and invisible simultaneously.

[4] For example, Columbia University suspended two pro-Palestinian groups because they were protesting the extreme violence perpetrated by the Israeli state. https://www.insidehighered.com/news/students/free-speech/2023/11/10/columbia-suspends-two-pro-palestinian-groups

[5] Lowe, Lisa. *The Intimacies of Four Continents*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015, p. 150.

[6] See: "Abolitionist University Studies: An Invitation", 13.

[7] "Georgetown Reflects on Slavery, Memory, and Reconciliation" https://www.georgetown.edu/slavery

[8] "Georgetown Reflects on Slavery, Memory, and Reconciliation" https://www.georgetown.edu/slavery/

[9] Williams and Tuitt, 6.

[10] The discussion of surplus has found some of its richest theorizing in relation to the Prison Industrial Complex. In this literature, scholars discuss the way that the prison serves as a means to deal with the problem of surplus land, labor, state capacity, and financial capital. Many argue that the university serves a similar function. See: INCITE!, *The Revolution Will Nott be Funded*

[11] See: "The Rise of UniverCity" https://jacobin.com/2021/09/university-cities-urban-development-gentrification

[12] For example, ever since the 1994 congressional elimination of mandatory retirement of tenured faculty and staff, there has been a steady delay in retirement. See: https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/08/02/new-study-shows-difficulty-encouraging-professors-retire

[13] Shankar, "The Campus is Sick"

[14] As Sara Ahmed has written, "those who embody diversity... are assumed to bring whiteness to an end by virtue of [their] arrival".

[15] See: Haider, Asad. *Mistaken Identity: Race and Class in the Age of Trump*. New York: Verso, 2018; Táíwò, Olúfemi O. "Identity Politics and Elite Capture." *Boston Review*, May 7, 2020. https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/olufemi-o-taiwo-identity-politics-and-elite-capture/.

[16] Toni Morrison, "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature." *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*. University of Michigan, October 7, 1988. https://tannerlectures.utah.edu/_resources/documents/a-to-z/m/morrison90.pdf

[17] In "The Campus is Sick," I argued that the neoliberal university values "choice," but that such choice usually only reinforces that which students were already exposed to, i.e. capitalist values. In this case, when students are given no choice, it again is meant to reinforce the value of economic thinking and capitalist ways of being.

[18] Robert Bernasconi, "Will the real Kant please stand up: The challenge of Enlightenment racism to the study of the history of philosophy," *Radical Philosophy* 117, Jan/Feb 2003.

[19] A *New York Times* expose showed that over 60% of Georgetown students had families whose income was in the top 10% and 20% of Georgetown students came from families earning in the top 1 percent of family incomes. https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2023/09/11/upshot/college-income-lookup.html

[20] In *Annihilation of Caste*, Ambedkar writes, "…the Caste System is not merely a division of labour. It is also a division of labourers. Civilized society undoubtedly needs division of labour. But in no civilized society is division of labour accompanied by this unnatural division of labourers into watertight compartments. The Caste System is not merely a division of labourers which is quite different from division of labour—it is a hierarchy in which the divisions of labourers are graded one above the other. In no other country is the division of labour accompanied by this gradation of labourers."

[21] Perry Zurn. "Curiosities at War: The Police and Prison Resistance after Mai '68." *Modern and Contemporary France* 26, no. 2 (2018): 179–91.

[22] Nick Estes. *Our History is the Future*. New York: Verso. p. 18-19.

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

DEI as a Practice of Assembling: Translation and Transformation

by Chandani Patel

THE PEOPLE AND THE LIBRARY GRAPHICS PACK BY ERIK RUIN VIA JUST SEEDS OPEN ACCESS GRAPHICS COLLECTION

How I Got Here, Or What is Critical DEI?

Regardless of its colonial structure, because school is an assemblage of machines and not a monolithic institution, its machinery is always being subverted towards decolonizing purposes. The bits of machinery that make up a decolonizing university are driven by decolonial desires, with decolonizing dreamers who are subversively part of the machinery and part machine themselves. These subversive beings wreck, scavenge, retool, and reassemble the colonizing university into decolonizing contraptions. They are scyborgs with a decolonizing desire. You might choose to be one of them. (la paperson, *A Third University is Possible*, xiii)

I never would have imagined that I would be working at a preK-12 independent school in Salt Lake City, Utah as an inaugural diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) director. In fact, I said to more than one friend that I would never become a DEI practitioner. But after decades of studying postcolonial history and literature and working within higher education to support inclusive teaching and strengthen campus cultures, I am now in the most impactful role of my career, one that allows me to translate la paperson's concept of the scyborg into the K-12 space. While this essay touches on some of the practices I use in implementing critical DEI work, it primarily focuses on the underlying value of this work, the positional complexities it entails, and the sustainable approaches that support it. As described by la paperson, "Scyborg–composed of *S+cyborg*–is a queer turn of word that I offer to you to name the structural agency of persons who have picked up colonial technologies and reassembled them to decolonizing purposes" (xiii). Operating within systems initially designed to exclude, the scyborg agitates within them towards liberation. While to many colleagues and friends, my transition into the K-12 environment seemed out of the ordinary after over a decade in higher education, in reality, it provides the perfect opportunity to enact small and large scale changes that impact the experiences of students, faculty, staff, and community members in a political context where the words diversity, equity, and inclusion have been banned from government institutions, including public schools. In other words, I am able to channel my decolonizing desire within and through the private educational institution to reassemble it into "decolonizing contraptions" that force it to be in tension with itself.

As a scholar of comparative literature, I have spent my academic life working through multimodal and multidisciplinary frameworks of thinking to assemble archives, analysis, and arguments that make new meaning in and of the world. This propensity toward working in the interstices and at the margins compels me to an educational praxis that does much of the same. For DEI practitioners, there is no specific degree to pursue, no singular pathway to take, and no one sanctioned canon that guides our collective work. Instead, the field emerged at the intersections of multiple disciplines -- history, cultural studies, literary theory, postcolonial studies, antiracist pedagogy -- into a living body of work that evolves, shifts, and grows into the shape of organizational and individual needs to create equity, inclusion, and belonging. For me, this reality means borrowing from frameworks across these disciplines and gathering data from the community I work with in order to create a nimble and flexible approach that can attend to the varied needs of individuals, from preschool learners to adults, and systems, from databases to institutional policies. Blending data, scholarship, and lived experiences allows me to integrate a human-centered lens into an educational system founded in response to rapid advances in 19th century industrial technologies, as outlined by scholars such as David B. Tyack in *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education*.

The way I approach my work as a DEI practitioner – one whose responsibilities focus on creating more equitable and inclusive learning environments for students as well as a more equitable organization writ large – is grounded in my training as a postcolonial scholar, drawing from frameworks by Ngugi wa Thiong'o, whose work outlines the ways in which colonial ideologies are insidiously embedded in systems of domination long after the removal of imperial rule; Frantz Fanon, whose analysis of race and class within systems of oppression clarifies capitalism's impulse towards subjugation; Edward Said, who offers strategies for reading against systems of control and insidious othering; and many others. It is equally informed by black radical feminists like Angela Davis, Toni Morrison, Audre Lorde, and Nikki Giovanni, who blend the personal and political into acts of love, resistance, and solidarity that together operate as a powerful force for social change. And, perhaps more than anything, my approach is driven by a relentless optimism that we can imagine a better world into existence through literature, the arts, and our collective love and solidarity. In this piece, I am specifically in conversation with socialist, feminist, and antiracist theoretical frameworks conceptualized by Alicia Garza, bell hooks, Tricia Hersey, Alexis Pauline Gumbs, and la paperson, who interrogate the social, political, and economic systems we have inherited and whose scholarship provides glimpses into multiple, expansive, and joyful futurisms. All of these frameworks assembled together add up to how I define radical in the context of education: as a socialist, feminist, and antiracist approach in theory and a collective and relational one in practice, one that allows me to keep fighting at the intersections of colonizing structures and their decolonizing countercultures.

How do I translate these theoretical frameworks into my work within the preK-12 context? While I am the one directing or guiding this work, it lives beyond me. It is an assemblage of conversations, ideas, and actions toward change led by me and a host of others. My role is not only about me; my job is to give people permission to propel their decolonizing desires toward agitation against the institutional structure that was designed to keep so many of us out. While some of the work is more visible, such as community programs and large-scale initiatives that are marketed through official channels, a lot of it lives right beneath the surface in the mindsets, attitudes, and

behaviors of a community, as DEI from below. My goal is to create opportunities to bring all thinkers, agitators, and troublemakers together, making the scope of the work necessarily hard to describe and quantify because it is shared and lives everywhere.

DEI from below names the reality of working within our individual spheres of influence to enact change in an intentional and consistent way. As much as DEI work requires an aspiration toward futures free of oppression, critical DEI carries within it the tension of the status quo and the possibility of liberation. Sustained momentum towards institutional change often requires the consistent questioning and interruption of the machinations of the status quo to bend it towards liberatory practices. Intercepting the status quo from where each of us is located can disrupt the colonizing structure in ways that are sanctioned by others in the institution, but the status quo is always ready to resume its role at any moment. Perhaps that is why la paperson's conceptualization of the scyborg is so appealing – because it identifies the messiness of agitating towards change within a system that is designed to maintain the status quo.

What follows is my attempt to describe what critical DEI looks like within a tuition-charging institution similar to the higher education institutions that la paperson studies. I begin with describing a DEI from below from my location within the private preK-12 context in a local landscape where DEI wars are waged in public school classrooms. I then discuss the strategies and conditions through which I labor, against frontlash –as conceptualized by Joseph Darda – and backlash, and also against capitalism in its many insidious forms, as an act of self-preservation. And finally, I examine why I stay in this work and return to it over and over again through a sense of shared purpose and radical love.

***

How I Show Up, Or DEI From Below

When I talk with folks who are interested in taking up DEI work, they often ask how I got started on my journey to become the practitioner I am today. From the time I was a young child – the eldest daughter of immigrant parents – I often questioned the assumptions or expectations others had of me and my two sisters: Why couldn't I forge my own path instead of that dreamt of by others? Why couldn't I speak back to teachers whose racist ideologies impacted my relationships with friends and my idea of self? I didn't always have the language to name what I observed around me, but I knew that it didn't all add up to a feeling of liberation. I didn't feel like the me I wanted to be could exist freely within these constraints. Once I acquired the language to describe the structural realities of what being a young woman of color in this country meant, I began to realize that my work advocating for myself and others was meaningful, necessary, and impactful. Thus, when the opportunity to work with younger students and teachers arose, I recognized it as an opportunity for me to help others navigate systems of power and privilege in empowered and liberatory ways. Or, as a way to help young people become scyborgs too as they experience their first encounters with insidious forms of oppression.

No doubt there are many individuals who think they know how to do DEI work or what is required to do it "correctly." Countless folks have, in not so many direct ways, tried to tell me how to do my job. Like them, I too used to think it was an issues-based enterprise: if only I could get people to say this instead of that, or if only people better understood this topic, then . . . What I have come to realize, however, is that it is less about how well people know the issues or topics that are often categorized under the larger umbrella of DEI work – though basic literacy is of course helpful – but more their mindset toward change, being wrong, and (re)learning. When supporting colleagues, I now offer them the gift of feedback by pointing to gaps or missteps and then asking questions about how I might be helpful in their own process of identifying steps to move through the challenge. In other words, it's harder to teach people how to adopt habits of mind that allow them to become strategic allies and changemakers, and yet, these are the very attributes necessary for this work to have long-term impact.

I have been wrong and I have seen DEI work go wrong because of a refusal to inhabit the long view. I used to think that being radical meant loudly calling out inequities and injustices when you witness them, and while I still believe that naming inequities and injustices is a necessary first step, I have come to embrace a radical approach where I show up every day to grow capacity in others to help shift their mindsets and move this work forward in collective and sustainable ways that will long outlast my relationship to the institution. I have seen the fruits of this labor already in how questions about equity and inclusion are asked in all hiring processes regardless of my presence; in how decisions about compensation and leave policies account for potential inequities; in how students feel empowered to name what is and what is not working for them through the lens of belonging. In all honesty, it is hard for me to always harness my anger toward incremental change, and yet I know that institutions like mine, established over 150 years ago, are not going to change overnight. As la paperson reminds us, this change requires persistent and collective agitation, dismantling, and rebuilding towards the kind of futures we want to imagine are possible.

To cultivate a DEI from below, one that is transformative, proactive, and collective, I work to build trusting relationships with others so that we can together identify ways to struggle for change. When I first started, I spent several months listening and getting to know the dedicated faculty, the brilliant students, the intentional parents and caregivers, the Board of Trustees, as well as members of the leadership team. Was it overwhelming? Yes. People had wildly different ideas about what my role at the school could and should be, and they also had a variety of experiences that informed their thinking about these solutions. By creating opportunities for individuals to share, rather than problems for me to "solve," I was

able to forge individual relationships with many colleagues before identifying next steps. As Alexis Pauline Gumbs asks, "What are the intergenerational and evolutionary ways that we become what we practice? How can we navigate oppressive environments with core practices that build community, resistance, and more loving ways of living?" (*Undrowned*, 43) Within my tuition and donor-based institution, much of the work we do as educators is to help students and their families understand their privileges and positionality not in ways that shame or blame them but rather that help them develop empathy when interacting with peers and community members. I work alongside a number of colleagues to help lead this work in age-appropriate ways. We don't expect elementary students, for example, to understand equity and inclusion in the same ways as high school students. In fact, we work with humans aged 3 to 80, including long-standing Board members, so the work requires translation across contexts and coalition-building in order to be effective and impactful.

Working through the same hierarchical structures that consolidate power and disenfranchise workers will not work when advocating for equitable and inclusive educational environments. As Alicia Garza claims:

> When people come together to solve problems, they do not automatically become immune to the ways society and the economy are organized. We bring the things that shape us, consciously and unconsciously, everywhere we go. Unless we are intentional about interrupting what we've learned, we will perpetuate it, even as we are working hard for a better world. (*The Purpose of Power*, 201)

Despite the fact that a shared power structure is often more unwieldy than one that has a clear "leader," cultivating a DEI from below requires a disruption of traditional governing structures. While my team consists of a few individuals who have clearly articulated roles, both part- and full-time, within my office, it also consists of about twenty other individuals who lead this work on a volunteer basis as mentors for affinity groups and learning communities, increasing the reach of our work and ability to support students, teachers, and families. Additionally, when colleagues approach me with parts of the machine that are not working inclusively, I am able to deputize them to share some of the load; if they name it, then I urge colleagues to be a part of the solution too. When a colleague expressed concerns about how his faith-based identity was not visible or accommodated within the institution, I encouraged him to lead an affinity group with students in his division as a way to begin collectively identifying their needs. While reluctant at first, he came around to stepping into this role, and it proved to be valuable not only to the students, but also to him. In this way, I have been able to work with the moveable middle, what Dolly Chugh refers to as the 60% of people who are willing to come along, to build capacity, momentum, and a collective that carries this work with each other. This approach also empowers those among the 20% who are out ahead agitating for change and acting upon their decolonizing desires, as I've seen demonstrated by a colleague who talks about identity in his physics classes or by a group of high school students who dared to create a collective space of healing and empowerment for themselves.

In addition to coalition-building and a shared sense of responsibility to cultivate a DEI from below, I work through what I refer to as inception, planting seeds to nurture over time in order for them to flourish. Part of the frontlash that DEI work often has to contend with is the false opposition between rigor and DEI – the assumption is that spending too much time talking about DEI takes away from the rigorous academic curriculum that students should be engaging with every day. In reality, we are presented constantly with the consequences of individuals, communities, and entire nations not being able to engage in productive dialogue through difference and disagreement to arrive at better solutions for the collective whole. This opposition or binary stems from the perception that educators are taking a piecemeal approach to different issues or topics related to DEI instead of helping students cultivate a strong sense of self, community, and purpose in the world. In order to combat this perception when it has shown up in our community, I recorded a short video to share with our community connecting the very human need for belonging to students' ability to learn and grow, thereby contextualizing DEI work within the preK-12 setting with citations to the research that backs up these claims. It's hard to argue with the fact that, as a school, our priority is to ensure that each and every student is able to learn deeply, and that in order to do so, they need to feel a strong sense of belonging. This tactic also helps alleviate the concern that I as a practitioner or the school as an institution has some kind of hidden activist agenda that pits individuals against each other. By working within the machinations of the institution, in other words, we are able to act as scyborgs, agitating for change in ways that are integrated within our educational mission and legible to the whole community.

While most folks who disagree with my approach or the institution's commitment to inclusion will rarely come to speak with me directly, I knew that this perception about rigor was out there and chose to proactively address it. When our students come to school, they enter into the real world of difference, tension, and challenge -- it does not exist somewhere outside of this space. Those who perceive DEI as taking away from the academic rigor promised by our institution fail to understand that in order to best prepare our students for the world in which they live, we must equip them with the tools to integrate DEI into their critical thinking frameworks. Challenging them to deeply engage with others' perspectives and develop the tools to understand their limited world view as individuals is no small feat; instead, this type of education requires rigor not only in terms of content, but also attitudes and mindsets in order to truly understand one's place and purpose in the world. Whether or not those who need to hear it the most engage with the information I share in the video mentioned, it is an attempt to help educate and support those who are not already predisposed to the type of learner stance necessary to engage with others in our community, thereby extending

the scale at which these conversations often take place (i.e., within the Boardroom or at the leadership table). All of these strategies constitute for me a DEI from below, one that operates on multiple levels and scales toward a shared goal of transformation. This approach does not come without risk; when the work is dispersed in these ways, it's sometimes hard to wrap my arms around all of it, and at the end of the day, within the system, I am the one responsible for the impact. However, I refuse to operate through the consolidated power of my position within a hierarchy because it is antithetical not only to my own values but also to the value of the work.

I took a similar approach when Utah passed anti-DEI legislation recently. Instead of making a public statement reaffirming our commitment to DEI and admonishing the government, we instead chose to continue doing the work so as not to draw undue attention to individuals within our community or to invite more targeted legislation at our efforts. As an independent school, our governing body is our Board of Trustees and we are accredited through a regional organization that provides oversight to independent schools. This status does mean that we are protected from the bills that our state legislature passes, but the rhetoric generated by anti-DEI legislators still has an impact on parent/caregiver, faculty, and student perceptions within our community as well. Often, individuals do not understand how legislation impacts our institution and the public sector differently, which means that my job has also been to read and translate these laws to make them legible to those within our community. And while I continue to have the support of the Board and Head of School in carrying on with my strategic initiatives, given the tensions within our political landscape, this support can often start to erode overnight, as it has for many colleagues who are DEI practitioners in places like Seattle, San Diego, Los Angeles, and New York. While the intersections of frontlash and backlash are a challenge, they illuminate how DEI from below – one that is transformative, proactive, and collective – is the only way forward in any institution because it lives outside and within overarching structures, enabling scyborgs to operate from within and through their decolonizing desires.

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How I Labor, Or Working Towards Abundance

You were not just born to center your entire existence on work and labor. You were born to heal, to grow, to be of service to yourself and community, to practice, to experiment, to create, to have space, to dream, and to connect. (Tricia Hersey, *Rest is Resistance*, 122)

In order to cultivate a DEI from below, how I labor is a crucial component to examine within the capitalism system we have inherited. Reading Tricia Hersey's *Rest is Resistance* felt like a balm I didn't know I needed to move through the world and my work as a DEI practitioner. Her meditative prose and simple but powerful reminders about our humanity jerked me into an awakening within the deepest recesses of my soul. Who was I laboring for? More importantly, how was I laboring? Her manifesto opened up a deep well of questions for me and continues to help me refine and center my approach.

There are countless memes circulating on the internet that depict the dichotomy between what people think others' jobs are and what they actually entail. The same is true for my role –pundits, politicians, and parents alike all hold assumptions and ideas about what any DEI practitioner's job actually is, regardless of context. Most assume we are going around calling people out for their racist language, or that we are shutting down conversations and creating situations where folks in dominant groups are shunned. While I cannot speak on behalf of other practitioners, these assumptions are a far cry from the work I do with teachers, students, and families on a daily basis. Instead, I help individuals build a positive sense of self-identity, prioritize repair when there are rifts in their relationships with peers because of harmful language or behavior, and provide countless learning opportunities about how we can build more empathic, ethical, equitable, and inclusive educational environments. Working with younger students, usually aged 3-18, means modeling for them how to learn from and grow through mistakes, because if we told them they can't come back from them, why would they keep trying?

This work happens on many time scales and levels, often requiring me to balance others' sense of urgency with what I know to be sustainable practices and needs. For example, when bias-related incidents take place, as they sometimes do because we work with humans, there is often an outsized sense of urgency to "fix" the problem because adult witnesses are often activated from their grown up sense of harm within the community. And while we must work to address the situation through intentional and restorative processes, we also need to work towards proactive and long-term strategies that help community members avoid making these mistakes in the first place. Often, we need to allow students the time to reflect and process so that they can come to a moment of repairing a relationship with a sense of sincerity; otherwise they will feel forced into an apology that lands flat. The reality is that humans will never be free of bias, and we need both short and long-term strategies to employ when it shows up. As I work with others, I often hold this tension up so that we do not lose sight of both the reactive and proactive needs within the community towards resolution.

Laboring as a DEI practitioner also often requires working with folks at their starting point, instead of our own. While in the past I was certain I knew why someone got defensive or was stuck, I now try to take a stance of curiosity so that I can engage colleagues and students with grace and from a genuine place of interest. On a personal note, to do this work means having to attend to my own trauma and experiences as a girl of color so that I can support cishet boys in the same ways I do marginalized students –and it's still a work in progress because of my natural affinity with those who share experiences similar to my own. Similarly, I have to work from where the institution is at instead of where I hope it to be. Affinity groups, for example, are an important first

step towards creating a sense of belonging and safety for so many students who have no other spaces to talk about their experiences. Over time, we have been able to establish 21 affinity groups starting in 1st grade and through 12th grade that are race-based, gender-based, ability-based, faith-based, and based in intersections of these identities as well. For so many students, these are spaces where they say they can fully be themselves and not worry about being judged unfairly by others. They come together to engage in shared learning, mutual support, community service, and more. And yet, affinity groups are a temporary solution within a dominant structure that makes some of our students feel othered. As we work towards a possible future in which these groups would not be needed because everyone would feel belonging no matter what space they are in, it would be foolish for me to nudge toward that endpoint without taking the necessary steps along the way, which means laboring slowly instead of impatiently. As Alexis Pauline Gumbs offers,

> It is the speed, the speedboats, the momentum of capitalism, the expediency of pollution that threatens the ocean, our marine mammal mentors, and our own lives. What if we could release ourselves from an internalized time clock and remember that slow is efficient, slow is effective, slow is beautiful? (*Undrowned*, 141)

One of my colleagues uses the phrase, "go slow to go fast," and it has stuck with me. It reminds me that it once took me nine months to write a polished version of my first dissertation chapter before my PhD advisor would approve it, so as impatient as I can be at times, I have practiced waiting in order to make more of an impact, and I can do so again.

Laboring more patiently also allows me to center the students in my approach. Their needs must guide the work that we do because they are the ones who are impacted by the decisions we make. I take them seriously, and I strive to role model for them how to take up space in the world and how not to tie their worth to their productivity. Tricia Hersey reminds us that:

> We are socialized into systems that cause us to conform and believe our worth is connected to how much we can produce. Our constant labor becomes a prison that allows us to be disembodied. We become easy for the systems to manipulate, disconnected from our power as divine beings and hopeless. We forget how to dream. This is how grind culture continues. We internalize the lies and in turn become agents of an unsustainable way of living. (*Rest is Resistance* 99-100)

Our young people should be allowed to dream and become dreamers; too many of them are already jaded and divested from the notion that their dreams are powerful. Often, this disposition is inherited from the grown-ups around them: if we cannot be dreamers, if we cannot imagine better futures, what messages do we send to them? So many of us are caught in the trap of grind culture, doing more to do more, doing more even if we know we should slow down and do less, doing more even when our bodies tell us that we are dying. I now try, therefore, to talk openly to students and colleagues about how I leave some things undone, that I revise my to-do list, that I punt projects to the next year because at the end of the day, my value and worth should not be measured based on what I have done or what I have accomplished, but rather by what kind of human I strive to be in the world. A scarcity mindset, derived from capitalism's death drive, leads to negative physical and mental consequences. As the formidable Audre Lorde admits when first diagnosed with cancer:

> I had to examine, in my dreams as well as in my immune-function tests, the devastating effects of overextension. Overextending myself is not stretching myself. I had to accept how difficult it is to monitor the difference….Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare. (*A Burst of Light*, 130)

Working against capitalism, as Tricia Hersey encourages through her manifesto, means working toward an abundance mindset. Despite what capitalism might have us believe, there is enough for all of us, and each of us can have value and worth and also celebrate each other's accomplishments. It also means not allowing our adult ideas about the world to diminish students' joy. When I march with our students in our annual city-sponsored Pride Parade, their joy is infectious. I could tell them about my ambivalent feelings about a parade sponsored by large corporations whose DEI frontlash often manifests as co opting movements for financial gains, but instead I choose to center myself in their joy as a revolutionary act of belonging, especially in a state where they often do not feel seen or celebrated. Cultivating a community of care instead of operating through an individualistic mindset allows us to preserve our humanity and approach others through theirs.

Modeling an abundance mindset also means not taking yourself too seriously. As I like to joke when facilitating workshops, I am both a recovering serious person and a recovering perfectionist from the decades I spent in academia under the many pressures that early career folks encounter there. Now, I instead create opportunities for play, mistakes, and risk-taking in order to live and learn joyfully alongside others. While I have always been a curious person, open to experimenting and trying out new ideas and initiatives, I would often wait for the right moment or to have it all figured out before fully going for it. Working with younger students, and being a mother to a small human, has enabled me to see the wisdom of trying, failing, and trying again openly and publicly to normalize the process of learning and growing. I have embraced opening with connection activities that I would have thought cheesy in the past, participating in improv activities, working through the design thinking process, and requiring experimentation when leading learning for colleagues and students because I have seen that the mark of a successful session is when participants return to engage in learning together again. There is a ton of unlearning required as part of DEI work in terms of the

messages and assumptions we make about others, but also in terms of expectations about labor and productivity.

The way I move through the work seeks to model both joy and self-preservation as anti-capitalist practices. While this might not look like DEI work as folks often think of it, it is critical DEI –against capitalism and exploitation, against the status quo, against the theft of our humanity. "Loving ourselves and each other," Tricia Hersey writes, "deepens our disruption of the dominant systems. They want us unwell, fearful, exhausted, and without deep self-love because you are easier to manipulate when you are distracted by what is not real or true," (*Rest is Resistance*, 118). How do I attempt to disrupt dominant systems of exploitative labor? I talk openly about my whole life, not just my work, as a way to normalize bringing my full humanity and that of others into the workplace. When someone asks me how I am doing, I don't give the quick and easy "I'm fine," but rather respond honestly and genuinely to build a connection with another human. When I am asked to take on a new project or collaborate with colleagues on theirs, I name the realities of my work schedule and push back if my calendar will not allow me to take it on. My sisters and close friends make up my "no" committee so that I guard my time intentionally and only take on projects in addition to that of my full-time job that are both value-aligned and manageable within the care practices I prioritize for myself. These practices include exercising at least 3-4 times a week, spending time outdoors alone, being present for my family, and writing at least a few times a week. Without these care practices, my body physically and mentally begins to break down, making it hard for me to continue to labor under capitalism. My self-preservation also requires laughter and time well spent with my BIPOC colleagues; we collectively create sacred time where we hold each other's worries, but more importantly where we celebrate and lift each other up so that we can continue fighting the good fight in community with one another. Within the political landscape of my state and the country, there are countless attempts to rob individuals of their humanity and joy; my approach to critical DEI stems from a deep commitment to cultivating an abundance mindset for myself and my community so that we can become more powerful agents of change.

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Why Stay? Or Radical Love

When I applied for my current job, I wrote about radical hope in my educational philosophy. I wrote that the way I approach this work stems from a sense of radical hope that we can help cultivate future leaders of this world who collaborate effectively across their differences to tackle global-scale challenges and who lead with compassion -- for themselves, for one another, and for the world we share. This deep sense of hope is tied to purposeful work, as Alicia Garza writes in *The Purpose of Power*: "Hope is not the absence of despair -- it is the ability to come back to our purpose, again and again" (289). My purpose is to lead institutional change with integrity and in ways that are values-aligned, without which I would be equally complicit in upholding outdated and covertly discriminatory policies, ideas, and frameworks. Since that time, my commitment to radical hope has transformed into a deeper commitment to love; radical love is the only pathway to the better, more just futures we can imagine together. As a woman of color navigating predominantly white spaces for my entire education, career, and life, practicing radical love towards myself, my neighbors, and my community can prove quite challenging, but all of my research and training has taught me that without it, we will not be able to productively struggle towards the kinds of worlds so many movement makers have been dreaming up for decades. And so, I choose to claim agency as part scyborg:

> The agency of the scyborg is precisely that it is a reorganizer of institutional machinery; it subverts machinery against the master code of its makers; it rewires machinery to its own intentions. It's that elliptical gear that makes the machine work (for freedom sometimes) by helping the machine (of unfreedom) break down. (la paperson, 55)

This fight for equity and justice is long; we have been in intense political battles over belonging for as long as this country has existed, and we will be here again – it is a requirement of nationalism to draw boundaries around who belongs and who does not. I have been here before, as a younger person with less of a sense of empowered and embodied practice. Choosing how you show up as a leader matters; I am willing to have a conversation with anyone who feels courageous enough to walk through my door and into a state of vulnerability. Following Alicia Garza's guidance, I start by building a relationship around our shared humanity before addressing the issue at hand. Even though we expect and ask kids to inhabit vulnerability every day, so many educators still do not practice engaged pedagogy in the ways that bell hooks offered thirty years ago in *Teaching to Transgress*, often leaving students and adults alike without a strong sense of belonging within the classroom. In an earlier text, hooks writes about the plight of isolation and disconnection that plagues our country:

> Currently in our nation Americans of all colors feel bereft of a sense of 'belonging' to either a place or a community. Yet most people still long for community and that yearning is a place of possibility, the place where we might begin as a nation to think and dream anew about the building of beloved community. (*Belonging: A Culture of Place*, 85)

Written more than 30 years ago, this observation is no less true now than it was then. Our human need for connection across differences is a place of possibility, from which hopeful actions of solidarity can take shape. Belonging does not indicate a lack of disagreement, but rather an ability to advocate for yourself and others and make demands to meet your individual and collective needs. It was mine and my husband's desire to feel attached again to a sense of place and community that brought us to Utah, and it is the beloved community we

are trying to build anew within our school that keeps me motivated to continue, no matter the struggle, no matter the tensions, no matter the disagreement about what exactly it all looks like and adds up to.

My goal is to help both students and adults become braver versions of themselves, ones that are not afraid of differences or not knowing, but who embrace these wholeheartedly as an opportunity to learn something new about themselves, their peers, the world. As much as I can sometimes miss, with a fierce intensity, enthralling academic conversations about the meaning of words and what they add up to, there is nothing more thrilling than witnessing a young person's mind expand to more fully understand the world in which they live as well as their place within it. When high schoolers engage in deep conversation with me about how systems are connected with capitalism as the driver, I relish in their newfound sense of agency to combat its hold on their lives. When middle schoolers revise an argument in response to my (gentle but direct) feedback, I am proud of their ability to collaborate effectively toward a better claim. And when lower schoolers share with me something that is important about who they are or what they have learned, I feel grateful that they are empowered in ways I could only dream of at their age. Equipping students with the tools they need to continue asking critical questions, even if they are the only ones asking, is radical work in the deepest meaning of that word, for when all is said and done, it is the human capacity to ask deep questions of the world around us that moves us toward justice.

What if school, as we used it on a daily basis, signaled not the name of a process or institution through which we could be indoctrinated, not a structure through which social capital was grasped and policed, but something more organic, like a scale of care. What if school was the scale at which we could care for each other and move together. In my view, at this moment in history, that is really what we need to learn most urgently. (*Undrowned*, 55-56)

My practice of assembling frameworks, people, and actions together is an attempt to help build or rebuild institutions as scales of care, ones through which we can channel our decolonizing desires towards the creation of our liberated futures. That is the revolution I am after, one day at a time.

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RADICAL TEACHER

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Collective Art Activist Practice: A Pedagogy of Hope

by Dipti Desai

NYU FLASH COLLECTIVE, LIFE COST MONEY, 2017. IMAGE COURTESY OF AUTHOR.

Our graduate program Art, Education, and Community Practice at New York University (NYU) is grounded in artistic activism, a practice that envisions new ways of acting and thinking in our society in order to create social change. The art activist strategies we explore range from the representation of social issues in order to build awareness and open dialogue to the facilitation of direct-action in order to change unequal power structures in our society. Artistic activism, as a form of cultural production, is pedagogical in its intent and structure because it combines the creative power of the arts to move us emotionally with the strategic planning of activism necessary to bring about social change (Center of Artistic Activism website, para #1). Always involving some form of action, this practice calls for new ways of working collectively if it is going to be effective in shifting the balance of power in our society. To borrow Nina Montmann's (2009) words, "collaboration is a constitutive activity, in political activism and other societal movements" (p.11).

What does collaboration mean in artistic activism, and what can we learn about collective pedagogy for our increasingly diverse classrooms? In this essay, I draw on my experiences of teaching courses that incorporate collective pedagogy, a term I take from Avram Finkelstein, at a corporate university that is part of the academic industrial complex. Within such a setting, collective pedagogy is fraught with contradictions, tensions, and challenges, but also possibilities: what Paulo Friere (2014) calls a pedagogy of hope.

I recognize that coloniality has profoundly shaped and managed how I have learnt to see, know, and act in the classroom and in society. Here my exploration of collective pedagogy in relation to teaching art activism is undoubtedly framed by my assumption regarding art's capacity to be a tool for creating social change that at its core can be considered a modernist, western, colonial project. In recent years, I have begun to pay more attention to what Sylvia Wynters (1994, p. 44) calls my "inner eye" in order to interrogate the notion of art and activism that often perpetuates a western epistemology in relation to aesthetics, education, politics, justice, and social change. I hope to make visible this interrogation of art activism as I make a case for collective pedagogy as a prefigurative practice of thinking, sense-making, and revolutionary love that challenges the hyper-individual educational practices that structure our classrooms. To practice collective pedagogy is to understand classrooms as what the anthropologist Mary Louise Pratt would call "contact zones": "social spaces where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power" that are shaped by the history of settler colonialism, slavery, forced migration due to war, poverty, and, in recent years, environmental crisis, as well as voluntary migration (Pratt, 1992, p. 7). How to attend to and mobilize the acute differences that emerge within these contact zones toward a shared, creative project is the question that collective pedagogy confronts.

Learning from Art Activist Collectives

Collaboration is not a new concept in art; rather, as Maria Lind (2009) indicates, it is a primary method of working in contemporary (western) art. Its history is "long and complex and includes a number of different forms for organizing artistic work and its aesthetics … which [extends] from [Peter Paul] Rubens and other Baroque artists' hierarchical large-scale studios" to the contemporary studios that are lucrative business models, such as that of Matthew Barney or Ai Wei-Wei (Lind, 2009, p. 53). For Surrealists, collaboration was conceived differently as a way of creating group experiments, while the Fluxus artists created games called "Fluxfest" that required multiple players. Andy Warhol's studio, called the "Factory," was another kind of collaboration, as it became a hub for celebrities in art, music, film, and the fashion world to meet and work together (Lind, 2009). Today, how we understand collaboration in contemporary art varies greatly as artists collaborate in a range of different ways -- through networks, coalitions, associations, and artist circles.

The formation of art activist collectives in the late 1980s and early 1990s in the United States (Gran Fury, Guerilla Girls, Ultra-red, Chinatown Art Brigade, MTL, to name a few) is distinct from the collaborative art practices mentioned above. These art collectives deliberately challenge the lucrative symbolic economy of art that relies on the exchange of art objects by working outside that system to build meaningful relationships between people, design different forms of participation, and deploy organizing strategies learnt from social movements to address pressing socio-political issues in our society, including challenging the colonial structure of the artworld. Collaboration is conceived very differently in these art collectives, where participants deliberately create an environment of social solidarity in which cooperation, horizontal relationships, and mutual care are cornerstones that then allow for egalitarian art making practices that are based on collective decision-making regarding content, aesthetics, and activist interventions in the public sphere or in art institutions. Avram Finkelstein, co-founder of the artist collective Gran Fury and Silence=Death, indicates that collectivity in art activist practices is a form of political organizing that is intentional and learnt, requiring a different pedagogical process (Desai, 2014). As Finkelstein states, "all political organizing is contingent on collaboration . . . we are not always encouraged to work collaboratively . . . I see it as an essential part of almost any pedagogy, not just an arts pedagogy or social justice pedagogy" (personal communication, October 20, 2018). As an intentional pedagogical process, learning solidarity then is a political project because it moves our understanding of ourselves from autonomous individuals to interconnected and interdependent human beings (Freire, 1970; Anderson, Desai, Heras, Spreen, 2023; Llewellyn & Llewellyn, 2015).

As a pedagogical practice, the process of building solidarity requires a commitment to inclusiveness and democracy. This calls for a relational understanding of collective work in which "individual subjects do not enter

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into relationships, but rather subjects are made in and through relationships" that are typically negotiated within unequal power relations (Gaztambide-Fernández 2012, p.52).

Another aspect of learning solidarity in an art activist class is that it is multi-sensory, calling on our imagination to transform our ways of living and relating to each other as human and non-human beings. It is in this way that it prefigures new ways of living and being together. This intentional collective pedagogy not only involves sharing ideas and skills through a horizontal process in order to produce a guerrilla art intervention for public spaces, whether physical or digital, but more importantly, it draws on emotions, cultural memory, and the transcendental connections between humans and non-humans. Collective art activist practices are also concerned with a range of cultural practices (such as rituals or festivals) and forms of representation (visual, aural, performative) that challenge hegemonic ways of seeing that perpetuate the violence of oppression with regard to race, class, ability, gender, and sexuality.

Collective pedagogy in higher education, I suggest, is a prefigurative educational practice that models democratic participation and a specifically critical DEI (Adams et al, 2022; Breines, 1982; Dewey 1916/1944; Kishimoto, 2016;) that I believe is so needed today given the onslaught of neo-liberal privatization of education and the dismantling of academic freedom. My understanding of prefigurative politics is informed by Paul Raekstad and Saio Gradin (2019) who define it as "the deliberate experimental implementation of desired future social relations and practices in the here-and-now" (p.10). As a form of social activism it foregrounds the kinds of spaces, institutions, and communities we would desire that are democratic, egalitarian, and humanely grounded in a politics of hope that demonstrate other ways of being and living. These spaces exist today across the globe in worker cooperatives, social movements, and indigenous, feminist, and radical education to name a few (for some examples see Anderson, G., Desai, D, Heras, A.I., & Spreen, C.A., 2023). As a prefigurative radical educational practice, critical DEI, as I deploy the term, is grounded in an anti-oppressive and feminist perspective (Adams et al, 2022; Crenshaw, 2017; hooks,1994; Delgado, R & Stefanic, J., 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998) that calls for building community through social action in order to create more just and equitable institutions and society. Learning to work together, I contend, is an important part of teaching and learning from an anti-racist/anti-oppression position.

For me, critical DEI focuses on challenging and changing the unequal power structures that shape our identities (race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability) in multi-racial/ethnic contexts, which are always multiple and intersectional (Crenshaw 2017; Collins 2000; hooks 1994) because they are a directly connected to interdependent systems of exploitatoin and domination, such as capitalism, patriarchy, heteronormativity, White supremacy, imperialism and colonialism. In education, critical DEI challenges structural racism that shapes institutions and sites of learning as well as questions whose knowledge and experiences are legitimated by the academy and whose knowledge and experiences are silenced and rendered invisible. It calls for the voices and experiences of marginalized groups to be included in education. Moreover, "anti-racist pedagogy is an organizing effort for institutional and social change that is much broader than teaching in the classroom" (Kishimoto, 2016, p. 540). Therefore, it makes sense to focus on collective pedagogy as part of anti-racist pedagogy as it is based on sharing experiences and knowledges, and building positive relationships where one learns to work through our social differences without erasing them in order to create a more just and equitable society.

What Does Collective Pedagogy Look, Sound, and Feel Like?

The subject of collective pedagogy is, first and foremost, the collective, meaning that the efficacy of this practice is grounded more in the practice and maintenance of collective processes (related to decision-making, creation, and analysis) and less on whether an art intervention successfully produces a narrowly defined result. In my classes, I draw on the idea of affinity groups, each focused on different practices, that break with the neoliberal educational framework that positions students as individuals learning "skills" as their human capital. The practice-based affinity group model aims instead to detach "skills" from the individual and re-attach them to the collective as students and instructors all become responsible for the shared undertaking of art activist creation in and outside of the classroom. In such a model, to be clear, the teacher is also part of the collective, not someone above or outside of it.

However, despite the centrality of collective decision-making in this form of pedagogy, there remains a tension between the practice of collective pedagogy and the responsibilty of the teacher to protect vulnerable students, especially within highly corporatized and punitive contexts. In what follows, I share my experience of teaching a class for several years that focuses on art activism at NYU, where my students and myself as their teacher become an art collective for the semester, where we learn collective decision-making processes for the most part in a horizontal manner and use the multi-sensory aspect of art for political organizing by working on a project together.

This class is open to students from across the different schools at NYU. Students come with varied expertise as their major may not be art making, but rather related fields such as art history, visual arts administration, performance, media studies, and experimental humanities. The class is always composed of a diverse socio-cultural demographic. The context of this praxis based class is discussed on the first day, as we listen to how each of us "stepped off the curb and joined the march," a phrase I have borrowed from Stephen Duncombe. Throughout the courses through both theoretical readings and art activist case studies we talk about how each of our locations and posititionalities,

FIGURE1. NYU FLASH COLLECTIVE, LIFE COST MONEY, 2017; FIGURE 2. NYU FLASH COLLECTIVE, 2022 ABORTION; FIGURE 3. HIDDEN HISTORIES: BLACK STORIES IN THE LOWER EAST SIDE, 2021. (LEFT TO RIGHT)

including myself as a South Asian, middle class, cisgendered woman who is teaching art activism in a neoliberal university in a diverse metropolis, shapes our lived experiences and how we speak.

We borrow the art interventionist method developed by artist activist Avram Finkelstein called Flash Collectives (Desai and Finkelstein 2017) that is inspired by Paulo Friere's (1970) notion of praxis. We begin by identifying an urgent current issue that would be the focus of our work together for the art intervention. The class readings focus on theories of art activism as well as both historical and current art activist case studies that provide a frame to discuss what, why, how, and for whom we are designing an art intervention. The readings help us discuss two critical questions: What is the political objective of the art intervention and who is the audience? This discussion leads to thinking together about the ways we can communicate in public spaces that are increasingly privatized in NYC. We also discuss the various strategies and tactics for collective cultural production borrowed from art activist collectives/artists, advertising, and social movements. In order for the collaboration to take place under the constraint of a 15-week semester we suspend the desire for complete consensus over language, visuals, and strategies and elect to implement a decisive voting process.

A collective mapping exercise on the topic then allows us to listen deeply, create a space where each student is heard, and identify what is behind an issue in order to identify key ideas. Each of us goes up to the paper on the wall and writes down what came to mind, responding to other people's ideas, and making connections between concepts and ideas. Once we identify the big ideas we then work through a questioning process in order to narrow down our message (using text and image) and the aesthetic form the intervention will take. One of the questions we work through is how, even though we live in a visually saturated world, we can capture the attention of our audience unexpectedly, in order to implicate or engage them in the message we intend to convey through the art intervention. What images and text would surprise the audience and what aesthetic strategies—such as humor or juxtapositions between text and image—would draw their attention? Given that we do not seek permission from authorities, our actions are guerilla art interventions. Deciding the best aesthetic form -- whether it is crack and peel posters, stickers, performances, chalk walls, or banner drops -- is based on the location and kind of audience we want to reach with the hope that learning about the issue will trigger some action on the part of the people walking by. It is for this reason that posters, stickers, and banners have a QR code for people to get more information on a social media site (website or Tumblr) that the students design. In discussions about the audience we also discuss which languages other than English should be included in the same poster or in different posters. For example, for a subway intervention on abortion we decided to create posters that mimicked service change announcements in 3 languages: English, Spanish, and Chinese.

Contemporary art collectives work in different ways. Given that my class is composed of students from across different departments and schools at NYU who bring a diverse set of skills, I draw on the Critical Art Ensemble collectives (1998) understanding of floating hierarchy and "solidarity through difference" (p.66) where we focus on the assets of the class to create affinity groups. Some students have an art/design background where they are knowledgeable about using design software such as photoshop/illustrator that is required to design posters or banners, while others have significant research experience or social media and communication experience. This means that not everyone in class was involved with each aspect of the art intervention. Respecting our differences structured our power relations horizontally, but this does not mean that we are equal at all times and the amount of work done by each member is equal. As the Critical Art Ensemble (1998) indicate: "the idea that everyone should do an equal amount of work is to measure a member's value by quantity instead of quality. Rigid equality in this case can be a perverse and destructive type of Fordism" (p.67). The constraints of a semester mean that, in each iteration of the course, I create the three affinity groups that we require (design,

research and communication, and social media), as I know the skill sets required to design and enact art interventions in a short period of time. In class, I explained the kind of work each affinity group would focus on so students could self-select which affinity group they would choose based on their interest and skill set. The affinity groups continued to meet in class throughout the semester to work on either the design, website, or public performance. We would reconvene to share what the affinity groups had done and, as a collective, make suggestions, edit texts, or endorse each affinity group's work.

For many of my students this is the first time they have considered pasting a poster in public spaces or dropping a banner, requiring us to establish some protocol for the intervention given that these acts are illegal in NYC. For postering, I urge them to go in groups of three, with two students as scouts. If they see police, they alert each other, drop what they were doing, and leave the site. This protocol is particularly important for students of color because we live in a racialized world where Black and Brown bodies are policed in particular ways. However, I also let students know that, if they are afraid, then they can use masking tape to secure the poster on a wall or lamp-post (in NYC one finds many taped flyers of missing dogs and cats). Sharing the protocol for postering or banner drops invariably leads to a discussion in our class about the uneasiness students feel about doing something illegal. We talk about protests and guerilla tactical interventions in the public sphere and what it means to use art as a tool for creating social change and how this might involve sometimes putting one's body on the line. Whatever else the students think about the readings and discussions, they have all decided to enact the intervention in public spaces.

In the case of the banner drop, I discuss the particular nature of this intervention with the class because of my experience of not being allowed by the Chair of my department at the time to practice dropping and retracting the banner from their third floor office window in order to see how quickly I could do it. My Chair exclaimed that it was totally illegal, stating that if they could not justify it to the Deans, then I should not do it anywhere in our building. In class, we discussed my experience and how banner dropping differs from stickering in terms of illegality and its relationship to democracy, freedom of expression, and the law. While all my students were given the option of whether they wanted to drop the banner, I had to make the executive decision to not allow students of color or international students to participate. In class, I explained my reason for this decision given the current political situation and my experience as a person of color. I indicated that it might seem like a contradiction that I would participate without allowing them to do so, even if they wanted to knowing the risk of arrest. However, knowing that our university would not support this kind of art intervention, in good conscience I could not have international students deported or students of color put behind bars. As many of the students of color and international students enrolled in different iterations of the class have wanted to participate, we decided that they would document the banner drop by photographing it from a distance and listening to people's reactions to the action.

After the public interventions of stickering, performing, or banner dropping, we talk about how it felt to participate in these actions and how the audience reacted to the interventions. Students are asked to take a photograph of where they placed the sticker/poster and then go back a few days later to document whether the poster had been ripped off or painted over, or if people had written something on it. In the case of stickering and postering we talk about the choices we make regarding where we placed the posters in the public realm. Given our visually saturated environment, students share the

FIGURE 4. NYU FLASH COLLECTIVE, DEFINE IMMIGRANT, 2015; FIGURE 5. DEFINE IMMIGRANT PERFORMANCE, 2015

dilemmas they face as they walk around the city deciding what a good public site might be in terms of people walking by and seeing the poster. Many students expressed feeling simultaneously anxious and fearful as well as exhilarated. After one public performance, we discussed why people walking through Washington Square Park (mainly NYU students and tourists) were unwilling to answer a tongue and check immigration survey and participate in the performance until we called it an art project. This raised the question of whether calling it art was a way we defanged addressing the topic of immigration or if indeed it was useful. We were clear that the reluctance on the part of passersby meant that if we did this performance in an immigrant community we would have to change the art intervention completely, even if we called it art. In another instance, it was the design of an abortion poster that closely mimicked subway service announcements that was problematic. People running to catch the subway did not read our poster as being R for Republican and D for Democrat but just as the R or D trains (insert see figure 6). Another problem with the poster is that the goal of the intervention was to get people to vote in the primary election, which was a critical election in 2022, but that portion of the poster was small and should have been bigger. We have no idea if this poster and other art interventions in the public sphere that we have enacted actually make a difference, and that is one of tensions we have to address in art activist interventions.

But I also argue that the success of an art intervention is less about achieving one immediate result than about how my students and I collectively think through collective action, design the artwork, and consider its placement in the public sphere. As a class we have to critically examine why and how we want to get passersby on the street to address a topic and what role dialogue plays in tactical art activist interventions at both the planning and implementation stage of the pedagogical process. We would collectively evaluate the art intervention and a grade with feedback was given by each person in the collective that was shared with the class.

Each art intervention is different in the ways solidarity is learnt; however there are five key and interrelated pedagogical ideas that they share. It first requires us to engage in dialogue with the public, evoking what Grant Kester (2004) calls dialogic aesthetics, which means deliberately creating a space for human interaction and communication by an artist. Second, it requires us to challenge and reimagine visual forms of representation that maintain the status quo and, in the process, make visible what the dominant groups deliberately obscure. As a consequence, third, it involves using multisensory ways of knowing that require horizontal ways of working together and co-learning that can create emotional bonds between members of the collective in order to enact social action in the public sphere. Fourth, the process requires members of the collective to trust each other and work together through affinity groups that are based on skills and interest. Finally, given each student's social position and experiences in different locations, co-learning is shaped by unequal power dynamics and therefore is fraught with tensions, contradictions, and confrontations that have to be worked through together.

There seems to be a moment towards the end of the semester when students get frustrated with the democratic process as disagreements have to be worked out in order that the art intervention can take place. Although we do use the voting process, a liberal individual process that contradicts horizontalism, given the time frame of a semester to make decisions, it still seems to evoke a lot of tension given the institutionalization of learning that requires grades, a limited time-frame (semester), and the difficulty to accept failure.

FIGURE 6, NYU FLASH COLLECTIVE - ABORTION POSTERS, 2022

Practicing Participatory Democracy through Collective Pedagogy

I would suggest that working collectively is one way of building community across our differences and practicing democracy. If we are committed to democracy then we need to shift our emphasis on individual teaching and learning to a collective mode where solidarity is learnt intentionally. It is through collective action and reflection of members that communities are not only created, but defined by it, as John Dewey (1916/1944) reminds us. Learning solidarity involves "learning a different set of skills, such as thinking together, listening to each other's ideas, feelings, and desires, and engaging in difficult and often emotional conversations in order to work through cultural and social differences that might be incommensurable in order to produce the action" (Anderson, Desai, Heras, Spreen, 2023, p.149). I would suggest that this construction of a communal "we" is a crucial component of practicing a critical DEI, a concrete method for mobilizing our classrooms, the academy, and perhaps larger society as well. The lesson I have learnt about teaching and learning based on a collective pedagogical approach is that it opens a space for collective thinking and revolutionary love.

Collective thinking, or thinking together in a largely horizontal manner, is an integral part of art activism. Given our different social positions that color our experiences, dispositions, and modes of learning, the

classroom becomes a space where tensions, contradictions, and confrontations surface and have to be worked through together. Since elementary school we have been taught to think as individuals in all subjects, including art. Originality in terms of thinking and making in art classes from kindergarten through college is prized and celebrated in our society and so collective thinking and decision making can be challenging and frustrating. For example, one of the students in my class got very upset as she had spent hours researching what it costs to raise a child from birth until 18 years for an image of a receipt for a banner that we were designing for reproductive justice and the class decided that this actual cost for every item on the receipt was not important. She had to make her case, which she did successfully, as the reciept was itemized for the final banner, but in doing so asked a critical question to our class regarding accuracy and if it mattered or not in relation to representation and art in general. Standing up and arguing for her position was hard but this is the nature of collective thinking and working. It requires courage to speak up at the same time one also learns to listen to other viewpoints. It is only through listening to others that we can move forward in terms of designing the art intervention.

Listening here is a practice that is learnt and becomes a "two-way process of dialogue rather than as an end in itself" (Farinati & Firth, 2017, p. 10). The process of collective learning is grounded in listening and dialogue with and between students on a particular social issue. This listening process becomes the basis for thinking about what kinds of questions need to be asked that spur us to imagine tactics or strategies that might be effective at that particular moment in time. For me, drawing from feminist consciousness raising pedagogy, listening is both a social and political process as it disrupts how power and privilege manifest in the classroom, moving us towards more equitable social relations.

Learning to listen to each other is vital to the collective process of art activism and therefore listening is a precondition for learning solidarity. Following the art collective Ultra-red, I believe that "listening is a site for the organization of politics" (Ultra-red, 2008, Para #3). As they indicate: "[c]ollective listening is not an end in itself. Rather, it is a tool among other tools available for the long haul of struggle" (2014, p. 7). In their book, *Force of Listening,* Farinati & Firth (2017) indicate that there are two ways of thinking about listening in relation to social action: "listening together with others in order to become aware of your own conditions . . . and listening as a willingness to change them through a collective effort. This willingness can be actualised in terms of political organizing, protesting, or simply getting involved in some kind of social struggle" (p. 21). Thinking and listening collectively is itself a method of social change that can create different kinds of political and organizational spaces and in this way transform the power dynamics in concrete ways. Students in my class learn not only to think and listen to each other in the process of imagining and designing an art intervention, but they also need to learn to listen to the sound of public spaces and the public who interact with their art interventions through objects (stickers or banners) and performances. Creating spaces in the classroom for listening and dialogue becomes a process of creation, transformation, and action (Farinati & Firth, 2017; Friere, 1970). As Janna Graham from Ultra-red reminds us, listening has been well theorized by indigenous people and feminists where "questions like who is speaking and how they are speaking, at what moment are they speaking, and at what moment are you listening are key questions within organizing spaces" (Farinati & Firth, 2017, p.24).

This form of active listening as political, grounded in an understanding of how power relations inform and shape our relationships in both classroom spaces and the public sphere, is not usually part of educational practices in university classrooms and not part of normative DEI practices. Rather, as Janna Graham (2017) indicates, the "dynamics of speaking and listening" in classrooms and DEI practices tend to be "habituated through experiences of neoliberalism, a kind of condition of the voice to speak constantly, but a total dearth of conditions that enable listening to take place" (p. 113). One listens to each other's experiences and responds and then moves onto the next experience. Listening to diverse voices is undoubtedly part of democractic processes and is a cornerstone of normative DEI practices where often the rooms might be structured with chairs in a circle formation rather than lecture style with the intention to create a more equitable and dialogue friendly enviornment. However, simply transforming architectural spaces does not mean that each student and teacher has equal power given our social positions, which play out consciously and unconsciously. Rather, as feminist and indigenous scholars remind us, the politics of speaking and listening is relational: we speak from particular social positions, histories, and locations in relation to others that are mediated by unequal power dynamics (Alcoff, 1991; Llewelly & Llewellyn, 2015). A critical DEI that is deliberately shaped by the politics of voice and listening actively engages in relational reflection, practices deep listening, and attends to how our subject positions, as well how we speak and to whom we respond, are always grounded in power relations

Challenging the Cartesian mind/body divide, collective pedagogy draws on multi-modal ways of knowing and being that call upon all of us (teacher and students) to use all our senses, as well as emotions and desires. Classrooms are spaces where people from different social positions meet in order to learn together. In order to enact social change through art, both students and teacher have to go beyond simply learning to work together across our differences, but have to call upon love and care as part of our everyday practice -- a process of collective sense-making. Thinking and working together as I have discussed is a political skill that shapes our identity as artists, activists, and educators, enabling us to speak to, against, and through power grounded in what bell hooks (2018) and Chela Sandoval (2000) call revolutionary love. This notion of love is not understood as solely a feeling or emotion but as a verb that requires us to intentionally take action (hooks, 2018). It is as hooks (2002) tells us "a combination of care,

commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect, and trust" (p. 94). Emotions, desires, and trust become an integral part of the educational process of what Friere (1985) calls "teacher learners"; a collective practice where we are teaching each other as well as learning from each other (p.16). Yet, creating this symbiotic relationship is not easy as we try hard to dismantle the emotional strands of the teacher-student hierarchy that is so ingrained in our bodies and psyche from kindergarten to college. It is hard work and not always successful as we do fall into the traditional roles of teacher and student, which instantly disrupts collectivity. We struggle to acknowledge and talk about how our emotions play out in the classroom, which are connected to how power manifests in the affective realm. Even though in art education we speak about the power of art to express emotions, we rarely address the implications of how our hierarchical social structure creates, manipulates, and enforces appropriate affective responses in class and to the world around us. As Megan Boler (1999) has taught me, emotions are learnt and directly connected to our social location and position. In many ways, our feelings are not our own, but are instead products of a dominant ideology that we need to pay attention to in order to listen and learn from each other. Paying attention to our subject postion and location is critically important to building solidarity as it is shaped relationally (Llewelly & Llewellyn, 2015).

As a collective we need to trust and care about each other and in doing so we learn what is common amongst us -- our humanity. I am beginning to understand care not only as a moral framework (Nodding,1984; Held, 2006) that guides how we interact with each other in the classroom or public sphere, but as relational and interconnected (Llewelly & Llewellyn, 2015). Grounded in feminist relational theory, care is the "full range of influential relationships, personal and public, in which we exist and are constituted as human selves" (Llewelly & Llewellyn, 2015, p. 17). This understanding of humans as caring beings means that "justice aspires to equality of relationships" where it "seeks equality in the basic elements required for peaceful and productive human relationships -- namely, equality of respect, dignity, and mutual care/concern for one another" (Llewelly & Llewellyn, 2015, p. 17). Caring and love as "relational equality" Llewelly & Llewellyn, 2015, p. 18) become the framework for art activism and enacting democracy.

Concluding Thoughts

The art interventions we have done collectively have left us with more questions than answers about the role of art in tactical interventions in the public sphere in order to spark dialogue with passersby and thereby begin the process of what it means to create social change in our neoliberal society. Despite the many challenges, tensions, and contradictions of working collectively in higher education, which include the restraints of time in terms of enacting an art intervention in public spaces or within an institution in a semester, issues with enacting a guerilla tactic, resources that are available, and hyper individualism as an educational mode of being and knowing; I do believe collective pedagogy has been a transformative relational practice that gives us a taste of what it means to work together with care and love. It has opened spaces for experiencing democracy as a way of living in classrooms that are diverse and shaped by unequal power relations (Dewey,1916/1944; Pedagogy Group 2014). As I have tried to demonstrate, the notion of collective pedagogy is important to art activism, critical DEI, and radical education as a relational way of living, thinking, feeling, and being that is needed today, more so than ever before, given our fragile democracy.

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RADICAL TEACHER

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

Climate Humanities in the L2 Classroom: Radical Possibilities for an Uncertain Future

by Francisca Aguiló Mora and Almudena Marín Cobos

INTERSPECIES MUTUAL AID BY ANDREA CONTE VIA JUST SEEDS OPEN ACCESS GRAPHICS COLLECTION

1. Introduction: Radical Pedagogies on Language and Climate toward a Critical DEI

Most academic disciplines, including the humanities, have gotten down to work to help mitigate the climate crisis. The recognition of humanists' unique contributions to climate scholarship has started with the creation of a transdisciplinary field frequently called "Environmental Humanities" other times "Climate Humanities." In fall 2020, the Climate Humanities initiative began at Columbia University, including "any work in which the climate crisis is addressed in and through the humanistic disciplines, or any partnership that brings together climate science with our areas of study" (Columbia University). As a result of a campus-wide collaborative effort from 2016 to 2018, Barnard College launched Barnard's Climate Action Vision, which is defined as "a 360-degree approach that prioritizes the role of women, people of color, and low-income communities in defining new paradigms for climate leadership" (Barnard College "Sustainability"). With an aim at crossing disciplinary and intellectual boundaries, Barnard currently offers an Environmental Humanities Minor and Concentration under the conviction that "the natural world always raises questions that are simultaneously scientific and social and, second, that any meaningful effort to address environmental challenges must emerge from both humanistic and scientific consideration" (Barnard College "EHMC").

As language and cultural studies faculty at Columbia and Barnard, we strongly believe that this notion of climate humanities critically connects with the work of DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) in contemporary higher education, and that it is imperative that this new field embrace the teaching and learning of second languages in the context of our university programs and beyond. When we think about DEI, we agree with Sara Ahmed in her critique of institutional commitments to diversity: understood as "non-performative," such commitments do not bring about what they name and work as a "containment strategy" (53). In this sense, and as pointed out in the article "Disrupting Diversity Management: Toward a Difference-Driven Pedagogy," in "our increasingly neoliberal culture, diversity programming functions as a dominant pedagogy -- a way to manage and assimilate difference into existing systems, rather than to engage it as a disruptive, dynamic, relational process" (281). Authors suggest, indeed, that "diversity" has become an empty discourse, turning into a "fixed commodity" (283) at times that, instead of making diversity open to exploration, is managed and shut down to make it fit within institutional constraints. That is why we propose to think in terms of a "Critical DEI" -- that is to say, we propose using the classroom as our battleground from which to engage in a "difference-driven pedagogy" that allows us to grapple with conflict from the bottom-up, establishing common practices that go beyond integrating diverse course offerings into the curriculum. Thinking about this within the realm of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) along with the climate crisis exhorts us to critically examine discourses -- what kind of culture is privileged, what kind of culture is erased, and what role language(s) play in the configuration of imaginaries.

Up to this moment, climate humanities mostly include environmental projects in anthropology, history, philosophy, geography, sociology, political science, and performing and visual arts. In the field of language arts, we discreetly start witnessing environmental research and education in literary and cultural studies. Second languages are not part of the equation yet. Climate discourse and action are relegated to single unit projects, lesson plans, or sections of the textbook, usually as a connecting thread to practice pre-established grammatical and lexical expressions (see, for example, Contreras et al.). Some initiatives are taking place in English as a Second Language (ESL) (Braselmann et al., British Council, Deetjen and Ludwig, Green Action ELT, Summer), but these are barely existent in other instances such as Spanish. We lack a true institutional and curricular conceptualization and restructuration of language education with respect to the climate emergency.

Our goal and research praxis is to include the teaching, learning, and study of languages, specifically the Spanish language, both in the area of climate humanities and in what a "critical DEI" might be and do across multiple scales of intervention, starting from the basic language programs, and beyond serving a mere public relations strategy for the institution's benefit. Accordingly, this article explores the current politics and practices of language teaching and learning in higher education in the US, and the ethical dilemmas that we face as instructors of Spanish as a Second Language (L2) with a focus on climate emergency. By addressing how Spanish L2 education works and whom it serves, we propose radical curricular possibilities for advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion in the L2 classroom centering on climate and sustainability. Because language matters and disrupts. Language is the main sociocultural mediating tool for cognitive development through which we build thought and knowledge of the world, a tool for inter and intrapersonal construction (cf. Negueruela-Azarola et al. 2023). We are striving for inclusivity and a climate dialogue starting from below, in the university basic language programs. This is the time to listen to, rethink, and talk climate in languages other than English. Moving in such a direction is appealing to an increasingly diverse faculty and student body, making space for those whose heritage languages and cultures go beyond the mainstream English discourse.

2. The Trunk of the Tree: A Critical DEI from Below

This initiative envisions the interconnection between language (ideologies)/(socio)linguistics, culture, social justice, and the climate crisis in our core language curriculum. Carleton College's InTeGrate initiative enumerates all the benefits that bringing sustainability into our teaching offers to student learning, such as "establishing relevance, bridging course content to

current topics in the news, and making the course connected to other disciplines" ("Sustainability"). It also details two of the primary obstacles faculty encounter when planning to incorporate topics of sustainability into a course: time and content overload. Through a tree metaphor, they propose to relate topics of sustainability to the core content in order to overcome this barrier. The idea is not to think about climate and sustainability as a branch or a twig of our classes (i.e., an 'add-on'), but instead make it part of the course trunk. For instance, our departments have offered advanced content seminars that address the climate crisis in their syllabi at Barnard ("Between Science Fiction and Climate Fiction," Prof. Orlando Bentancor; see Betancor et al.) and Columbia ("Nature, Capital, and Environmental Cultures," Prof. Ana Fernández-Cebrián). Climate is the trunk of these courses. The InTeGrate model is equally course-specific. We are pushing beyond the limits of the InTeGrate framework and building this conceptual metaphor into departmental programs.

Before taking these elective seminars, students sometimes need to first learn the language in basic-level language courses. What happens is that there is often a gap and lack of continuity between language programs and advanced content courses in cultural studies across higher education nationwide (see Kern). Reconciling the language-cultural studies split Kern refers to -- not only through literacy, but more specifically through climate discourse literacy in the second language -- is what paved the road for us to challenge ourselves to make climate the trunk of the tree. As Megan Cole mentions, "integrating the humanities and the sciences at every stage of climate scholarship -- not incorporating the humanities at the final stages of scholarship, as an afterthought -- will be crucial to ensuring that climate mitigation strategies are equity-focused and sustainable" (2799). Thus, in teaching, which cannot be detached from scholarship, the incorporation of climate discourse has to start at the foundational level: in the basic language program, the trunk of the departmental tree. We cannot ignore the fact that languages are a core component of the humanities, and considering the great number of students that fulfill the language requirements through our basic language offerings, working at the level of the tree trunk means merging climate and sustainability with the language program.

The current Spanish basic language program at Columbia/Barnard offers a four-semester sequence of elementary and intermediate-level courses for which an average of 900 students register each semester. At Columbia University, the Foreign Language requirement is part of the Core Curriculum. The requirement may be completed with the satisfactory completion of the second term of an intermediate language sequence. The Barnard language requirement is two courses at any level, without exception. After students complete our intermediate-level courses, they may take Advanced Spanish through Content classes, which focus on specific topics to offer an intensive exposure to the language through written and oral practice. This broader approach initially seemed more challenging than designing a content course on the topic because language courses traditionally revolve around explicit language instruction and acquisition, but it introduces a much-needed teaching paradigm shift in the long run. To start talking climate in the trunk and branches of the tree, we have to transform the roots first. How? In addition to the inherently radical approach of incorporating climate and sustainability in the tree trunk of university academic programs, we strive for sustainable teaching practices in the L2 classroom. The following ethical dilemma has driven our thinking since we started to conceive of this curricular innovation: how can we teach and learn Spanish -- a colonial language mostly in Latin America, but also in the US, Africa, Asia, and even Oceania -- in the context of climate and the environment without somehow perpetuating the colonial imperative (del Valle, Train)? How to avoid propagating "colonialingualism," in other words, "privileging dominant colonial knowledges, languages, and neoliberal valorizations of diversity" (Meighan 146)? If we acknowledge that the climate crisis is the result of intersectional colonial and neocolonial processes at various levels, we need to decolonize our teaching dynamics (Behari-Leak, Mintz, Phipps, Twyman-Ghoshal and Lacorazza). To tackle these questions, we propose a root-level transformation of the language program that, scaffolded by the following teaching principles, will allow for a curricular development within the frame of critical DEI:

1. Contextualization of an often decontextualized language teaching
2. Decentralization of climate discourse in English toward an integration of climate discourse in other languages
3. Shared expertise and transdisciplinarity toward an integrated approach

As a first step to implement the above mentioned pedagogical approach, we are delivering a fourth-semester Spanish course on topics of climate discourse. Spanish Intermediate II is the last semester course in the basic language program at Columbia/Barnard and in Columbia's language requirement. An average of 200 students take this class each semester. For many, the experience in this course is decisive in choosing whether to continue with advanced Spanish courses toward a major, minor, or concentration in Hispanic Studies. Reworking one of the sections of this course at this key moment in their academic journey helps students bridge the gap between the language program and advanced-level study, while also enabling the implementation of SLA courses from a critical social justice perspective, focused on the living nature of languages and their interconnection with society beyond academia.

This course centers on developing students' critical thinking skills through the analysis of climate-related topics, emphasizing a range of diverse texts -- such as literature, film, documentaries, social networking platforms, press articles, and realia. Students engage deeply with these materials, enhancing their communicative skills and metalinguistic awareness as

they critically assess various representations of the climate emergency across different media. The course contextualizes language by addressing the colonial history and ongoing impact of Spanish and its regional varieties, ensuring that the voices of marginalized communities -- such as women, racialized groups, and indigenous peoples -- are actively part of the conversation. Students compare climate discourse across the Spanish-speaking world, analyzing rhetorical and aesthetic choices, and explore how metaphors and communicative strategies in both indigenous and colonial languages shape environmental beliefs. Finally, the course bridges scientific knowledge in English with alternative epistemologies in Spanish, connecting academic and public spheres to address the political and social dimensions of the climate crisis. This reframed section works as a case in point to illustrate the paradigmatic shift that we envision for post-secondary teaching and learning of L2 Spanish, based on the teaching principles and learning outcomes previously listed and further developed in the following sections.

2.1 Contextualization of an Often Decontextualized Language Teaching

Spanish is the second most spoken language in the US. It is not surprising, then, that the teaching of Spanish has become a highly institutionalized professional practice (del Valle). However, perceptions about the language or, better said, its speakers, are complex, multiple, and often contradictory. While the Spanish language and its speakers are often marginalized, minoritized, and delegitimized in the US, Spanish is also perceived as "a valuable, standardized global language" (del Valle 29), as both a local and global sociocultural commodity that facilitates an entrance to national and global marketplaces. Given its recognized instrumentality for professional growth, as well as its ability to connect learners to their linguistic heritage (Carreira and Kagan 57), Spanish is the language that the vast majority of students choose to fulfill the requirement at US universities (Lusin et al, "MLA Report on Enrollments in Languages Other Than English," 49).

Spanish is often taught in the US from an instrumental perspective that is accompanied by a structural view of languages. Under these ideological premises (del Valle), the language is still conceptualized as a disembodied resource. ACTFL's 5Cs goal areas for learning languages (Communications, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, Communities) stress the application of learning a language by creating meaning beyond the instructional setting through the interaction with multiple cultures and multilingual communities. The problem is that curriculums, students, and instructors are still very much exclusively focused on a decontextualized teaching/learning of grammar, which is too often perceived as a synonym of what "language" is, and on certain grammar structures as the result *of* learning more than a tool *for* learning (Negueruela 190-1). When cultural, ideological, and socio-political issues are brought into the L2 syllabus, it is frequently done as an addendum -- a leaf of the twig -- for example in separate sections of the textbook, or as a connecting thread to practice pre-established grammatical and lexical expressions. Paul J. Meighan asserts that even translanguaging (García and Wei) and plurilingual approaches, which have been promoting more equitable language education, "still tend to reflect the knowledge and belief systems of dominant, nation-state, 'official,' and/or colonial languages as opposed to those of endangered and Indigenous languages" (146). In other words, although we live in an increasingly interconnected world in which multilingualism is the norm, the monolingual imperative prevails through the imagined "one-nation, one-language, one-culture" ideological motto associated with the idea of a nation-state.

A consequence of this is the (not so) implicit ideological supremacy of certain varieties -- i.e., white, peninsular, urban, monolingual, "official," standard, academic -- that are erroneously perceived as "neutral." This assumed "neutrality" and "usefulness" of said varieties of Spanish imply the erasure of other varieties and languages in contact. By "erasure" we refer to the process by which language ideology, in simplifying the sociolinguistic field, renders some people and sociolinguistic phenomena invisible (Irvine and Gal 38). This process of linguistic erasure also discredits other knowledge epistemologies that do not fall under the western gaze. In the L2 classroom, teaching materials -- whether textual or audiovisual -- used to develop communicative competence are still typically selected or created in a monolingual format. Even when efforts are made to help students understand that European varieties are not "the languages" *per se*—through exposure to a diverse array of regional varieties—the underlying belief that only the dominant linguistic norms are "correct" still persists. Furthermore, a specific nation (or sense of *nationness*) is assumed to be represented by those geolects, erasing other co-existing varieties, often racialized or spoken by lower classes. For example, our current program's textbook offers the opportunity to listen to the same texts in four different regional varieties: those "corresponding to" Colombia, Spain, Mexico, and Cuba. However, Mexican varieties from indigenous populations are rarely shown in the classroom, nor are Afro-Cuban dialects, for instance.

This type of linguistic and cognitive imperialism (Battiste 2017) is what Meighan calls "colonialingualism," which "upholds colonial legacies, imperial mindsets, and inequitable [pedagogical] practices" (146). Although Meighan refers to English language education, Spanish also carries "a colonial, imperialist legacy and a eurocentric, human-centered worldview" (147). Meighan adds that colonialingualism "is subtractive and detrimental to multilingual, multicultural learners' identities and heritages; endangered, Indigenous languages and knowledges; minoritized communities; and our environment" (146-7), since indigenous languages and knowledges are closely interrelated to culture and land (Chiblow and Meighan 2022, 2023). Accordingly, following an inquiry-based learning approach based on research, group work, presentations, debates, and external collaborations with expert voices from wide-

ranging disciplines, the students in our new intermediate course consult, understand, and share initiatives by indigenous communities that address the climate crisis and promote sustainable practices. The work done by La Plataforma de Pueblos Indígenas para enfrentar el Cambio Climático in Perú, the series *Somos indígenas* released by UNAI (United Nations Academic Impact), or the Salvadoran testimonies presented by PNUD (United Nations Development Programme) as part of its Climate Voices Campaign are examples of these. Through the study of these types of actions, students critically practice their listening comprehension of non-normative accents, while indigenous voices are truly heard and become part of the climate conversation. From a descriptive exposure to language(s) (as opposed to the prevailing monocentric prescriptivism), students explore, discuss, and, in some cases, unlearn traditionally ingrained perceptions of these linguistic varieties and voices.

In their research on the relationship between language and environmental ideologies, Fine et al. suggest that "the removal of a language from its environmental context can result in more harmful environmental practices by divorcing it from the ecological knowledge in which it arose" (86). The decontextualization of language in the creation of standard forms of communication, such as scientific discourse and other types of academic writing -- reflected in certain pedagogical practices as well -- lead to non-inclusive, non-equitable, and non-diverse academic and institutional dynamics, and at the same time establish unsustainable environmental practices by using "forms that obscure agentive and affected participants" (87). In our pedagogical proposal for L2 teaching and learning, we reveal the colonial moves that continue to cause the erasure of indigenous languages and the undermining of indigenous ownership over their languages and environmental epistemes. We highlight these racialized languages and study these epistemes in contact with the target language. In the classroom, this translates, in the first place, into the explicit analysis of the systematicity of bilingual discourse and, second, into the teaching of literacy as a basis for cultural analysis (Kern). The languages that are in contact with Spanish/es in the US, Latin America, and Spain -- together with those that were lost or are on the verge of extinction -- are embraced, included, and studied from a sociolinguistic perspective of bilingualism beyond structuralist, synchronic notions of language and identity, and modern views of nationhood (Heller).

Audiovisual texts such as the short films *Ja chomobicho baneni (La última tinaja)* (2020) and *El tiempo es agua* (2017), the documentary *Sembradoras de vida* (2019), or films like *Guaraní* (2016), are bilingual works that bridge language, colonial and indigenous identities, national imaginaries, and the land. More specifically, the bilingual Spanish-Quechua documentary directed by the Sarmiento brothers centers on five women from the Andean highlands and their ongoing efforts to maintain a traditional and organic way of working the land guided by an Andean cosmovision in which women and the earth are deeply interrelated. In a world where *patrias* -- i.e,. fatherlands -- have exploited ecosystems and deceived their inhabitants, we need to listen to "the mothers of the lands" and their wisdom on "the connections between plants and animals, between diseases and what we eat as well as the differences in taste between organically grown food and those following a more industrial method of growing and harvesting" ("Mothers"). Meanwhile, the film by Zorraquín is a bilingual piece in Spanish, Guaraní, and Jopará -- a mixed variety of Spanish and Guaraní spoken in Paraguay -- analogous to "Spanglish" in the US. In the movie, Guaraní is understood by the protagonist's grandfather as the language of the Paraguayan nation, closely tied to the land and resistant to change. However, his granddaughter, more fluent in Spanish and Jopará, represents a more flexible and less masculinist imaginary of the nation(s).

Through these texts, students learn to recognize and name common (socio)linguistic patterns when two or more languages are in contact -- loanwords (integrated and non-integrated), calques (semantic and syntactic), or code changes (inter- or intrasentential, in markers of the speech, etc.) -- which contradict the mistakenly assumed idea that multilingual speech is indicative of linguistic incompetence. Students realize that "not everything goes" in multilingual discourse, since language alternation has restrictions; i.e., that of structural equivalence or that of free morpheme (Poplack, 1980). This development of metalinguistic awareness will positivize their perception toward bilingual practices, since only those speakers who have a certain morphosyntactic command of both languages are capable of respecting these restrictions and participating in specific pragmatic intentions when code-switching. With the critical analysis of these texts, students connect those discursive moves not only to pragmatic intentions by the characters or participants but also to historical, ideological, and sociopolitical implications.

The fact that students strengthen their communicative, metalinguistic, and literacy competence in Spanish–as well as their critical thinking skills–through climate-related weekly readings and critical analysis of diverse types of texts, portrays language as a living phenomenon that is intrinsically connected to its sociocultural history and surroundings. That said, culture is not studied as a mere excuse to mobilize predetermined language structures. Instead, we study culture through language and language through culture, analyzing metalinguistically ideological, moral, and socio-political implications of language uses and choices both synchronically and diachronically. We cannot study languages without considering its users as we cannot study climate emergency and climate discourse in the Anthropocene without acknowledging the impact of human activity on the planet. We recognize and highlight "the impact of climate change on culture, and […] the potential of culture for global climate action" (UNESCO). This allows for a connection between what students learn in the classroom and the outside world and for a better preparation to dissect and generate environmental

discourse about the present and future of our planet in Spanish.

2.2 Decentralization of Climate Discourse in English Toward an Integration of Climate Discourse in Other Languages

A topic crucial to this new paradigm of climate-language teaching is how the climate crisis is discursively framed in scientific debates, in the media, and in diverse cultural productions in the Spanish-speaking world, including the US. In class, we explore how climate discourse is reframed and renegotiated, and how the linguistic and rhetorical strategies deployed are shaped by the (geo)political economy of climate debates. "Right now" (argued hooks in 2003, but this is still accurate as of today), "free speech and the right to dissent are being undermined by conservative, mass media-pushing dominator culture. The message of dominator culture would have little impact if it were not for the power of mass media to seductively magnify that message" (11-12). Just recently, journalist Matthew Yglesias posted the following comment on X regarding Genevieve Guenther's book *The Language of Climate Politics* (2024): "The idea that this is primarily a linguistic problem -- rather than an engineering, physics, economics, IR, and congressional bargaining problem -- that requires the expertise of a doctor of Renaissance literature [referring to Genevieve] to help us solve [the problem] is the problem" (@mattyglesias). By quoting Lakoff as the epigraph of the book's introduction, Guenther defends that action on climate crisis requires the right framing: "Political ground is gained not when you successfully inhabit the middle ground, but when you successfully impose your framing as the 'common-sense' position" ("Conservatives," qtd. in Guenther 1). Our role, then, as facilitators of knowledge in the classroom, is that of providing students with tools to interrogate the source of information and then perform a mediating role between specialized knowledge production and the public.

Certainly, how we frame language as well as its context in use shapes how we perceive and interact with the environment. For instance, Fine et al. note that in English, we refer to living organisms such as trees through the pronoun "it" whereas in Potawatomi, a Central Algonquian language historically spoken in the US Great Lakes region, members of the living world are categorized as animate (85). Fine et al. also quote linguist Michael Halliday to explain that grammatical features like "the use of mass nouns for finite resources, such as 'soil' and 'water,' which are grammatically unbounded…convey an air of limitlessness that is counter to reality" (86). These scholars prompt us to explore how mass media "portrays climate change as uncertain through epistemic markers even as the effects of the climate crisis become more and more apparent" (87), and even advise us against the use of terms such as "climate change," because it elicits no specific consequences and can even imply that the climate is changing with no human interaction. They stand up for the terms "climate crisis" and "climate emergency" because they metaphorically offer "a greater sense of immediacy and alarm," although these may erase to some extent "the connections between the climate crisis and the crisis of colonial violence that Indigenous communities have endured for centuries" (87).

As a matter of fact, some metaphors can also often "mediate scientific concepts in a way that makes them more understandable to non-expert audiences, while also affecting how those concepts are perceived" (Fine et al. 86), while others are deeply embedded in English and European philosophy or have a direct and harmful impact on indigenous voices. Fine et al. enumerate some of these (85-6). For example, (1) the *terra nullis* metaphor to refer to newly colonized lands imagines a new land as "empty" so that colonial names can then be given (see also Saïd); (2) natural systems as inanimate "machines" in colonial languages vis-à-vis more animistic ways of understanding these systems in indigenous languages (Rout and Reid); or (3) the metaphor of biodiversity as a "library" for the benefit and extraction of humans (Stibbe). In her proposal of metaphors that seek to cultivate a mutualistic relationship between scientific and traditional ecological knowledge, Robin Wall Kimmerer claims that "indigenous ways of framing and communicating concepts, through shared narratives and symbols, effectively engage the power of metaphors to encompass both material and spiritual dimensions of a matter" (50).

Through a thoughtful engagement with these practices, in our course, we put forward the need to study metaphorical figures of speech as regards climate in the target L2 Spanish in comparison with figures of speech in English and indigenous languages in contact. We tackle the geopolitical differences that are central to the climate debate by making students comparatively examine texts published both in the United States and in the rest of the Spanish-speaking world, questioning issues of diversity and inclusion by paying attention to rhetorical and aesthetic decisions. Students learn to infer the discursive features in the scientific and public spheres that are used to talk about climate, specifically distinguishing how metaphors and communicative standards in indigenous and colonial languages and cultures shape our environmental beliefs and actions differently. As a pedagogical example, in class we compare the mainstream US film *Don't Look Up* (2021) -- a satirical metaphor of the political, scientific, and societal responses to the climate crisis (discourses) -- with alternative Latin American and Spanish narratives that go beyond Global North perspectives, such as those in the films or documentaries *El Agua* (2023), *Distancia de rescate* (2021), *Utama* (2022), *Maya Land: Listening to the Bees* (2022) and *La Tierra de Azaba* (2020).

As a unit project, students question, support, or propose various metaphorical resources to frame the climate crisis in the target language. As an illustration, some students analyzed the linguistic strategies of doomerist discourse in Spanish (vis-à-vis examples of this discursive position in English) in the media and/or political arena, and developed metaphors that suggest potential responses. In that regard, Zion Lights condemns doomerism as it is not going to solve climate change, end poverty, or address air pollution, and believes that to achieve climate-smart global prosperity, we need to use the language of solutions. Other students also carried out

a comparative project that examined in the target language the metaphorical discourse of deniers and that of those perceived as alarmists. Guenther classifies the network of climate discourse in the following groups: lukewarmers, techno-optimists, the alarmed, climate scientists, and doomers (9-25). It is interesting to see which discourses in Spanish fall into these categories -- and by whom these are produced. It is also compelling to survey which metaphors in the L2 are misleading -- in the sense that they seek to calm any concern and anesthetize any reaction–and dismantle them. For example, the notion of *ola de calor* ("heat wave" as well in English) refers to something temporary that erupts and then retreats without any consequences. So, we can deduce, we don't need to do anything about it. Just endure the anomaly and wait for it to leave as it came (Castro). However, data shows that the climate crisis is incentivizing the frequency and duration of these high temperatures. Should we still be speaking of "waves"? Other students analyzed metaphorical resources related to war or disease to address the climate emergency. Another group explored which metaphors were used during Hurricane María both in Puerto Rico and the US in contrast to the more romanticized depictions of natural disasters in 19th-century poetry.

We can indeed approach climate discourse through literature as well. How about studying which metaphors and other stylistic resources are used in the poems on/for climate, such as "Mujer-Tierra" de Rosana Toro, "La canción de Gaia" (Joy Harjo), "Oda a la tierra" (Pablo Neruda), or *Benko enuuru/Ojos de hormiga* (Morela Maneiro)? Finally, a way of integrating indigenous languages in contact with Spanish is by means of indigenous words that are untranslatable in the target language. The book *Intraducibles* lists and explains words in Mexican indigenous languages that have no easy translation into Spanish because they convey a different cosmovision, such as the ecological word *jiku'u* in Dibaku (or Cuicateco language). This term conveys the place where guardians that protect their water, flora, and fauna live. These spiritual beings provoke disease in those who pollute or cut trees, or take them to their world with no prospect of return (147). Assignments like this one present an opportunity for students to consider terms in their own languages that may or may not relate to this concept.

Toward the commitment to sustainable environmental practices, all of these pedagogical applications help to unlearn the "epistemological error in dominant western thought, characterized by linguistic imperialism and cognitive imperialism; the view that humans are superior to nature; and white (epistemological) supremacy" (Meighan 146) -- still very much present in commodified institutional DEI practices -- and co-create knowledge with other voices. The idea is to generate metaphorical competence and awareness in students so that they understand metaphors as an ubiquitous cognitive phenomenon, and a mediator of our comprehension of the world (see Peña Pascual 2023). We believe that this inclusive engagement at diverse epistemic and (socio- and ethno-) linguistic levels promotes the acquisition of conceptual, creative, pragmatic, and semantic discursiveness in the L2 classroom. Our main goal and challenge is to diversify climate discourse, predominantly in English, while mainstreaming climate and sustainability education so that students are as prepared as possible from multiple standpoints to help the world in which they live.

2.3 Shared Expertise and Transdisciplinarity Toward an Integrated Approach

Second Language Acquisition courses are grounded in active learning strategies, flipped classroom methodologies, and student-centered environments. These principles have a solid base and are at the center of project-based curricula, like the ones we work with in L2 Spanish. However, when it comes to teaching climate as an embedded object of analysis in a language course, since critical thinking skills are essential to the task, it is necessary to go one step further. Hence, we propose here an approach to language and climate teaching that is rooted in critical pedagogy -- that is to say, that encourages students to unpack and challenge the climate discourses they encounter. In order for this questioning that is expected and ingrained in our courses as a learning goal to be an active process, it needs to be nurtured by two mutually-reinforcing principles: shared expertise and transdisciplinarity.

We envision the classroom as a space for action and experimentation, exchanges, and, above all, multidirectional cooperation. This horizontal environment is possible when there exists a nurtured collaboration between students and instructor. The instructor's role is, therefore, centering students' voices as well as channeling their queries. In this way, we can talk about "shared expertise" in the sense that the class builds on each one's participation and input, where all the contributions are valid and necessary in order to gain a common understanding of the subject matter. The idea of shared expertise goes beyond content itself and builds on a concept coined by James Engell -- that of "co-mentorship," that encourages us to consider our work in the classroom alongside students. Engell argues that, in order to engage with the climate crisis, "we must act as mutual, reciprocally subservient co-mentors" in a sort of multiple mentorship (25). In this model of co-mentorship, he underlines the importance of connection, "not mere addition" (29), suggesting: "we become a community of mutual, reciprocal mentors, collaborators, when we listen to -- and teach, and teach with -- those outside our own training and bailiwick" (27). This kind of co-mentoring is feasible if we take into serious consideration the knowledge and ideas that everyone brings into the classroom, where each is seemingly willing to listen to others and build on each other's ideas, while raising awareness of the challenges faced when we position ourselves outside of our communities of scholarly practice.

One way to put these concepts into practice, even at the elementary level, is to start from what we all share in the classroom: NYC, the city we live in, is our common ground. The NYC Mayor's Office has been running an

Office of Climate & Environmental Justice since Bill DeBlasio was mayor (2014-2021). Their website (https://climate.cityofnewyork.us/es/) is roughly translated to many languages, and Spanish is one of them. There is a lot of information about their working team, what they do specifically in the city, the hazards that the city faces, and so on. One section of the website includes maps of green areas and what has been called "cool zones" in all five boroughs (available here, with an option to Google translate if needed). In courses that are increasingly diverse in terms of social background and origins, approaching the city we all live in from this perspective is indeed a way of understanding the connection between climate discourses and climate actions, as well as the connection between neighborhoods, their demographics, and socioeconomic status. Spoiler alert: not all areas in heat vulnerability indexes 4-5 have resources to fight extreme heat. A question arises: which ethnicities and economic statuses are predominant in those areas? That is a discussion to be held in class.

One of the learning objectives of the Language Program is that students identify the geographic and cultural diversity of the Spanish-speaking world, and what better way to do so than by starting from our current location. The conversation becomes even more enriching when issues of climate justice, race, social class, and linguistic background come into play. Students, indeed, are learning the tools they need in the target language to realize a problem around them and to question the reality they live in. This is an area of transdisciplinary shared expertise because, presumably, maybe only a few are experts on the climate emergency, but all can contribute with their knowledge of the city, to begin with, and the prospective majors and concentrations they will be pursuing -- incorporating their own interests in urban studies, architecture, engineering, or public health.

What would an assignment look like under these coordinates? The main learning goal is for students to identify the urban and climatic diversity of NYC, and to be able to connect such identification with bigger issues. In greater terms, they will be performing a mediating role between official climate discourses and daily lives -- unpacking the impact of climate discourses in their own routines. First, students are provided with a vocabulary sheet that they can consult, if needed, with keywords to help them understand the main areas of concern. Then, students are asked to take a look at the website before class, get familiar with it, and bring any doubts they might have. In class, we will work with the map accessible on the projector and the class will be divided into five groups, one per borough. With that map and legend opened as a reference to all, each group is assigned a specific neighborhood within their borough with the goal of briefly describing it in terms of location, demographics, and green areas. Each group can have a poster-sized blank paper to draw and add the information that they will share with the class. Next, they will also identify the areas where NYC has (or has not) taken action. Each group will share the information with the class in an interactive round of presentations that the instructor can model once and then each group can mimic. Finally, the instructor might facilitate a conversation about the findings, asking about the possible relation between the city's interventions and the specific areas' living conditions.

We have explored the idea of shared expertise as a kind of multiple mentorships, and as such it is inseparable from a transdisciplinary approach. We talk about transdisciplinarity as opposed to interdisciplinarity because we are combining diverse disciplines to form a new integrated framework (Choi and Pak 2006). Hence, it is not just about adding different parts even if this addition brings us to a new level of interrogation; rather, it is about getting to an outcome totally different from what could be expected from the addition of the parts. We aim not to cover grammatical structures as isolated units (in this case, describing places and reading maps), but to merge linguistic understanding of keywords within the context where those words gain meaning. Interdisciplinarity analyzes, synthesizes, and harmonizes links between disciplines into a coordinated and coherent whole (354). Transdisciplinarity, on the contrary, integrates the natural, social, and health sciences in a humanities context, and transcends their traditional boundaries (355). The idea, then, is to bring into the language classroom the various expertises of our students and ourselves in order to learn together how to challenge climate discourses. For that, we need more than just learning the basic grammar structures of the language. We need the student who can bring an urban studies-based analysis, the student who can bring a more public health vision, and so on. In fact, as instructors coming from the field of Cultural Studies, we both take our own expertise beyond language instruction alone, performing a labor that allows us to meaningfully connect the curriculum with the school community.

For these reasons, rather than thinking about "covering" content, we agree with Wiggins and McTighe when they argue for "uncovering ideas." Thinking about ideas rather than content foments students' engagement and participation, since students are asked to draw on what they already know. "Essential questions," hence, "are designed to challenge preconceived notions and force students to stretch their thinking, using course content to support and inform answers." Following a student-centered design, topics are treated with depth rather than breadth, and students' takeaways consist of durable, foundational knowledge that will support present and future learning. Climate, like language, is transversal to all subjects. Rather than designing around content coverage, the course is conceived in terms of "big ideas" that are universal in application and timeless, work as a conceptual lens for any study, and, most importantly, require uncovering. What makes a question essential is that it "stimulates vital, ongoing rethinking […] of assumptions and prior lessons" (Big Ideas and Essential Questions). This prompts us as instructors and students as well to reflect on the value of what is covered in class and its impact in our daily lives, in the past, present, and future. These conditions invite an atmosphere in the classroom that is both innovative and passionate, since it fosters a community of learners where everyone shares

and participates, where everyone owns their own responsibility in the game, and where critical-thinking skills act as a true tool for collectively-informed empowerment.

Undoubtedly, the climate crisis places everyone in an unprecedented state of mind and feeling and requires a global, complex, and interconnected response that involves all disciplines. If we commit to a learning process that is transformational (Gannon 150), that is to say, that gives us the capacity to instill change, we need a point of departure with roots deeply embedded in transdisciplinary transformation -- truly changing how we teach across disciplines. If we intend this approach to climate humanities to indeed be an institutional and epistemological transformation in dialogue with DEI efforts, we cannot ignore the question of language -- many times overlooked in discussions of diversity -- and how that question is inseparable from the spheres from where climate narratives and discourses emanate. Transdisciplinarity, therefore, is also part of a decolonial effort, because language cannot be contained within boundaries.

3. Conclusion: Radical Hope to Think about the Present and Future of the Planet

This approach, by connecting Climate Humanities and SLA, challenges DEI institutional dynamics from below, aiming at transforming the conditions of what it means to labor for diversity, equity, and inclusion right now, in the midst of a global climate crisis and in a rapidly-changing world. The initiative is born at the roots of the curricular level, is nurtured via transdisciplinary connections, and, last but not least, will inform a critical DEI in that it explores the tensions around knowledge, power, and discourses, granting an increasingly diverse student body the tools to grow and flourish in an uncertain future. As such, our proposal is born in the classroom because that is the space from where we can actually set a living example of what it means to be committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion beyond institutional expectations and promises.

Our vision attends to many of the issues inherent in SLA -- such as colonialism and the impact of language on the reproduction of inequalities and old-fashioned visions of the nation -- and in pedagogy -- proposing student-centered environments intertwined with the climate emergency, that is assessed as a threefold discursive, humanitarian, and scientific crisis. By offering a balance between a theoretical, value-driven articulation of why this paradigm shift matters, and a more practical approach of how these ideas get embodied in our classroom, we are putting forward a focused intervention of language teaching as a site for advancing climate justice.

Despite this thoughtful and optimistic attempt, we acknowledge the resistances and obstacles faced in the classroom. Above all, we do know how pervasive is the mindset --prevalent in language curricula, instructors, and even students -- in which grammar is taught and learned as a decontextualized substratum of language. One of the problems with decontextualization is that grammar is understood as equivalent to the language itself instead of as a tool for learning a language, together with the aforementioned political stakes implied in this conceptualization. In our view, language is more than a requirement at the university level, since it is inherently transdisciplinary and central to all learning. Under the teaching principles developed here, we are advocating for a radical pedagogy that is decolonial and anti-racist, and that promotes social justice.

We should also recognize some of the tensions and challenges that we face at the institutional level. First of all, working at Ivy League institutions, we have the privilege of having sections capped at 15 students (a small number) and some resources that allow us to make out of our teaching practice a research topic, that is to say, funds to conduct scholarly research on teaching. However, in spite of that, as language lecturers in off-ladder positions, we do not receive as much institutional support as our counterparts in tenured positions. Therefore, we do have a higher teaching load, less time and funds for research, and, as a consequence, we often fall within a lower pay scale for a sometimes-wrongly assumed non-research position, as if teaching was detachable from research. For these reasons, the basic language program is perceived as having secondary value (Kern 21), when in reality, as we have argued here, it should be part of the main trunk, if not the roots. We will persist in exploring these tensions, navigating the problems even if solutions do not come easily. Hopefully the reader finds guidance here when strategizing how to overcome such a complex challenge.

And yet, we envision our present task with radical hope. A space between optimism and pessimism, where we embrace uncertainty. In this uncertainty, we don't surrender to the future of the climate crisis, but instead move forward without falling into the traps of "positive hope" or magical thinking (Valverde Gefaell; see also Bargués). Our present is, indeed, a place of meaning (hooks, *Teaching Community* 166). Without attentively analyzing and comprehending our present time, the future will become increasingly uncertain. If our overarching transformative, proactive, and collective goal is paving the way from below for a sustainable future that does not underwrite racism, colonialism, and class and gender inequality, it is required that we rely on our teaching practices as an equally radical form of hope: "A pedagogical praxis … that fosters openness and inclusivity, critical reflection, dialogue and conversation, and a commitment to making higher education accessible and meaningful for all of our students" (Gannon 6). Reflections are served and foundations are laid; let us begin the action.

Climate is an emergency. The scientific community (and the data) urge us to act immediately because our climate is changing faster than nature can adapt to it, including us. In other words, CLIMATE ESTÁ CABRÓN (as people say in Mexico) or CLIMATE ESTÁ JODIDO (as people say in Spain). However, we do not want you to

focus on the adjective but on the verb: ESTÁ. What is the difference between SER and ESTAR? If you have taken Spanish lessons, you would say that *ser* is what we perceive as the essence of people or things, and the verb *estar* is incidental, out of the norm, the result of our experience. So, climate ESTÁ … whatever adjective you want to use, you name it, but ESTÁ is incidental; there is room for hope. It is in our hands as educators to help make climate SER blank, your favorite adjective, again. Let's not waste it.

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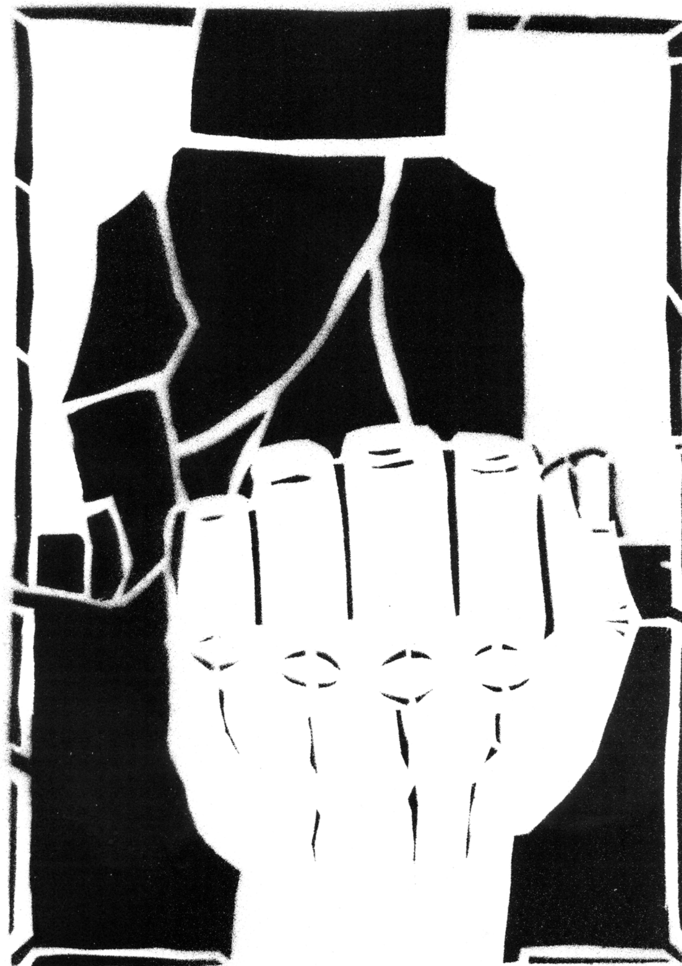
RADICAL TEACHER
A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

A Conversational Reflection on the Co-Creation of the Principal Preparation Answerability Rubric (PPAR)

by Nathaniel D. Stewart and Malaika Bigirindavyi



UNITY BY COLIN MATTHES & COLIN MATTHES VIA JUST SEEDS OPEN ACCESS GRAPHICS COLLECTION

Introduction

The purpose of this piece is to share how a graduate student, Malaika, and her advisor, Nate, practiced their radical teaching and learning within their localized educational contexts and relationality. We, Nate and Malaika, share this story as we conceptualize radical teaching and learning as critical educational policy praxis (Stewart, 2024). That is, we shared a dissatisfaction with superficial equity standards for principals, as they did not go far enough, and understood that we could take action to ensure principals are better prepared to serve Black, Brown, and Indigenous (BBI) students and teachers in our local context. We wanted to lean into the idea that a different education system is possible beyond what BBI students and teachers have been given. We materialized our co-imaginary into what we call the Principal Preparation Answerability Rubric (PPAR). We dream of the PPAR being used, extended, and contextualized by other radical educators as we all continue to navigate state principal preparation requirements.

Figure 1 shares our rubric so readers can visualize the product of this knowledge co-creation project. However, it is important to note that the rubric is still in the process of being fine-tuned. The rubric should not be understood as a traditionally tested and validated assessment tool ready for implementation. Similarly, readers should not extract this tool and implement it without their own contextualized knowledge co-creation process. We offer the tool here as a testament to invite readers to see how the PPAR materialized from Malaika's class-prompted literature review activities. This article's focus is on the rubric co-creation process between Malaika and Nate as we hope to contribute to radical conceptualizations of rubrics used in principal preparation, teaching, and learning spaces.

Our piece shares the complexities, reflections, and reconciliations that took place as we co-constructed the tool. Our reflection is organized by the various decision-making practices we engaged in to solidify the PPAR. We found few rubric creators who have used relational or critical frameworks. This may be because educational rubrics have been imagined within the neoliberal accountability project where the tools are used for punitive improvement practices (Trujillo et al., 2021; Tuck, 2013). Instead, we mobilize rubric creation from our own Black radical imaginations and teachings. We hope readers find connection to our process and draw insights for strategies in radical rubric-creation practices within principal licensure pedagogical processes.

Nate and Malaika's Relationality

Our co-authoring of this article has been a relational practice where Nate and Malaika agreed to partnership

Categories	No Evidence	Developing Evidence	Present Evidence	Reflection and Recommendations
Redistributing Power The Redistributing Power category refers to principal preparation pedagogies acknowledging US education's historical and current power imbalances and how a principal's positionality attributes to or redresses that imbalance (Kohli et al., 2015; Warren & Jenkins, 2024). Additionally, my review activities found that Black, Brown, and Indigenous students and teachers need principal preparation programs to produce leaders who utilize their power and privilege to uplift the needs and move beyond traditional power-hoarding distributions (Kohli et al., 2015). For instance, Daftary and Suquires (2022) have identified how educational administrators may "step outside traditional power relations and the chain of command" to protect, uplift, and share power with racialized and marginalized students (p. 157). Equitable power redistribution may take different forms such as; sharing power, relationship power, participatory decision-making, and co-designing pedagogical practices and policy (Kohli et al., 2015; Daftary & Sugrue, 2022; Ishimaru, 2019). Ultimately, embedding redistributive justice in principal preparation programs centers the demands and lived experiences of BBI students and teachers.	Pedagogical decisions do not reference methods of distributing power to students and teachers.	Pedagogical decisions do not reference methods of distributing power to explicitly Black, Brown, and Indigenous students and teachers.	Pedagogical decisions reference methods of distributing power to explicitly Black, Brown, and Indigenous students and teachers.	
Support and Professional Teaching and Learning Principals' capacity to provide Support and Professional Teaching and Learning for Black, Brown, and Indigenous students and teachers centered on their emotional, physical, spiritual, communal, and professional needs. Principal preparation needs to prepare leaders to establish "home places" and hold space within their schools for BBI students and teachers to uplift their culture and collective empowerment (Bryan et al., 2023; Stewart et al., 2023). For instance, a professional development program held for Latinx educators was "necessary to support their relational, personal, political, and pedagogical growth" (Lincoln et al, 2022, pg.54). Notably, principal preparation programs need to provide critical professional development to students and teachers and embrace critical thinking, pedagogy, and practices within their schools (Kohli et al., 2015).	Pedagogical decisions do not reference methods of supporting and providing professional development for students and teachers.	Pedagogical decisions do not reference methods of supporting and providing professional development explicitly for Black, Brown, and Indigenous students and teachers.	Pedagogical decisions reference methods of supporting and providing professional development explicitly for Black, Brown, and Indigenous students and teachers.	
Defending Black, Brown, and Indigenous Knowledges The Defending Black, Brown, and Indigenous Knowledges category moves beyond acknowledging academic performance records and tracking school demographic changes. Instead, the rubric category promotes reflection on preparation pedagogies' capacity to support principals in defending Black, Brown, and Indigenous students and teachers who are subjected to oppressive realities. The articles categorized here named a need for prospective principals to take into account their school and community historical context. Specifically, how white supremacy, settler colonialism, and anti-Blackness have operated and been perpetuated; thus, negatively affecting their Black, Brown, and Indigenous students and teachers (Bryan et al., 2023). In turn, how principals are challenging racialized gaslighting that makes teachers and students feel invalidated. An example of this comes from Wilhelm and colleagues (2022) when they stated, "interventions to help educators identify and reduce implicit biases and to positively reframe perceptions of minority students may decrease differential instructional and disciplinary treatment of students to foster connectedness" and foster students and teachers' self truths (p.513). Validating and defending Black, Brown, and Indigenous cultural context, in reflection and interaction, preparation programs leave their students with a much better chance of connecting, acting for and with those non-dominant groups (Wolfe & Steiner, 2023;Wilhelm et al., 2022; Bryan et al., 2023; Ishimaru, 2019).	Pedagogical decisions do not reference methods of endorsing historical and current contexts and lived experiences of students and teachers.	Pedagogical decisions do not reference methods of endorsing historical and current context and lived experiences of explicitly Black, Brown, and Indigenous students and teachers.	Pedagogical decisions reference methods of endorsing historical and current context and lived experiences of explicitly Black, Brown, and Indigenous students and teachers.	
Critical Self Reflection Critical Self Reflection capsulizes the ability of principal preparation programs to model and encourage continuous critical self-examination of biases, racisms, and anti-Blackness. Intentional acts against these oppressive norms of thinking is the only means to not falling willing to anti-Black and white supremacist positioning in our education system (Jenkins & Warren, 2024). In addition to themselves, principal preparation programs need to prepare principals to create space for staff and teachers to critically self-examine their own biases, racisms, and anti-Blackness. Principal preparation programs may teach aspiring principals to use socially-just pedagogy in professional development, engage in conversation about systemic oppression, investigate how oppression may operate in their school, and/or join reading groups to build critical self reflection. Establishing a holistic approach to transformation will strengthen the united front school will own in the name of equity and inclusion.	Pedagogical decisions do not reference methods of critically self-reflecting for prospective principals.	Pedagogical decisions do not reference methods of critically self-reflecting for explicitly Black, Brown, and Indigenous students and teachers.	Pedagogical decisions reference methods of critically self-reflecting for prospective principals.	
Authentic Relationship- Building Authentic Relationship-Building with Black, Brown, and Indigenous students and teachers is a core factor in building equitable school environments. When principal preparation programs advocate for creating collaborative, contextualized, and reciprocal relationships, it fosters a healthy and excelling learning environment for all students (Amiot et al., 2020). On the flip side, when school leadership's main interaction with students and teachers (particularly those people who identify as Black, Brown, and/or Indigenous) is around disciplinary or formal intervention, positivity and authenticity are absent (Bryan et al., 2023). For example, Rivera-McCutchen (2021) examined how principals who have established authentic interpersonal relationships with teacher staff had the ability to confront moments of tension with more ease and camaraderie. Recognizing how problematic disciplinary interactions can be, principal preparation programs can supply prospective principals with the building blocks to foster equitable and healing relationships.	Pedagogical decisions do not reference methods of seeking authentic interpersonal relationships with students and teachers.	Pedagogical decisions do not reference methods of seeking authentic interpersonal relationships with explicitly Black, Brown, and Indigenous students and teachers.	Pedagogical decisions reference methods of seeking authentic interpersonal relationships with explicitly Black, Brown, and Indigenous students and teachers.	

FIGURE 1. PRINCIPAL PREPARATION ANSWERABILITY RUBRIC

stemming from a dual positionality. We are united in our bent toward justice and bring nuanced strategies in pursuit of Black liberation. We illuminated important negotiations and decisions made during the tool creation. As Malaika's advisor and course instructor, Nate wanted to affirm the already-present brilliance nested in the knowledge Malaika brings to their program. Malaika's personal experiences in Minnesota K-12 schools as a Black student and activist have rooted her passion promoting pro-Blackness, multicultural education, and dismantling systems of white supremacy in education. For example, Malaika's organizing experiences in solidarity with movements promoting Black power, LGBTQ+ protection, and gun restriction laws have informed this rubric co-creation. Through these movements, she has developed skills in mobilizing people and implementing strategies that promote unity, joy, and safety for those most marginalized by intersecting systems of oppression. Malaika's employment within a K-12 administrative licensure program has allowed her to use a critical lens when performing otherwise normative tasks. This project began when Malaika inquired how the administrative licensure program's reflections of their equity efforts matched the demands of Black, Brown, and Indigenous students and teachers. This project, conceptualized in Nate's classes, provided an opportunity to critically evaluate programmatic course syllabi, pedagogy, and curriculum decisions through a critical lens. She aimed to demonstrate how K-12 administrative licensure programs can continue supporting equity-oriented school principals.

Malaika made the decision to create the PPAR as part of her authentic assessment for Nate's Educational Policy Perspectives course. This project offered strong alignment to Malaika's goals of exploring our administrative licensure program as Nate's assignment tasked students with focusing on real-world application. These requirements helped Malaika craft her MA thesis and became useful to her given her administrative assistant role in the principal licensure program. Nate encouraged Malaika's interests in exploring recent educational literature tracing what Black, Brown, and Indigenous students and teachers have said they need and want from their educational leaders.

Minnesota State Context

Minnesota state legislatures have codified program requirements for all educational administrative licenses, including school principals (Minnesota Administrative Rules, 2020). These rules require principals to "demonstrate competence in equity and culturally responsive school leadership" (p. 2). However, these rules appear to be surface-level DEI or political propaganda aimed at progressive signaling. Educational policy actors' attempts at virtue signaling often result in public-facing DEI initiatives that sound excellent but lack resource distribution and critical dispositions to achieve their goals (Farrell, 2022; Gibbs & Cameron, 2020; Gibson, 2022; Stewart & Goddard, 2024). For example, while principal licensure programs have begun to revise introductory courses using Dr. Gholdy Muhammad's work (2023; 2020), it is unclear what standards and accountability measures ensure that critical DEI is appropriately instilled. For instance, Minnesota's standards for DEI competencies lack resource allocation and state-level accountability if the university is accredited (BOSA, n.p.). Currently, the rubric cannot address this resource maldistribution, but we argue that our radical co-imagined rubric might push our localized settings to embrace a more critical stance.

Some DEI competency languages seem coded within oppressive logics. The Minnesota Administrative Rules (2020) have used the terms "fair" or "fairly" several times in the equity section. Fairness, meaning all people receive the same treatment, contradicts equity, where people receive what is owed given historical and ongoing oppression. A fairness framework has led to surface level reflections in licensure program design. For instance, principal educators have included DEI components at the beginning of the program in the two required introductory courses. Yet, more critical and radical stances would embed conversations of equity, justice, and belonging throughout the pre-service principals' entire course load and field experiences. The embedded approach would treat DEI as a process rather than a set of competences that can be met with a few courses. More critical DEI frameworks would focus on differences between fairness and equity, particularly for those marginalized by educational systems (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Horsford et al., 2019). Convoluting equity and fairness at the systems level may dilute educational DEI initiatives, perpetuating inequities (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014). We argued a tool to critically assess principal preparation pedagogical practices' ability to meet critical DEI aims may be needed or could be useful to programs.

Black, Brown, and Indigenous Students and Teachers

Our rubric invites reflection on what Black, Brown, and Indigenous students and families have said they want and need in relational research literature, classrooms, community spaces, and to us directly. Educational policy actors have constructed the principal role to establish school climates (Wolfe & Steiner, 2023), promote local-level equity (Kohli et al., 2015), build relationships with families (Bryan et al., 2023), and support teachers (Farinde et al., 2016). Therefore, educational leaders have the influence to protect Black, Brown, and Indigenous students. Harris and Kruger (2023) describe how Black girls' protection from over-sexualization and harassment reflects leaders' prioritization of their safety. Moreover, school-level educational leaders can set up school environments in ways that prioritize Indigenous ways of knowing and being (Khalifa et al., 2019). Still, there seems to be a disconnect between having the ability to support Black, Brown, and Indigenous students and teachers, and following state-mandated Equity and Inclusion standards. Generally, principal preparation programs have not been held answerable to what Black, Brown, and Indigenous students and teachers have said they want from their school principals. This lack of answerability ignores the extensive knowledge co-

creation informing what marginalized and racialized students need and deserve. We constructed the PPAR for principal educators and licensure staff to assess their pedagogical practices, ensuring pre-service principals develop the skills and knowledge to support Black, Brown, and Indigenous students and teachers.

A Conversational Reflection on Rubric Co-Creation Process

We selected a reflective format that allowed us to articulate the non-hierarchical, mentor-mentee, and advisor-advisee relationship between Nate's and Malaika's roles as teachers and learners. Below, we invite readers to engage with Malaika's decision justifications related to various components when designers construct an evaluation tool. This writing style aims to emulate the negotiated process we navigated. Additionally, readers will examine Nate's guidance in learning from Malaika's brilliance while simultaneously offering his own expertise. These decision descriptions should be read as a conversation between egalitarian teachers and learners committed to negotiation in the pursuit of equity. The reflective format will follow a sequence of Nate's guiding questions, Malaika's thoughts, and their negotiations. Additionally, we organized the conversational reflection into ideas related to the PPAR's (a) focus, (b) scope, (c) format, (d) categories, (e) levels of evidence, (f) utility, (g) interpretation, (h) radical teaching, and (i) agitation.

Focus

Nate: May I ask why you decided to not focus solely on Black students and teachers given much of the literature you pulled focused on Black students' and teachers' experiences? I know you have read about my frustration stemming from some policy actors' discomfort when focusing solely on Black people's experiences (Stewart et al., 2023). White supremacist critiques may not be enough to illuminate how Black teachers and students experience anti-Blackness in education systems. Again, I am interested in understanding why you chose to utilize a Black, Brown, and Indigenous framework as opposed to one that solely centers on us, Black people?

Malaika: I acknowledge your observation and agree with your statements. It was important to me to acknowledge and act upon how Black-focused knowledge co-creation can be unfairly critiqued. I wanted to find a way to stay conscious of anti-Blackness while fulfilling the call I saw in Minnesota contexts. The call I saw was the need for an evaluation tool for principal preparation program courses that would support school leaders and program evaluators within the diverse Minnesota context. I remember you telling me how Twin Cities' school districts serve the most racially and ethnically diverse neighborhoods seen within the region and nation (Deer et al., 2021). The tool provided could be incorporated within Minnesota's diverse array of school systems and may inspire other acts to co-create radical rubrics and extensions. Possible additional rubrics and extensions may include highlighting specific racialized groups and their needs from their school leaders. These tools could be applied for local contexts and act as further resources for principal educators and program evaluators as well.

Nate: I hear your willingness to center on how anti-Blackness moves in educational spaces and communities. Your addition of specific reflective language on anti-Blackness in the tool's category description and our agreement about specifying the racialized group's contributive knowledge meets our joint aims. I think the PPAR is well-situated in combating anti-Blackness and promoting critical self-reflection within the scope of Minnesota student contexts.

Scope

Nate: Why focus solely on principals? As you know, our program prepares superintendents and special education leaders as well.

Malaika: From my experience principals are powerful localized decision makers that provide supervision over the operation, climate, and well-being of their school. They have great influence on the achievement of teachers and students both personal and academic/professional. I, as a student, had strong opinions toward my school principals growing up, whether that was positive or negative. Within my graduate courses, my peers and I have had discussions on the influence and experience with their respective principals. Whether principals understand this magnitude or not, they hold the capacity to have a great effect on their school environments.

Choosing to evaluate principal preparation courses made the most sense within my employment context as well. The principal preparation program within which I work sees principals graduate at the highest frequency compared to the other licenses. This means that there would be a larger amount of data to analyze for my graduate course requirements.

Nate: How did you come to your decision to center on students' and teachers' voices?

Malaika: From my experience, students and teachers have been the beating heart on frontline equity and DEI initiatives. As a current graduate student and scholar activist, I am driven by my passion to protect students' needs and demands from their school systems. In addition to students, I wanted to hold space for teachers within my evaluation tool as well because of their immense influence on student activism.

I believe that one of the most important relationships in educational settings is between students and teachers. Teachers act as guides for students to build their identity, expand on their abundance of knowledge, and help them find what feeds their intellect. While students are understanding themselves within their historical and societal context, teachers must be provided culturally relevant development and held accountable to transformational teaching standards, which are fulfilled by the function of their principal. Principals that model

authentic and culturally sensitive relationships in school buildings will assist in setting the tone for instruction within their buildings. For example, a principal who takes time to learn the histories and values of the students within their building will display to students the value of their identity in that environment and promote pride in that sense of self. These aspects had led me to navigate principal preparation courses utilizing a tool composed of narratives about those whom principals serve: students and teachers.

Lastly, in your course discussions, when my classmates, who were working as teachers in schools, were describing their experiences with their principals, they brought up themes of principals using their power and privilege to fulfill their own agenda. Though I do not share this perspective with my fellow classmates, I merged their perspective with my own as a former student and concluded that with the hierarchy of education school spaces, the character and disposition regarding DEI of principals have practical ripple effects throughout buildings. In my graduate classes, including those with you, we would further our discussions by dreaming of ways to build our power within our educational spaces. This dreaming was incredibly helpful in the inspiration for what would turn out to be the PPAR.

Format

Nate: I wonder how we plan to format the tool? There are many ways to organize the knowledge into groups while thinking about tool utility. Let your purpose and aims guide this decision.

Malaika: I started with thinking about the tool's aim to see if there is evidence within principal preparation programs showing they are providing their preservice principals with means of supporting Black, Brown, and Indigenous students and teachers through their pedagogical decisions. You recommended investigating various evaluation methods and how current principals (and their preparation programs) are assessed. I found limited literature providing a critical reflection on the ways in which principles are reviewed/evaluated. I remember you sent me an article examining Critical Race Digital Literacy (CRDL) within librarians' mis/disinformation literacy lesson plans (Chomintra, 2024). I thought this article brilliantly presented a tool which critically explored coursework of educators, specifically librarians, which held similar aims to our future tool creation activities.

Additionally, I found a poster presentation at an educational research conference that evaluated the coachability of principals within a principal preparation program (LAUSD, 2022). The utilization of a rubric within the LAUSD principal professional development tool further affirmed how a rubric could be a well-suited evaluation tool and format I could use for the evaluation of our principal program's pedagogical materials.

Categories

Nate: Now that we have decided on a rubric, it is important to start to set the selected article authors' knowledges in conversation with one another. What has been your process to synthesize ideas across sources?

Malaika: I began developing the five themes within a spreadsheet. First, I listed critiques, recommendations, really any commentary regarding principals from BBI students and teachers. As I collected these sources, themes were easily formed from the most mentioned experiences and reflections. I had internal negotiations relating to how descriptive and narrow each theme would be. For example, I determined a theme would not be included if it didn't hold as an argument within at least 5 of the rubric articles I found. I included articles in the rubric centered on the voices of BBI students and teachers. Therefore, I integrated article authors who provided clear objectives for principal support into categories that reflected similar themes. All rubric categories hold strong evidence and arguments; however, the category which held the least evidence compared to the other categories was redistributing power. I do not believe this reflects a lack of importance but points to the influence of white supremacists' historical and ongoing power-hoarding activities.

Lastly, I processed how each category interacts and affects the themes within educational settings. For example, day-to-day interactions between students and principals, between teachers and principal, in administrative meetings, and how power dynamics influence those interactions. I reviewed literature repeatedly to realign myself with the narratives of the BBI students and teachers as I shaped the themes.

Levels of Evidence

Nate: Too often, rubrics can be used to signal to educators their deficits. More insidiously, educational rubrics can have major negative impacts on well-being, livelihoods, political situatedness of the educators being evaluated. For instance, policy actors create procedures where teacher observation rubrics contribute to decisions about pay and/or continued employment. How are you thinking about creating your tool to refuse to engage in potential punitive uses?

Malaika: I really appreciate your suggestion in providing a rubric created to refuse treating pre-service principals based on their shortcomings. I created the rubric with the understanding that equity is a continuous movement with endless opportunities for action. Pre-service principals, their educators, and evaluators can align their course work, programmatic decisions, or curriculum to the PPAR and explore categories that can be better supported. Furthermore, pre-service principals can be better equipped to uphold BBI students and teachers in their communities when they have a guiding framework to get there. For example, the PPAR's "levels of evidence" were created to encourage self-reflection on principal preparation materials. My decision to include "levels of evidence" sets itself apart from dominant Eurocentric and western narrative evaluation of standards that may treat

equity as a finite destination. This component of the rubric can also be seen as an additional reinforcement of how rubric users can hold themselves accountable to BBIs students and teachers, by separating itself from dominant grading scales that have been historically harmful to BBI communities.

Utility

Nate: What should the tool evaluate? I see you want to focus on syllabi, but could we broaden the utilization to other pedagogical aspects of principal preparation?

Malaika: One would use the PPAR rubric to discover evidence of ways principal preparation courses are providing pre-service principals with the understanding of how to support BBI students and teachers. I want to specifically examine pedagogical practices of principal educators, not the behaviors of principals themselves. Although, I hope that pedagogical practices rendered answerable to our rubric would lead to BBI-centered behaviors. At the beginning of understanding how the PPAR could be potentially used it was first solely going to evaluate course syllabi. I was not completely satisfied with that due to the limitations of using a single aspect of pedagogical decisions. From my understanding, course syllabi only outlined the details of a course and its outcomes, which in turn would leave large gaps in my analysis. Tool users would benefit from additional documentation providing more detail and adequately evaluating the course contexts. My optimism for the tool's usage grew when you (Nate) proposed including other course documents such as reflections, project artifacts, activities, and lesson plans. This proposition excited me because it would allow me to perform a more contextual and comprehensive analysis and speak more holistically about principal preparation pedagogies and how they can help principals serve BBI teachers and students.

Interpretation

Nate: One important decision to make about our tool is how we intend it to be used in practical, educational evaluation spaces. How do we intend to have the tool be used during interpretation stages?

Malaika: This tool was intended to interrogate the principal preparation program's equity efforts within the program where I work. Originally, it was to be performed by an evaluator from outside of the program because I was worried about actors' willingness to listen. At this point and time, I have moved forward with my plan to use the tool to complete my Master's degree thesis. For that project, I am using students' pre-assessments, evaluation grids, and student reflection papers completed during their field observation experience. I am reading materials line-by-line and when coming across language that reflects the PPAR, I have been coding the sections containing the language that tracks onto one or more of the rubric categories. When applicable, I provide additional notes, commenting on how I think our program could continue to improve in that given section.

As you (Nate) and I further discussed possibilities, we found ourselves drawing upon tactics of co-reflecting and co-developing because you mentioned how this is a more relational practice. Once we found ourselves wanting to provide readers with an example of how to use the PPAR, it only seemed fit for you (as the instructor of the course and co-creator) and I (outside evaluator and co-creator) to both evaluate your course syllabus and provide analysis through our respective lenses. Additionally, you mentioned that you would offer a syllabus you have used in a course where you instruct educational leaders (including principals). The pilot allowed us to see how open dialogue about feedback can be pivotal to produce meaningful course reviews. We were able to consider how a dialogue between the evaluator (myself) and the person being evaluated (Nate) would improve the chances that the instructor would actualize rubric co-learnings. Additionally, we agreed that providing a short explanation/reflection throughout the review of course materials from each party, evaluator, and evaluatee, would allow for the program to better understand how different pedagogical strategies might show up in courses. I wanted future evaluation and interpretation procedures to include principal preparation course instructors and program evaluators promoting co-reflection, resulting in positive collaborating, and maximizing the discovery of evidence within the rubric categories.

Radical Teaching

Nate: How is our tool-creation process one example of radical teaching and learning?

Malaika: Radical teaching components are included throughout the development and overall usage of the PPAR. First, grounding the evaluation process of principals in leading with BBI students and teachers breaks down the hierarchical framing of principalship and uplifts historically racialized communities' needs and holds principals answerable to those needs. This results in building power and capacity within BBI communities and is a key aspect in disrupting settler colonial structures. Secondly, the PPAR merges theory and practice, an important radical teaching component, allowing for principals to align their service more closely to the lived experiences of racialized and marginalized people left out of decision-making spaces. Likewise, the enabling of students' and teachers' perspectives are activated through the specific category of distributing power. This category is defined as promoting and pursuing different ways that students' and teacher's perspectives can be centered within school decision making, policy creation, and overall school operation. Finally, you mentioned the importance of open-source and free modalities in disseminating the tool. I agree and want to make sure that paywalls and academic gatekeeping mechanisms do not halt access to our imagined rubric.

Agitation

Nate: Dominant policy actors will have issues with a radical teaching tool that exposes racialized harm,

especially in a state that is known for being progressive and signaling post-racial attitudes. So called equity champions will get defensive and may gaslight tool users. How may we think about navigating these agitators?

Malaika: I agree. I have seen patterns where leaders measure their DEI efforts solely within the limits which are determined by the state or local policymakers. These efforts may originate from DEI frameworks but, when in the implementation stage, fail to produce radical change. Supplementary to that, I have witnessed leaders be presented with radical teaching resources but refuse to act beyond the status quo. This leads to frustration and discouragement, and encourages complacency. I find it important when facing opposition and when utilizing the rubric to acknowledge two aspects: the critical process of school leaders' unlearning and relearning, and the need for leaders to take intentional action against systems of oppression, which state and local systems still find themselves in. I am not sure I have an answer, but your (Nate) support was validating and kept my motivation to present my tool with confidence. Within my experience of presenting radical racialized equity efforts, I have been met with discouraging messages. I have been told I am doing "the most" and questioned why I would want to do so much work. I have even been told that this process is "not valid." Your faith in my abilities as a researcher and scholar activist were key factors throughout the entire rubric process.

Implications for Critical DEI and Radical Teaching

There are several important practical implications regarding the convergence of the PPAR with radical teaching. First, critically-situated actors may center on their relationships while engaged in tool co-creation practices. It was our mutual disgruntledness with state equity standards that mobilized us toward a critical DEI praxis of rubric creation. The mutual dissatisfaction brought us together in affirmation and action. Nate's action was to encourage Malaika to center on her imagination in exploring the educational futures Black, Brown, and Indigenous teachers and students deserve. Malaika's action involved learning about evaluation, reading and writing, and sharing her lived experiences. We reciprocally benefited from these actions as dual teachers and learners. In turn, refusing to engage stringent hierarchical mentor-mentee or advisor-advisee relationships which can translate to dismantle other socially-constructed hierarchies (i.e, researcher/subject, evaluator/evaluatee, teacher/learner).

Our negotiated decision to keep the tool's Black, Brown, and Indigenous focus as opposed to focus solely on Black teachers and students was perhaps the most significant co-learning related to critical DEI frameworks and radical teaching. This co-learning holds important practical implications as critically-situated collaborators engage in radical tool co-creation. We agreed on a resolution where Malaika would indicate the specific racialized and/or ethnic groups each article spoke to and address some of the homogenization that can take place within broad "people of color" labels. In future co-authorship, we plan to share our tool-creation process in simultaneously speaking to solidarities and perceived tensions across racialized groups, the specificity of Black experiences, and how to navigate state-deemed aims with dreams of radical futures. These negotiations were the result of Nate and Malaika's relationship-building activities within the tool development stages. Thus, implicating how similarly-situated actors may illuminate radical knowledges in the practice of creating tools rooted in criticality.

Finally, we want to draw implications when mobilizing co-created and relational tools as radical teaching beyond the purview of superficial DEI frameworks. Reactionary educational policy actors will attempt to circumvent collective efforts to pursue radical futures. These agitations come in the form of racialized gaslighting, impracticality labels, defensiveness, and deflections. Thus, tool users and creators must stay ready by strategizing how to respond to agitators. This piece's scope was specific to tool creation and cannot speak to co-strategizations beyond how we navigated superficial DEI logics in Minnesota. Vulnerably, we may leave this discussion for future work as speaking to specific tensions could trigger unwanted interpersonal conflict between us and other actors. Yet, we want readers to know we found reprieve in demonstrating radical futures and creating a tool to get there -- despite reactionary policy actors projecting stuckness as the only educational reality. Our reprieve resided in exchanges of affirmation, celebrating each other's brilliance, negotiating tool-creation decisions, and collectively withstanding oppressive actors' tendency to tell us that we were doing something wrong. On the contrary, we rejected oppressive right-wrong binaries, and our connection allowed us to unapologetically render ourselves answerable to Black, Brown, and Indigenous teachers, students, and our childhood selves.

Conclusion

Those educational actors attempting to move beyond superficial DEI frameworks may find connections to and divergences from our tool creation process. We encourage deep contextual work moving across temporal and spatial boundaries. The work can move across temporal boundaries in forecasting potential fights on the horizon given political shifts toward more state and federal agitators in power. Future work may consider where and how these types of pedagogical evaluation tools should be situated in the radical movements for educational justice. The work could move spatially in sharing principal and/or educational leader preparation strategies across states and nations. Our tool creation activities are one contribution among many to radical teaching strategies. We look forward to continuing to learn and evolve in the collective pursuit of the self-determined futures Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities have said they want and deserve.

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

Multiculturalism's Genocide: A Brief History of Administrative Repression and Student Resistance

by Anthony C. Alessandrini

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Multiculturalism and Violence

Even the tamest forms of institutional multiculturalism on campuses today, including Offices of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, only exist due to radical struggles by social movements, particularly student movements, of the recent past. To be more specific, institutional multiculturalism as we experience it today is the product of two opposing forces: on the one hand, radical student movements, particularly those struggling against racism, settler colonialism, capitalism, patriarchy, and imperialism; on the other hand, the counterinsurgent strategies forged by the state, corporations, and university administrators, which aimed, and still aim, to neutralize the transformative power of these movements.[1] The struggle between those counterforces continues today.

The administrative cooptation of radical movements under the banner of "multiculturalism" has been a crucial element of the ongoing counterinsurgency against radical student movements. But there's also a more explicitly violent side to the story. For this cooptation would never have been successful if it were not carried out alongside the much more direct forms of coercion—including brutal violence—that have been aimed at students over the past fifty years. Some of this violence has been implicit, and thus perhaps not immediately visible *as* violence. Rob Nixon's definition of "slow violence" is apt here: "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all."[2]

Take, for example, the slow violence of austerity policies that have deliberately impoverished public education. Anyone teaching at a public university has experienced the results of this slow violence via decaying buildings, overcrowded classrooms, and the general deterioration of student learning conditions. There's also what Michael Fabricant and Stephen Brier have described as the "curricula of austerity," created by the constant demand for public universities to do more with less. Fabricant and Brier summed up the grim landscape that resulted from this imposed austerity back in 2016: "The drive to impose efficiencies has resulted in the elimination of courses or whole disciplines not clearly aligned with concrete market needs and, thus, declared unproductive."[3] Today, an increasing number of state and federal lawmakers insist that the era of public investment in colleges that offer a humanities education to working-class students is quite simply over and done with. The violence of austerity is attritional, but it adds up to long-term class warfare against public education.

Then there is the related explosion of crushing debt imposed on two generations of students. As economist Mark Blyth noted soon after the (first) election of Donald Trump, a generation of baby boomers who "went to university for fifty bucks at Berkeley and got the greatest minds in the world coming from World War II refugees" now oversee a system in which the "privilege" of a university education, for all but the richest young people, can only be purchased via a sometimes life-long burden of student debt.[4] The almost unfathomable mountain of debt that has resulted—as of 2024, $1.7 trillion in total—is borne by two generations of students who have had to shape their lives around this burden knowingly imposed upon them. The formation of the Debt Collective, which functions as a debtors' union, is a mark of the refusal of students to bow down to this burden without a fight, but also of the fact that student debt has now become a more or less taken for granted fact of life.[5]

Austerity is quite simply the air we breathe on campus today, conditioning not just the education students receive but their very lives. At the City University of New York, where I teach, the numbers only begin to tell the story of the resultant slow violence: as of 2019, roughly 48 percent of CUNY students suffered from food insecurity, 55 percent suffered from housing insecurity, and nearly 15 percent of CUNY students were or had been homeless while attending college.[6] Today, those numbers are surely much higher. And while none of this has stopped student organizing—at CUNY and other public institutions, the students are on the move—much of their energy has been forced into demanding conditions that the boomer generation could take for granted, like affordable tuition or decent student housing.

But universities have also been sites of *explicit* violence for decades. When you step onto campus grounds, once you get past the multicultural branding, you find yourself in a heavily-policed—indeed, a militarized—space. For many readers, that may sound like an exaggeration, although at the urban community college where I teach, students entering the campus pass through a checkpoint manned by armed campus police officers, after walking a gauntlet of ubiquitous military recruiters perched just outside the gates. Most campuses on most days, however, don't *feel* like militarized spaces. But scratch the surface and many are precisely that: since 1990, more than one hundred public colleges and universities have participated in a federal program that allows the transfer of surplus Defense Department equipment, including semi-automatic rifles and armored vehicles, to campus police departments. This includes flagship public universities: Ohio State has a "mine-resistant ambush protected vehicle" that it brings out for football games, citing the need for "homeland security football missions." When, thanks to student demands, the University of Maryland finally agreed to divest from this federal program in July 2020, the equipment that it returned or sold included fifty M16 semiautomatic rifles, an armored truck, three hundred magazine cartridges, seventy-nine gun sights, two camouflage Humvees, and an armored vehicle that campus police had nicknamed "The Peacekeeper."[7]

But even at elite private universities—as we have seen over the past year—student movements exist in a general context of violence that is always just a phone call away. A few students camping on the quad, demanding an end to their university's complicity with genocide, was enough to transform Columbia's campus from a tourist destination to a quasi-military zone, complete with checkpoints. Samuel P. Catlin, describing the suppression

of student protests at Brown University in December 2023, brilliantly captures the nature of this hidden but always-present violence:

> Brown University administrators sent in the police to arrest students, including not a few Jewish ones, who had peacefully occupied University Hall to call for a ceasefire in Gaza and university divestment from Israel. Police officers booked and fingerprinted students right there on the spot . . . The scene was disorienting, not because something was out of place, but because nothing was. . . . What was strange was not that the campus had suddenly become a police station, but rather that it turned out already to have been one all along.[8]

To sum up: institutional multiculturalism, which absorbs and co-opts student demands, acts as the velvet glove in the counterinsurgency against radical student movements; the campus police are the iron fist beneath. This has been true for decades, but the past year has put this fact front and center. The brutal repression of students standing against the U.S.-funded Israeli genocide and in solidarity with Palestinian liberation—by the most conservative estimates, over 3,000 students were arrested or detained on campuses across the country during the spring 2024 semester—represents a massive ratcheting up of direct violence by universities against student movements.[9] As I'll discuss, the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion—and, indeed, DEI offices and officers themselves—have become an increasingly important part of the administrative and police suppression of student movements. This represents a shift in the counterinsurgency tactics of universities: whereas modes of institutional DEI have for several decades functioned largely as part of a strategy to co-opt and depoliticize the demands of anti-racist and anti-colonial student movements, today we are seeing principles ostensibly derived from DEI actively weaponized against these student movements.

But this also represents, as we'll see, a moment of continuity, in that university administrators who have called the cops on their own students are, in a very direct way, doing the work of the state. In fact, from the state's perspective, the real problem is that university administrators have *not been violent enough*, as the October 2024 report issued by the Republican-controlled Congressional Committee on Education and Workforce makes chillingly clear. In a representative example of the committee's rhetoric, Virginia Foxx, chair of the committee, described university administrators as "cowards who fully capitulated to the mob"—that mob being, we can only assume, our students who have stood against genocide.[10] I'm a proud member of that mob myself, but, as history has shown, such rhetoric is almost inevitably a prelude to state violence. As a colleague who read the report put it despairingly: these politicians won't be happy until universities kill a few kids.

Killing in the Name of Tolerance: Nixon's "Commission on Campus Unrest" and the Criminalization of Students

This story has a longer history. Tracing it means revisiting the developments that have led us to today's dismal state of affairs. But it also allows us to recall the student movements of the past, whose fights in the name of decolonization prefigured and have actively inspired today's students in their struggles against settler colonialism and racism, and their unstinting stand against their institutions' complicity with U.S.-Israeli genocide.

To understand how we got our current militarized campuses, with institutional multiculturalism providing cover for, and blending seamlessly with, racist policing, we might begin by going back five decades. On May 4, 1970, four Kent State University students protesting the Viet Nam War—Jeffrey Glen Miller, Allison B. Krause, William Knox Schroeder, and Sandra Lee Scheuer—were murdered on campus by National Guard soldiers. Ten days later, city and state police officers in Jackson, Mississippi murdered two Black students—Philip L. Gibbs and James Earl Green—who were protesting against racist violence on the campus of Jackson State University, after riddling a dorm with more than four hundred bullets.

The precedent of unleashing state violence against student protesters certainly didn't begin with Kent State and Jackson State. For example, in February 1968, three students from South Carolina State College were murdered and twenty-eight more were injured by the state police during a peaceful protest against racial segregation in Orangeburg, South Carolina.[11] Nevertheless, those two weeks in May 1970 mark a turning point in the development of today's multicultural-militarized university. In particular, the aftermath of the Jackson State and Kent State killings helped lead to the development of two forms of institutional coercion—one subtle and covert, the other violent and overt—that we would all recognize today: the rhetorical commitment to multicultural diversity by university administrations, and the simultaneous militarizing of universities through the creation and augmentation of heavily armed campus police forces.

A key element in this process was President Nixon's "Commission on Campus Unrest," established a few weeks after the Kent State and Jackson State killings. Ostensibly set up in response to these "great tragedies," the commission's report rewrote the story so that student protesters were themselves the *source* of violence—erasing, in the process, the fact that students had in fact been the *victims* of massive and murderous state violence. [12] The rhetoric of the Commission's report could just as easily be used today by a college president or politician (from either party) describing Palestine solidarity protestors. In the Commission's version of reality, overwhelmingly non-violent student protests immediately become equated with acts of property destruction (including the vague accusation of "trashing"), which are directly attributed, albeit without evidence, to

protesters; on the other hand, the passive voice comes into play when it comes to the "killing we have witnessed." No one actually did the killing, it seems (certainly not the state); it just happened, as the inevitable outcome of those disruptive protests. In effect, the protesters unleashed the violence that killed them; the students, it appears, killed themselves. That basic sleight of hand is still in play fifty years later. We watch as students standing in solidarity with Palestine, engaged in non-violent protests, are brutalized by the police, attacked by right-wing thugs armed with clubs, dragged off their own campuses in handcuffs, and are then informed soberly by our administrators: student protests turned violent!

The aftermath of the murders at Kent State and Jackson State marks the emergence of on-campus police departments that are now all but mandatory at both public and private universities. When Nixon's Commission on Campus Unrest issued its report in 1970, universities by and large did not have their own police forces. Today, thanks to lobbying by US college presidents and the work of local, state, and federal legislators, virtually all public universities, and more than 90 percent of private universities, have their own police departments. Most of these university police departments allow campus officers to carry guns and to patrol and arrest not just on campus but also in off-campus communities.[13]

Unquestionably, the move to set up armed police forces at colleges and universities was a direct response to the student movements of the 1960s and the work these movements did to open up universities to communities that had previously been excluded. Put plainly, the fight to desegregate public education led the state to put cops on campus. Nixon's Commission on Campus Unrest (which included both college presidents and police chiefs) declared as much, recommending the formation of campus police forces as the key to fighting "disruption" on campuses: "A fully staffed and trained campus police force at its best can perform the functions of a small municipal police department with respect to campus disorders."[14] When student movements took up the fight to decolonize their universities, the state called the cops.

The Repressive Tolerance of the Administrative University

In addition to its role in bringing the cops onto campus, Nixon's Commission on Campus Unrest has another dismal legacy that plays an important role in the suppression of student movements today. As we've seen, the Commission's report used the occasion of deadly state violence against student protesters to portray students as themselves responsible for violence and disorder—in short, as criminals. The militarized campus built in the aftermath of this report takes this logic to its conclusion: since any student could potentially be a protester, it follows that any student is potentially a criminal. More specifically, the Commission's report accuses student protesters of creating *disorder*, which it defines as part of a continuum that begins with "disruption," extends to "violence," and ends in "terrorism." By collapsing this continuum into the single word "disorder," the report provides a powerful rhetorical weapon that can be wielded against student protesters.

This logic, by which students are criminalized based on their potential to create disruptions, continues to govern campus policing. *Disruption* is explicitly defined in the Commission's report as "any interference with others to conduct their rightful business." Examples of such "disruption" are said to include "sit-ins, interference with academic activities, the blockading of campus recruiters" (the Commission likely had military recruiters in mind), and "interference with the rights of others to speak or to hear others speak."[15] All these forms of "disruption" are of course tactics used by the Civil Rights Movement and other movements engaged in non-violent civil disobedience. This incredibly broad definition of "disruption" means that literally any attempt to interrupt business as usual on campus is, from the standpoint of the administration and the campus police, on the same continuum as an act of violent terrorism.

This might sound like an exaggeration. But think about it from the perspective of the administrator-cop: if the university claims to be the great guardian of tolerance and diversity, then it must protect these values against any who threaten them; and if the business of the university is to spread tolerance and diversity, then any interruption of this business can only be understood as an intolerant stifling of diversity. It might seem that students protesting on campus are attempting to exercise their civil liberties. Wrong, says the administration: by interfering with the business of the university, students themselves are the ones stifling free expression. This broad definition of *disruption* has the result, as Roderick Ferguson puts it, of "justifying police repression in the name of order and relying on the university administration—and not the faculty or students—to determine what is the rightful business of the university and what is not, what is orderly and what is not."[16]

To sum up: what student protesters are said to lack, and what those who propose to run the university claim to possess, is both *tolerance* and *respect for diversity*. Anyone who has spent a minute on a college campus will recognize these as two fundamental keywords of institutional DEI. The student and youth movements of the 1960s and 1970s, like those of today, demanded that the university become more democratic, more racially diverse, more just, and more open. By doing so, they set in motion the energies that necessitated the development of institutional DEI programs. But these energies were ultimately redirected and coopted by the state, corporations, and university administrators as part of the counterinsurgency carried out against these student movements.

When the dust cleared, campuses were more firmly in the hands of university administrators than ever before. After all, if students were the agents of disruption, then it was up to administrators to be the guardians of diversity, equity, and inclusion—at least as these qualities had come to be institutionally defined. As long as the administrators

were allowed to run things without disruption, there would be no need to call in the police, who remained the last line of defense standing between the tolerant, multicultural university and its unruly, disruptive students. Students simply needed to acknowledge "the humanity and good will" of administrators "who urge patience and restraint"—and of the police, "whose duty is to enforce the law." Most important, students needed to give up their intolerant views and "become more understanding of those with whom they differ."[17]

It's obscene that Nixon's Commission on Campus Unrest, set up to address the murder of students on their own campuses by soldiers and police officers, would conclude that the whole problem stems from the failure of students to recognize the inherent "tolerance and diversity" of a system that could so blithely slaughter them in a hail of bullets. But the reader may recognize the rhetoric that's still used by this system of order to attack young people who dare to oppose it. The "intolerance" attributed to student protesters in the 1970s morphed into the threat of so-called "political correctness" beginning in the eighties and nineties. That phrase, and the culture warrior stance that it recalls, was very effectively revived by Trump in 2016. Today, the same logic underwrites the attack on "wokeness," a word that has unaccountably found its way into the mouths of legislators who pass bills that outlaw it. Right-wing commentators, in the wake of the student protests against their universities' complicity in the Israeli genocide, today explicitly link wokeness with terrorism.[18] Administrator-cops use different language, but the outcome is much the same.

In order to prevent the police from being called, which can lead to things becoming very disordered indeed, the Commission on Campus Unrest made an additional suggestion alongside the recommendation for universities to set up armed campus police forces: a management strategy that the report calls "the ombudsman method." This involves appointing an administrative figure whose job is to "act as a mediator and factfinder for students, faculty members, and administrations." To perform this role, the ombudsman "must have both great autonomy and [the] support of the university president." These "special student affairs administrators" are described in a way that's unapologetically tokenistic. As an example of an ideal candidate, the report recommends "a young, independent, black [sic] administrator" who would "serve in the role of a spokesman, mediator, and advisor for black [sic] students. Because these administrators have the confidence of the students, they can suggest practical modifications of student demands without being automatically branded as 'sell-outs.'"[19]

Behold the invention of the diversity worker: autonomous and seemingly powerful, although they work at the pleasure of the president and, as Sara Ahmed has documented, rarely have access to or control over resources or other structural aspects of the institution.[20] In a brilliant piece of *McSweeney's* satire published in 2020, Tatiana McInnis and Amanda Lehr offer an imaginary advertisement for one such position: director of the fictional "Colorblind Rainbow Center for Campus Diversity." One of the job's most important responsibilities is the duty of "developing lists of things to give student-activists that exclude their original demands."[21] That's precisely how the "ombudsman method" was designed to work. It's the strategy that abolitionist scholar Dylan Rodriguez has described as "reformism as counterinsurgency."[22]

The unapologetic tokenism of such positions continues today. The ranks of upper-level university administrators (and, for that matter, tenured and tenure-track university faculty) remain overwhelmingly white and male. In 2017, according to an American Council on Education study, more than 58 percent of college presidents were white men. Not much has changed: the most recent study, released in 2023, reveals that 67 percent of college presidents were male; 72 percent identified as white. As an *Inside Higher Ed* article put it: "meet the new boss, same as the old boss."[23] And the boss is doing just fine: according to the employment marketplace ZipRecruiter, the average salary for a college president is currently $186,961.

The one exception to the general trend of white male supremacy in university leadership involves lower-salaried administrators working in student affairs or in DEI offices, where day-to-day "diversity work" takes place. According to a report by the Association of American Colleges & Universities, "among offices on campus, student affairs was the most likely to have a person of color as its highest-level administrator." Overall, the report concludes, "Students were more likely to encounter people of color in service roles than in faculty or leadership positions. While people of color represented less than one-fifth of senior executives, 42.2 percent of service and maintenance staff and one-third of campus safety personnel were people of color."[24] There, in a nutshell, you'll find the balance of power in the contemporary multicultural university, which must be protected, at all costs, from the disruption of students.

Multicultural Genocidaires: The Weaponization of Civil Rights Law

My purpose here has been to outline some of the history that has brought us to where we are today, and to highlight continuities in the dual use of DEI cooptation alongside the direct policing of student activists over the past five decades. This past year has brought an insidious twist to the story: the active weaponization of civil rights laws so that they can be deployed against anti-racist student movements. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964—a law passed thanks to years of anti-racist organizing and activism—prohibits discrimination based on race, color, or national origin in any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.[25] It's hard to imagine how such a law could be turned against students protesting against their institutions' complicity in apartheid and genocide, but that's precisely what is now unfolding on multiple campuses.

As Alex Kane of *Jewish Currents* has documented, this is the result of a decades-long campaign by right-wing

supporters of Israel.[26] In 2004, Kenneth Marcus, the interim director of the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) under George W. Bush, issued official guidance instructing schools to consider Title VI to prohibit discrimination against "groups that exhibit both ethnic and religious characteristics, such as Arab Muslims, Jewish Americans and Sikhs." Title VI itself does not mention religion as a protected class, so at first glance, this seemed an important extension of protection from discrimination intended by the law. But Marcus' previous career as a conservative lawyer should have provided a clue to what might come next: one of his first major cases was as a lead counsel for three white residents of Berkeley who sued the Department of Housing and Urban Development to protest low-income housing for unhoused neighbors.[27] Starting in 2004, right-wing organizations began using Marcus's guidance (with his explicit blessing) to launch civil rights complaints and federal lawsuits that cited Palestine solidarity speech and activism as contributing to Title VI violations.

This lawfare strategy gathered force over the next decade, after the Obama administration's OCR refused to overturn Marcus's guidance and affirmed that Jews and other religious minorities who have "actual or perceived shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics" are covered under Title VI. While most of these lawsuits were ultimately dismissed, Marcus argued in a 2013 op-ed that they still accomplished the important goal of putting universities "on notice" by, specifically, "exposing administrators to bad publicity."[28] Given that the two biggest fears of university administrators are lawsuits and bad publicity, the template by which administrators came to see repressing Palestine solidarity organizing on campus as a way to pre-empt Title VI complaints was established.

When Marcus was appointed assistant secretary for civil rights and head of OCR after the election of Donald Trump, he had the opportunity to double down on this strategy. He opened multiple investigations into schools on the basis of complaints that cited pro-Palestinian activism, including re-opening a seven-year-old case brought by the Zionist Organization of America against Rutgers University; the case claimed that an academic event featuring Omar Barghouti, a founding member of the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, violated Title VI provisions.[29] Marcus also successfully pushed for Trump to issue an executive order that not only codified Marcus's own 2004 guidance but also directed federal agencies that enforce Title VI, including the Department of Education, to consider how they could incorporate the controversial International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism—a definition that infamously classifies some criticism of Israel as antisemitism—into their work.[30]

Marcus was ultimately forced to resign due to complaints from civil rights groups that he had abused his authority by forcing through cases that furthered his personal and political agenda—including the case against Rutgers.[31] But the damage was done: a pattern through which campus administrators would come to use the principles established by civil rights laws to punish anti-apartheid students and faculty for standing against genocide was set firmly in place. The Biden administration's OCR, far from pushing back against any of this, maintained Marcus' interpretation of Title VI, kept Trump's executive order in place, and even went beyond Trump's order by stating in January 2021 that it "will consider the IHRA definition in handling complaints of anti-Semitism"—something even Marcus had not been able to achieve.[32] The stage was set for the full weaponization of civil rights law over the past year.

All continuities aside, there really is no precedent for the repression we've seen on campuses this past year. This repression is now being carried out precisely *in the name of diversity, equity, and inclusion*, via the direct weaponization of civil rights law. The two primary aspects of counterinsurgency against student movements—DEI programs for co-optation and the police for direct repression—have been united. Universities are increasingly tasking their DEI offices to act as the literal multicultural police. For many DEI workers, repressing and disciplining students, faculty, and staff for standing against genocide has become a primary job responsibility.

The paradox is apparent to many of those working in DEI offices: as a number of respondents recently told the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, "demands for harsher punishments run counter to the inclinations of people in student-affairs offices, who say they got into the field to help young people."[33] But the continuing weaponization of Title VI, and the re-election of Donald Trump, assure that this use of DEI for direct repression will no doubt continue. Kane reports a meeting at Brooklyn College where a college administrator informed faculty that, following an OCR-led Title VI investigation, any student allegation of discrimination—even if it concerned a post on a private social media account that was five years old—could result in professors being called in by the administration.[34] The administrator responsible for delivering this news, and for enforcing these policies, is the college's current Interim Chief Diversity Officer.

But the real responsibility lies with the upper administrators who, in the words of Bassam Haddad, "have become an extension of state power."[35] It is the college presidents who are calling the police on their students, banning them from campus, throwing them out of housing. In April, Columbia's President Nemat Shafik testified to Congress about how she would punish student protesters, then flew back to New York and called in the police: since no laws had been broken, she suspended them, declared them "non-students" on the spot, and had them arrested for trespassing. In October, Pomona College's President G. Gabrielle Starr suspended twelve student protesters for the rest of the academic year—which means losing housing and financial aid—without a hearing or any chance to see the evidence against them. President Starr invoked her "extraordinary authority," like any dictator, to throw students out of school for standing against genocide, while the Pomona website continues to laud her for "ensuring students from the full range of family incomes enroll in college and thrive."[36] And in November, the FBI and police raided the private family houses of two Palestinian American George Mason

University students in response to the decision of President Gregory Washington to escalate a minor spray painting incident into a criminal investigation.[37]

It has become achingly clear to students everywhere what their administrators are willing to do in order to maintain "order" on campus. At George Mason, more than 80 student groups came together to write a statement protesting the actions of their administration and the police. "Do universities such as GMU routinely send phalanxes of police officers in military fatigues and armored vehicles, and carrying assault rifles, to break down the front door and raid the homes of students during the pre-dawn hours over an allegation of spray painting? Do administrators routinely rush to judgment and issue criminal trespass orders—the kind used to exclude serial sexual predators and stalkers from campus—against students who have been accused of graffiti?" the groups wrote. "It appears that the answers to these questions may increasingly be 'yes.'"[38] Students also see the extent to which this fits in with the long history of student resistance and administrative repression. Reana Akthar, a sophomore at Wesleyan University who was placed on deferred suspension for protesting outside a Board of Trustees meeting in September, put it best: "It's fundamentally wrong for our actions to not be situated in a long history of activism at Wesleyan. The very basis of the disciplinary hearing is unfair because what political demonstration isn't a disturbance of the peace or a disruption?"[39]

The accusation of complicity with genocide is not something to be taken lightly. Accordingly, student activists have clearly and courageously documented their universities' complicity with the genocide being carried out by Israel, with complete support from the U.S. government, just as an earlier generation of activists did regarding complicity with apartheid South Africa and the U.S. war in Viet Nam. The administrators of these universities have not only opted to continue this complicity but have taken every measure, including direct and brutal violence, to ensure that it continues without interruption. One of their most important tools has been the weaponized distortion of Title VI handed to them by right-wing politicians.

Returning to the Roots: Student Resistance, Then and Now

If the history I've provided here seems unrelievedly grim and negative, let me assure you that so far, I've only told half of the story. We've seen the extent to which today's university, despite its rhetorical commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, derives its approach from the deft trick perfected in the wake of the Kent State and Jackson State massacres: turning state violence visited upon students into an opportunity to increase managerial and police control. But it's important to emphasize that I follow the lead of other activist-scholars in seeing our contemporary "multicultural" university as emerging from the clash of two opposed forces. The effective neutralization of the most radical impulses of student movements by the state, corporations, and university administrations came via the violent smashing of demands for decolonization, wrapped up in the pretty words offered by institutional DEI. But the counterinsurgency of institutional multiculturalism would never have been necessary in the first place without the insurgent demands of student movements, particularly Black and Third-Worldist anti-colonial movements.[40] Remembering that history is a way to begin the work of pushing back against the ongoing counterinsurgency today.

Faced with the grim reality of the university today, and in particular the latest wave of administrative-police repression from today's multicultural genocidaires, we need to remind ourselves of the significant and hard-won victories of student movements for decolonization in effecting major transformations at their universities. At San Francisco State, the country's first School of Ethnic Studies was established in 1969 following the longest student strike in US history. The struggle was led by a Third World Liberation Front that united the Black Student Union, Latin American Students Organization, Asian American Political Alliance, Filipino American Collegiate Endeavor, and Native American Students Union at SFSU—a radically multicultural alliance if there ever was one. Down the road a bit, at Berkeley, the Department of Ethnic Studies was created as a result of another student strike led by students united as the Third World Liberation Front. Less well known is the remarkable history of Merritt College, a two-year college in Oakland, where collaborations between students, faculty, and community activists resulted in the first Black history course in the country, initially offered in 1964, and the founding of the country's first Black Studies Department three years later. Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale, the founders of the Black Panther Party, met while they were students there, and it's fair to say that Merritt College was the birthplace of the Panthers.[41]

At my own school, the City University of New York, the struggles of a united student movement led by Black and Puerto Rican student groups in the late 1960s and early 1970s succeeded not only in winning a program in Black and Puerto Rican Studies, but also a radical but sadly short-lived open enrollment policy. This student-led struggle to desegregate CUNY has been justly described as "the most significant civil rights victory in higher education in the history of the United States."[42] The student movement at CUNY was deeply influenced and inspired by ongoing struggles for decolonization, which they linked to their anti-racist work within the university. As one student activist writes in his account of the history of struggle at CUNY: "The rapid decolonization of Africa, the Cuban Revolution and the appearance of armed national liberation movements across Latin America, the upheavals taking place in China, and the heroic resistance of the Vietnamese to the aggression of the mightiest military power in human history all contributed to a situation in which oppressed people everywhere imagined that they could make great gains through struggle."[43] Today's CUNY wouldn't exist without these struggles to decolonize the "people's university."

And that struggle continues. The resounding "Five Demands" issued by students at City College in 1969 were echoed in the "Five Demands to Heal CUNY in Crisis," aimed at the austerity policies starving public education in New York, issued by the Free CUNY Coalition at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. In April 2024, when students, academic workers, and community members established the CUNY Gaza Solidarity Encampment at City College, they issued their own Five Demands, calling on their university to divest from companies complicit in Israeli apartheid and genocide; support the call for an academic and cultural boycott of Israel; release a statement in solidarity with the Palestinian people; demilitarize CUNY by getting police off campus; and demanding a fully-funded, free People's CUNY, including free tuition and a fair contract for staff and faculty. The student-led Palestine solidarity movement at CUNY, which has brilliantly connected the dots between opposing settler colonialism, fighting austerity, and decolonizing their university, openly acknowledges their debt to the student movements of the past: one of the many cultural events held at the encampment before it was smashed by the administrator-cops was a screening of the film *The Five Demands*, which documents the student strike led by Black and Puerto Rican students that shut down City College in April 1969.[44]

This is where I'm supposed to say something vaguely apologetic, like "I don't mean to romanticize the student movements of the past." Actually, I don't have a big problem with doing a little bit of romanticizing, especially if it helps to reclaim the decolonizing power that these movements began to unleash before being set upon by the full force of state violence. That's particularly important when we try to come to terms with another face of this counterinsurgency: the way in which neoliberal politicians, pundits, and administrators have persistently *demeaned* student movements over the past five decades—for example, recasting collective struggles for redistribution and restructuring as the individual "grievances" of spoiled students—as part of what Roderick Ferguson calls "an ideological project meant to tear down the web of insurgencies that activists have been demanding."[45]

The institutional multiculturalist way of telling the story nods toward the "historic" achievements of the Civil Rights Movement and student and youth activists of The Sixties—and even offers a sad shake of the head at the Kent State massacre—but then scorns today's supposedly coddled, whining students who are said to be nothing at all like those fine and righteous student activists of the past. Joe Biden gave voice to this position clearly, if not eloquently, while he was running for President: "The younger generation now tells me how tough things are. Give me a break. No, no, I have no empathy for it. Give me a break. Because here's the deal guys, we decided we were gonna change the world. And we did. We did. We finished the civil rights movement in the first stage. The women's movement came to be. So my message is, get involved."[46]

We must refuse this version of the story, so carefully constructed by neoliberals, which claims that student movements combusted from within or ran out of steam, that students got tired of chanting and finally learned to be tolerant and trust the administrators, and that everything was fine until those nasty encampments turned up. Let's hold on instead to the alternate story I have tried to tell: student activists striving for social change (in fact, students more generally) have been violently and ruthlessly repressed, criminalized, surveilled, and demeaned, while also being systematically impoverished by student debt, for more than five decades, but have never stopped resisting.

To sum up: "DEI" in its current institutional form is what we're left with when institutions reconfigure radical student demands seeking to transform the system into slogans that strengthen the university's "brand." Ferguson expresses it well: "Rather than a result of student demands, we might more accurately think of diversity offices as the administrative and bureaucratic response to those demands."[47] But this means that DEI also contains traces of the original radical demands of the youth movements of the sixties and seventies: to open up the university, to wrench it from its settler colonial, white supremacist, and patriarchal capitalist origins, and to transform it into a place of radical democratic possibility. Those tasks remain utterly incomplete, and today's student movements have taken up this work. Radical teachers owe them our undying solidarity. That includes being willing to stand with them shoulder to shoulder every time the administration calls the cops.

Acknowledgement

I am incredibly grateful to the editors of this special issue, as well as the two anonymous readers of this essay, for their really important suggestions, questions, and interventions. They improved this article so much, although any weaknesses of course remain my own.

Notes

[1] For an excellent overview of this story, see Roderick A. Ferguson, *We Demand: The University and Student Protests* (Berkeley: U of California P, 2017). Some of what follows draws on my book *Decolonize Multiculturalism* (New York: OR Books, 2022).

[2] Rob Nixon*, Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2011), p. 2.

[3] Michael Fabricant and Stephen Brier, *Austerity Blues: Fighting for the Soul of Public Higher Education* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016).

[4] "Mark Blyth: How Austerity Brought Us Donald Trump," *The Dig Podcast* (February 14, 2017). For an extended analysis, see Mark Blyth, *Austerity: The History of a Dangerous Idea* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[5] Hannah Appel and Astra Taylor, "'You Are Not A Loan!': Introducing the Nation's First Debtors' Union," *In These Times* (July 23, 2024).

[6] Ben Chapman, "Thousands of CUNY Students Experience Homelessness and Food Insecurity, Report Says," *New York Daily News* (27 March 2019).

[7] See Sara Weissman, "Over 100 Campus Police Departments Got Military Equipment Through This Federal Program," *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education* (July 20, 2020); Victoria Chamberlin, "As Federal Programs Continue to Militarize Campus Cops, Some Universities Reconsider," *Guns & America* (July 9, 2020).

[8] Samuel P. Catlin, "The Campus Does Not Exist," *Parapraxis* (April 21, 2024).

[9] "Where College Protesters Have Been Arrested or Detained," *New York Times* (July 22, 2024).

[10] "Antisemitism on College Campuses Exposed, Education and the Workforce Committee Releases Report," Press Release (October 31, 2024).

[11] For more on the Orangeburg Massacre, including its historical silencing, see Jack Bass and Jack Nelson, *The Orangeburg Massacre* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996), along with the 2009 documentary *Scarred Justice: The Orangeburg Massacre 1968*, directed by Bestor Cram and Judy Richardson.

[12] *The Report of the President's Commission on Campus Unrest* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1970); see also Ferguson, *We Demand*, p. 18.

[13] Libby Nelson, "Why Nearly All Colleges Have an Armed Police Force," *Vox* (July 29, 2015); Angela Wright, "How Armed Police Officers on Campus Have Become a Ubiquitous Part of American College Life," *MacLean's* (June 25, 2020); Alex Vitale, "Campus Police Are Among the Armed Heavies Cracking Down on Students," *The Nation* (May 9, 2024).

[14] *Report of the President's Commission on Campus Unrest*, p. 132, quoted in Ferguson, *We Demand*, p. 29.

[15] *Report of the President's Commission on Campus Unrest*, p. 117, quoted in Ferguson, *We Demand*, p. 28.

[16] Ferguson, *We Demand*, p. 29.

[17] *Report of the President's Commission on Campus Unrest*, p. 4-6, 14, 131, quoted in Ferguson, *We Demand*, p. 22-23, 28-29.

[18] See Abe Greenwald, "The Woke Jihad," *Commentary* (June 2024); Michael Harriot, "The War on Wokeness," *Guardian* (December 21, 2022). For critical analyses of the "war on wokeness," see Patricia J. Williams, "How Not to Talk About Race," *The Nation* (October 18, 2021) and Anthony Alessandrini, "The Lived Experience of Social Construction," *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy* 30.2 (2022).

[19] *Report of the President's Commission on Campus Unrest*, p. 205, quoted in Ferguson, *We Demand*, p. 24-25.

[20] See Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Durham: Duke UP, 2012); *What's the Use? On the Uses of Use* (Durham: Duke UP, 2019); and *Complaint!* (Durham: Duke UP, 2021).

[21] Tatiana McInnis and Amanda Lehr, "The Colorblind Rainbow Center for Campus Diversity Seeks a New Director to Tell Us That Nothing Is Wrong," *McSweeney's Internet Tendency* (July 8, 2020).

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[24] "College Students Are More Diverse Than Ever. Faculty and Administrators Are Not," *AAC&U News* (March 2019).

[25] For an extended analysis of the role of political movements, especially student movements, in the development of civil rights legislation, and the uses to which such legislation has been put within the limits of institutional multiculturalism, see chapter five of my *Decolonize Multiculturalism* (p. 151-96).

[26] Alex Kane, "The Civil Rights Law Shutting Down Pro-Palestine Speech," *Jewish Currents* (November 15, 2024). See also Amira Jarmakani and Emmaia Gelman, "Zionist Organizations' Latest Strategy to Criminalize Palestine Advocacy: Weaponizing Civil Rights," *Mondoweiss* (September 24, 2024) and Emmaia Gelman, "Astroturf Antisemitism Watchdogs," *Jadaliyya* (April 13, 2024). I'm deeply indebted to the research done by Kane, Gelman, and Jarmakani, along with the legal scholar Darryl Li, for the account that I set out here.

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[28] Kenneth L. Marcus, "Standing Up for Jewish Students," *The Jerusalem Post* (September 9, 2013).

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[30] See Jewish Voice for Peace Press Release, "Jewish Voice for Peace Unequivocally Opposes the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism" (February 8, 2021).

[31] Erica L. Green, "Education Department's Civil Rights Chief Steps Down Amid Controversy," *New York Times* (July 28, 2020).

[32] See Kane, "Civil Rights Law."

[33] Kate Hidalgo Bellows, "A Punishing Year," *Chronicle of Higher Education* (December 4, 2024).

[34] See Kane, "Civil Rights Law."

[35] Akela Lacy, "Police Raid Pro-Palestine Students' Home in FBI-Led Graffiti Investigation," *The Intercept* (December 3, 2024).

[36] See Palestine Legal Press Release, "Civil Rights Orgs Warn Pomona College Unprecedented Suspensions of Students Are Unlawful, 'Punishes the Act of Protest Itself'" (November 13, 2024).

[37] Lacy, "Police Raid."

[38] Lacy, "Police Raid."

[39] Bellows, "A Punishing Year."

[40] I'm borrowing the notion of institutional multiculturalism as "counterinsurgency" from Jodi Melamed's *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2011).

[41] See Donna Jean Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2010); Robyn C. Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come: Black Power, Gender, and the Black Panther Party in Oakland* (Durham: Duke UP, 2019); and the film *Merritt College: Home of the Black Panthers*, directed by Jeffrey Heyman and available online.

[42] Martha Biondi, *The Black Revolution on Campus* (Berkeley: U of California P, 2012), p. 125.

[43] Bhargav Rani, "Revolution and CUNY: Remembering the 1969 Fight for Open Admissions," *GC Advocate* (30 July 2018). See also Martha Biondi, "'Brooklyn College Belongs to Us': Black Students and the Transformation of Public Higher Education in New York City," in Clarence Thomas, ed., *Civil Rights in New York City* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011) and Tahir H. Butt, "'You Are Running a de Facto Segregated University': Racial Segregation and the City University of New York, 1961-1968," in *The Strange Careers of the Jim Crow North: Segregation and Struggle outside of the South*, ed. Brian Purnell and Jeanne Theoharis (New York: New York University Press, 2019).

[44] *The Five Demands*, dir. Greta Schiller and Andrea Weiss (2023).

[45] Ferguson, *We Demand*, p. 68-69.

[46] Eve Peyser, "Biden Trashes Millennials in His Quest to Become Even Less Likable," *Vice* (January 12, 2018).

[47] Ferguson, *We Demand*, p. 26.

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RADICAL TEACHER

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

DEI in a Time of Genocide or Re-Calling June Jordan's Years at Stony Brook

by Abena Ampofoa Asare

JUNE JORDAN, CA. 1970. PHOTOGRAPH BY LLOYD W. YEARWOOD

Introduction

These poems
they are things that I do
in the dark
reaching for you
whoever you are
and
are you ready?

— June Jordan, "These Poems" from *Things that I do in the dark: select poetry (1981)*

Faculty on American college campuses must decide how to teach through the U.S.-sponsored genocide in Palestine. By teaching through, I do not only mean the syllabi we develop, the words we utter from the podium, or the feedback we scrawl on student papers. As bell hooks explains, college professors share knowledge in many locations and multiple formats (hooks, 2003). How faculty respond when their university threatens and arrests anti-genocide students and colleagues is a matter of pedagogy as well as politics. Our campuses have become a case study: who in the American university can and will speak about the violence facing our Palestinian counterparts in Gaza (United Nations, 2024; Abed, 2024; Democracy Now, 2025)? We pose the question and plot the data simultaneously. Colleagues with family, lineage, and homes in the region learn these terrible lessons in real time. "How difficult and treacherous our paths are, within this country and its institutions," writes Huda Fakhreddine about being an Arabic literature professor during the Palestinian genocide; "I can either be a tool of the very system that objectifies me, exoticizes me, and is not willing to bat an eye when my entire culture is being exterminated, or else I am a threat" (Fakhredinne, 2024). University proclamations of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) offer little guidance or protection. "When so many professors all over the country have been intimidated, punished and harassed for speaking out in support of Palestinians" (Fakhreddine, 2024), the American university's commitment to social justice -- now openly articulated as "DEI" -- crumbles into a question.

Feminist scholars warned us about the tradeoffs associated with higher education's embrace of "diversity" (Ahmed, 2012). When consent is a condition of inclusion, careerism blunts conflict, and success requires silence, the DEI mission can be a prison as much as a platform (Mohanty, 2003; Benjamin, 2024). Institutional proclamations of anti-racism after George Floyd's 2020 police murder did not spur anti-genocide missives when Hind Rajab, Khaled Nabhan, and Ayşenur Eygi, along with at least forty-five thousand others, were murdered by U.S.-backed soldiers. Though similar currents of racism and militarism drive these deaths, both at home and abroad, our universities now have little to say. As one anonymous academic job applicant confessed in 2020, DEI can "feel like a trap" when championed by the same universities that crack down on scholars for speaking about Palestine (*The Professor Is In* Blog, 2020). Those on campus who can and will move toward human life at its most vulnerable may not be found in the DEI office, but they must be found. Following Fargo Tbakhi's call for "forms of speech that might enact real danger to the constellation of economic and social values which are… facilitating genocide in Palestine" (Tbakhi, 2023), Black Studies archives are a critical resource. Underneath and outstripping the post-2020 DEI apparatus, there is a tradition of Black Studies scholars who dare to publicly interrogate the consequences of U.S. racism, even in foreign policy, even regarding Palestine, on campus.

Stony Brook

On March 26, 2024, I discuss our university's diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) mission with applicants for a leadership position. Some candidates speak about hiring and retaining diverse faculty. Others describe recruiting students from resource-starved neighborhoods. Outside our virtual meeting room, nine students holding a sit-in for Palestinian human rights are handcuffed by police. None of us, neither search committee nor candidates, mention this.

On the same day, nearly six thousand miles away, at a place called Beit Lahia, packages of food aid plummet into the ocean approximately one kilometer from the shore. Compelled by hunger, human beings plunge in to retrieve humanitarian assistance delivered inhumanely. At least twelve people drown, their lungs filling with water, flesh trapped between earth and the sky. Our search committee that does not discuss the nine students sitting in on campus cannot mention the twelve Palestinians drowned near Beit Lahia. A commitment to the DEI mission does not make the protesting students visible or the bodies at Beit Lahia speakable.

In the year when U.S/Israeli bombs, famine, land-lust, communicable and chronic disease, sniper shots, fear and racism kill between forty thousand (40K) and one hundred eighty thousand (180K) Gazans and condemn a million more to a hellscape (Khatib, Mckee, Yusuf*,* 2024), U.S. universities fail to credibly and reliably discuss this reality. In eastern Long Island, my public research university struggles to provide programming that interrogates Israel-Palestine's history of violent statecraft. Instead, the university warns faculty and students that our speech may trigger charges of antisemitism or other bias. They remind us of the technologies we can use to report one another. The DEI office proffers platitudes about civility and community while shadowing students at rallies, events, and lectures, flanked by university police. As the autumn hardens, then melts into graduation season, campus administrators who champion DEI move smoothly from engaging with to surveilling, disparaging, and ultimately aiding in the arrest of student protesters. The revelation of this carceral trajectory for DEI is another lesson from the spring 2024 student intifada (Thier, 2024). If a robust institutional commitment to DEI does not allow American universities to parse the matted strands of history and power that congealed on water and sand at Beit Lahia, or to confront the associated deluge of

U.S.-backed atrocities (Sidhwa, 2024); it would seem, as the students have spat out at us, that the university has nothing of substance to teach them.

Then I remember that June Jordan (1936 - 2002) was here, at the State University of New York (SUNY) Stony Brook, from 1978 through 1989. A dissident poet, city planner, and university professor, June Jordan's years at Stony Brook were shaped by artistic and political desire, including a commitment to telling the truth about United States violence at home and abroad, and specifically about Palestine. She faced professional backlash for this. Her career was stalled, she later told a student, following the poem "Apologies to All the People in Lebanon," published in *The Village Voice* in 1982 (Shamsunder, 2023). Back then, June Jordan called the loss of professional opportunities "whitelisting."

> I have encountered new and considerable resistance to the publication of my work…I have been whitelisted by editors who have plainly enough written or said to me: "We love your writing but too many of us have problems with your position on Nicaragua. Or the Middle East." They don't say "We don't agree with you and so we will not publish your work." They don't say, "We don't believe you have a right to any opinion on this matter." These editors hide behind "many of us" who "have problems" with me. (Jordan, *On Call,* 1985:3)

As many of her publishers and editors went silent, June Jordan continued teaching at the state university. Our campus became a crucial location in her political imagination. One of Jordan's political essay collections from this period, *On Call* (South End Press, 1985), is dedicated to a Stony Brook student, Willie Jordan, whose experience of police violence became a focal teaching and action point. Stony Brook is explicitly mentioned in six of *On Call'*s eighteen essays. A poem from this period, "Taking Care," is dedicated to the "Poet Sekou Sundiata and to the Students of SUNY at Stony Brook" (*Passion,* 1980). Jordan taught at many colleges and universities throughout her life. Her years at the City University of New York (CUNY) are critically archived (Reed and Shalev, 2017) and her time at the University of California Berkeley finds form in the text, *June Jordan's Poetry for the People: A Revolutionary Blueprint* (Jordan, 1995). Although there is no such study or review of her presence at Stony Brook, our campus was also a place from which June Jordan critically approached the world.

> From Phillis Wheatley to Walt Whitman, from Stony Brook to Lebanon, these writings document my political efforts to coherently fathom all of my universe, and to arrive at a moral judgment that will determine my further political conduct. (Jordan, *On Call,* 1985: 2)

June Jordan is cemented into our campus legacy; institutional neglect will not take her away from us. Her insistence on "coherently fathom[ing] all of [the] universe" to arrive first at a moral judgement and then at political action is as clear a guide as any on how to navigate the crisis facing U.S. academia.

June Jordan arrived at Stony Brook as faculty in the English Department. She also taught within the Africana Studies program, led by poet and performance artist Amiri Baraka. As chairman of Africana, Baraka unapologetically brought poets, artists, and political thinkers to Stony Brook. Championing a radical vision of Black Studies as a field created to transform, not simply integrate into, college campuses, Baraka valued and recruited faculty apart from the standard university rubric of publish, perform, or perish. (Stony Brook AFS Video Archive, 1987). Students needed access to people with experiences and practices of liberation, not only theories. Praising one such Africana Studies colleague, Baraka noted: "[William] McAdoo is a man who has actually been in the revolutionary movement, and been locked up in the revolutionary movement, and struggled, so he actually knows what he's talking about. He's not just bumping his gums together as some of our people are…" (AFS Video Archive, 1987). To retain these sorts of teachers at a public state university, Africana Studies had to chart a path of institutional autonomy within the liberal university. Under Baraka's leadership, Stony Brook Africana publicly relished its faculty and students' intellectual independence. When South African anti-apartheid activist and scholar Fred Dube was attacked for teaching about Israel-Palestine, Baraka's Africana Studies program rushed to his defense (Asare, 2024). "They've been telling us that Africana Studies is too insignificant to have opinions," Baraka quipped during a Black History month presentation in 1987, "but apparently we're going to have them anyway." June Jordan was among many Black artists, practitioners, and scholars -- with opinions -- who came to Stony Brook in the 1980s.

Baraka introduced June at a 1987 Black History Month poetry reading on campus in this way: "The Poetry Center's been dead for a long time… it began to stink, so they cleaned it out, and put, you know, June Jordan in there" (AFS Video Archive, 1987). As Amiri Baraka's robust vision of Africana Studies enriched the Stony Brook campus, the university provided world-shifting scholars and artists an institutional appointment fairly close, in measure of miles, to New York City. Stony Brook, June Jordan explained in "Report from the Bahamas" (1982), is the "state university… where I teach whether or not I feel like it, where I teach without stint because like the waiter, I'm no fool. It's my job and either I work or I do without everything you need money to buy" (Jordan, *On Call,* 1985:43). When some publishers separated from June Jordan because of her writing and speaking about Palestinian human rights, Stony Brook University provided an institutional berth from which to write, organize, travel, and reflect. June Jordan's years at Stony Brook show us how to be in the university and live in the world, at once. Although the four lessons recalled below are only partial reflections of June Jordan's work in eastern Long Island, I gather them for the consideration of faculty, students, and staff at Stony Brook and other universities where the DEI mission is paired with the Palestine exception.

Lesson One: Prepare to Pay a Price

For June Jordan -- as for students and faculty today - speaking or writing about Palestine comes at a cost.

> In the 1980s the *New York Times* refused to ever again print Jordan's work; her New York City publisher vowed to let her books go out of print; and one of her literary agents removed her from the client list, mainly due to her increasing focus on Palestine. (Kinloch, 2006:162)

Jordan did not swallow the isolation of professional "whitelisting" without comment. "I am learning about American censorship," June Jordan wrote. "Apparently, there is some magisterial and unnameable 'we' who decided -- in the cowardly passive voice -- what 'is punishable' or not" (Jordan, *On Call,* 1985: 3). Faced with this professional censure, the withdrawal of opportunities, invitations, and networks, June Jordan gathered her own political essays into a book, named it *On Call,* and explained that there was no other outlet to share much of this work. "This book must compensate for the absence of a cheaper and more immediate print outlet for my two cents. If political writing by a Black woman did not strike so many editors as presumptuous or simply bizarre then, perhaps this book would not be needed" (Jordan, 1985: 1) Initially embraced by publishers as a Black Woman poet, June Jordan was now excluded because she had moved out of place. The roster of subjects on which she, as a Black woman poet, was allowed to speak did not include Israel-Palestine.

> The only supposedly legitimate persons allowed by the media to express any views whatsoever on Lebanon/ Israel/ Palestinians/ US-Middle East policies were whitemen. Everyone else was either an Arab (i.e. "Anti-Semitic") or "Anti-Semitic" or else self-hating Jews (i.e "Anti-Semitic"). (Jordan, 1985: 83)

Mercifully, June Jordan did not allow her world-work to be circumscribed by professional acclaim or criticism. She understood herself as an artist, a scholar, and a teacher apart from the titles and praise allotted by publishers, universities, or employers. Her politics, she explained,

> devolve from my entire real life, and real phone calls and meetings about real horror or triumph happening to other real people, none of it respects or reflects any orthodox anything, any artifice of position or concern." (Jordan, 1985: 2).

Rooted in relationships apart from academic or publishing hierarchies, June Jordan weathered the backlash of American censorship and the cowardly passive voice. "I am gaining important connections to people who are actually not so different as American censorship might have you believe" (Jordan, 1985: 3). A procession of writers and artists arrayed against the violent Israel-Palestine status quo -- Benjamin Beit Hallahmi, Yo'av Karny, Etel Adnan, Shula Koenig -- appear in Jordan's poetry, dedications, essays, and letters during this period. Cultivating these relationships was a source of sustenance, clarity, and encouragement when it came time to pay the price.

Even when speaking about Palestine exacted a personal toll (Magloire, 2024), solidarity friendships also bloomed. Lebanese writer Etel Adnan wrote to June Jordan during the period of publishing troubles. "You know that 'Beirut' divides the word in two. It is one of the most untouchable 'taboos' for some. That's why. They never forgive you for thinking that Arabs are human beings. It is the one issue that one doesn't tackle without paying a price" (Edwards, 2021: 265). Reciprocally, June Jordan honored this relationship in the 1983 "Poem for Etel Adnan Who Writes." The poem begins with a bleak epigraph about the loneliness of watching the world stand by while beloveds are martyred: "[s]o we shall say: Don't fool yourselves. Jesus is not coming. We are alone." It ends in an exhilarating call to revolutionary friends who are one another's redemption when the world sits silent. "Nobody died to save the world/ Come/ Let us break heads together" (Jordan, *Living Room,* 1985: 62-63). Detailing a shift from despair to directed action, this poem shares the inestimable gifts, glee as much as clarity, that solidarity friendships provide.

Lesson Two: Confront Power

June Jordan relentlessly spoke her truth. She did not do this alone. "It has been other women," she wrote, "who have helped me to outlive and to undo my fears of telling the truth" (Jordan, 1985: 84). If resistance is a muscle, June Jordan's regular exercise of dissent produced a mode of courageous truth-telling that was not limited to foreign policy. Even when winning national poetry awards, June Jordan used her platform to expose the publishing industry's power dynamics. In 1981 she wrote an essay lamenting the "exclusion of every hilarious, amazing, visionary, pertinent, and unforgettable poet from National Endowment of the Arts grants…"(Jordan, 1985: 5). The next year (1982) June Jordan was awarded the same NEA fellowship she had criticized; and in 1987 Jordan was still urging Stony Brook students to examine how the NEA fellowship (and other national poetry awards) furthered an exclusive and Eurocentric understanding of "good" poetry. When powerful institutions in her field lauded June Jordan, she did not claim that her name in lights was sufficient for systemic change. Instead, she seized the moment to expose the flaws of a system that made her a pathbreaker by excluding others. For June Jordan, confronting power was not a seasonal or limited exercise; she was consistent in using pen and platform to illuminate the injustices she saw and felt, even when she was implicated in the harm.

Again and again, June Jordan named her own complicity in death-making systems. With piercing clarity, she named herself, as a United States citizen, among the rolls of those who are guilty.

> Yes, I did know it was the money I earned as a poet
> that
> paid
> for the bombs and the planes and the tanks

> that they used to massacre your family (Jordan, *Living Room,* 1985: 106).

For Jordan, calling out complicity was a way to pursue one's own power. By articulating that we are breathing when others are dead, that our children are safe in bed while other mothers are clawing at rubble, we hold the weight of our shared humanity. Every day we participate in unholy evil, but June Jordan knew that we need not consent, nor close our eyes, to this.

> Supposing everytime I hit this key
> somebody
> crumples to the ground or stops
> breathing for a minute or begins to strangle
> in the crib
>
> Supposing everytime I play this chord
> ribs
> smash
> brain-cells shrink
> and a woman loses all of her hair
>
> Supposing everytime I follow a melody
> the overtones irradiate five Phillipino
> workers
> burning their bodies
> to bone
> (Jordan, *Living Room,* 1985: 118).

Calling out complicity with death-making violence is not a slur. It is a way of telling the truth about our own power and our duty to exercise it. "Most important, I think, is this," June Jordan writes. "I have faced my own culpability, my own absolute dirty hands, so to speak, in the continuation of injustice and powerful intolerance" (Jordan, 2002: 8). What do we do with these dirty hands? On a university campus, when students awaken to their own complicity (which is also their power) they find ways to wash and wash and wash again. They find organizations to join, slogans to shout, funds to raise, monies from which to divest. If Stony Brook University administrators seek to shame, control, and criminalize all of this -- our students' impulse to live humanely within a broken world -- faculty must decide which version of power we will subscribe to and teach. What will follow if we dare to acknowledge our economic and political relationships around the world -- our ties to Haiti, to Congo, to Sudan, and Gaza? And as June Jordan repeatedly asked: by pretending we are innocent, what will we lose?

Lesson Three: Refuse to Confine Compassion

Another of June Jordan's poem collections from the Stony Brook years, *Living Room* (1985), traverses time zones, geographies, languages, and nation-states. The poems are about Nicaragua, Chile, Long Island, Soweto, Arkansas, and, yes, Palestine and Lebanon. Fiercely committed to speaking about the unity between people and the complicity of ideologies, Jordan refused to silo global violence in particular regions or bodies. The symmetry in the suffering of different populations was an opportunity to illuminate common sources of harm, and so pull up violence from the root. Accordingly, the book *Living Room* is

> dedicated
> to the children of Atlanta
> And
> to the children of Lebanon
> (Jordan, *Living Room,* 1985: preface)

What do the children in Atlanta and Lebanon have in common? The first and last poems in the collection explain. The first, "From Sea to Shining Sea," a rapid-fire report on the dystopia of the Reagan years, tells it:

> *This was not a good time to be a child*
> Suicide rates among the young reached
> alltime highs as the incidence of child
> abuse and sexual abuse
> rose dramatically across the nation.
>
> In Atlanta Georgia at least twenty-eight Black
> children have been murdered, with
> several more missing and all of them feared dead, or
> something of the sort.
> (Jordan, *Living Room,* 1985:16)

The last poem, "Moving towards Home," a response to the 1982 Israeli/U.S. massacre of the Sabra neighborhood and the Shatila refugee camp in Beirut, also offers guidance. It begins with the *New York Times* quoting a grieving Lebanese mother.

> "Where is Abu Fadi," she wailed?
> "Who will bring me my loved one?"
> *New York Times* 9/20/82

The children may be separated by miles and oceans, but whether in Atlanta or Lebanon, their blood cries out to be mourned, to be cradled, to be counted. June Jordan's Palestine poems are also Nicaragua poems, are also United States poems, are always human poems. On this point, Jordan was insistent; we must refuse to confine our compassion within national boundaries and borders.

Lesson Four: Your Identity is a Portal

In March 2024, I teach Jordan's iconic poem "Moving towards Home" to my African American Political Thought seminar. The opening salvo of the poem rushes through my classroom, articulating our current conundrum: we are inundated by images of atrocity, and we do not know what to do or say.

I do not wish to speak about the bulldozer and the
Red dirt
Not quite covering all of the arms and legs

Nor do I wish to speak about the nightlong screams
that reached
the observation posts where soldiers lounged about

Following a litany of refusals, the listing of horrors, there is this stunning declaration:

I was born a Black woman
and now
I am become a Palestinian
against the relentless laughter of evil
there is less and less living room
and where are my loved ones?

Raised with DEI's focus on identity as representation, intersectionality, and seat-at-the-table politics, the students in my seminar are flummoxed. What to make of this dissident poet, born a Black woman, and now become a Palestinian? Is this a desertion -- an evacuation of identity? Is this appropriation -- taking on what is not yours? How can you be born a Black woman and become a Palestinian?

For June Jordan identity was a portal, a means to connect deeply with the world and with others. In the 1980s when she traveled to Nicaragua, to the Bahamas, to Lebanon and Palestinian refugee camps, she did so as a Black woman. She brought the fullness of her identity to each new geography. June Jordan's 1984 essay "Nicaragua: Why I Had to Go There" begins with the claim that identity is an engine, something propelling her forward. "Like a lot of Black women, I have always had to invent the power my freedom requires," she writes. "All my life I've been studying revolution" (Jordan, 1985: 65). The reasons why June Jordan continued to talk about Palestine, traveled to Nicaragua, wondered about South Africa, were the rigors and revelations of her life as a Black woman. Seeing the world through her own eyes led her to reach farther than the borders given to her. "South Africa used to seem so far away," June Jordan muses. "Then it came home to me. It began to signify the meaning of white hatred here." (Jordan, 1985: 17). Moving through the world, poet June Jordan was compelled to ask particular questions and took the risk of traveling, going to see for herself.

> What I know from my own life after Lebanon is that I must insist upon my own truth and my own love, especially when that truth and that love will carry me across the borders of my own tribe, or I will wither in the narrow cold light of my own eyes. (Jordan, 1985: 84)

Reaching into the richness of one's own identity should carry the possibility of relating to people who are not your own but who have become your own. Our class seminar concludes with this question: what are the gifts and duties of your particular vista? What can you alone see and what does this require of you?

Conclusion

Amplifying ancestor June Jordan's work at Stony Brook University is necessary in these times. With the rise and fall of DEI as a framework that seeks to institutionalize anti-racism within universities and yet enforces silence about Palestine, we must speak frankly about where this logic falters and who it fails. In this way, we map our location and create space to revise. Thankfully, we do not begin from scratch. The lessons from June Jordan's years at Stony Brook --- prepare to pay a price, confront power, refuse to confine compassion, claim identity as a portal -- are an alternate model of how to teach justice and equity as bedrock values on campus. Bastions of intellectual and institutional autonomy, places like June Jordan's Poetry Center and Amiri Baraka's Africana Studies, must be purposefully cultivated. The archives are a resource. We need not be led by the nose nor discouraged by limited and repressive visions of what the university has been and what it can be; we have other examples.

June Jordan died in the year 2002, two decades before the student encampment protests of 2024. We can imagine what she would have said. In April 1985, Stony Brook professor June Jordan was invited to address Columbia University students demanding university divestment from apartheid South Africa. I reproduce some of the text of her speech:

> I want to tell you how much happiness you give, how much morale you restore, by your courageous and heroic protests here at Columbia. I want to tell you how much respect I feel and how much I admire the persevering heroism of your bravery. To me you are political heroes and political heroines coming of age despite national inertia, turpitude and cowardice. At this moment of outstandingly senile leadership and the politics of the senile cowboy leading the ignorant into a never never land of blundering lies and unconscionable idiotic outcries… you are young and brilliantly well-informed and centered on justice… (Jordan, 1985: 118)

During her Stony Brook University years, June Jordan was writing and thinking about revolution -- about what it looks like, who can speak it, what it means to fight for it. "A lot of people get scared by the word revolution," June Jordan explained to a Stony Brook student during a Q&A session; "my attitude about it is why use it, let's just talk about what you want to accomplish…" (Stony Brook AFS Video Archive, 1987). The same clarifying principle applies to the mantra of diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education; what are these words actually trying to accomplish? With her poet's eye June Jordan paid attention to the Long Island Expressway, Beirut, Soweto, and Des Moines, Iowa. What was at stake? Nothing less than "[our] ambitions of self-respect and species' survival" (Jordan, 1985: 83). The breadth of June Jordan's geopolitical imaginary, her global "majority people of the

world" map of care, challenges a DEI sensibility where identity is valuable as a means of so-called minorities plunking down a seat at the blood-stained table (Jordan, 1978). Instead, June Jordan offers us her revolutionary traveling -- an ethic that propels us to reach toward the worlds we do not yet have, but desperately need.

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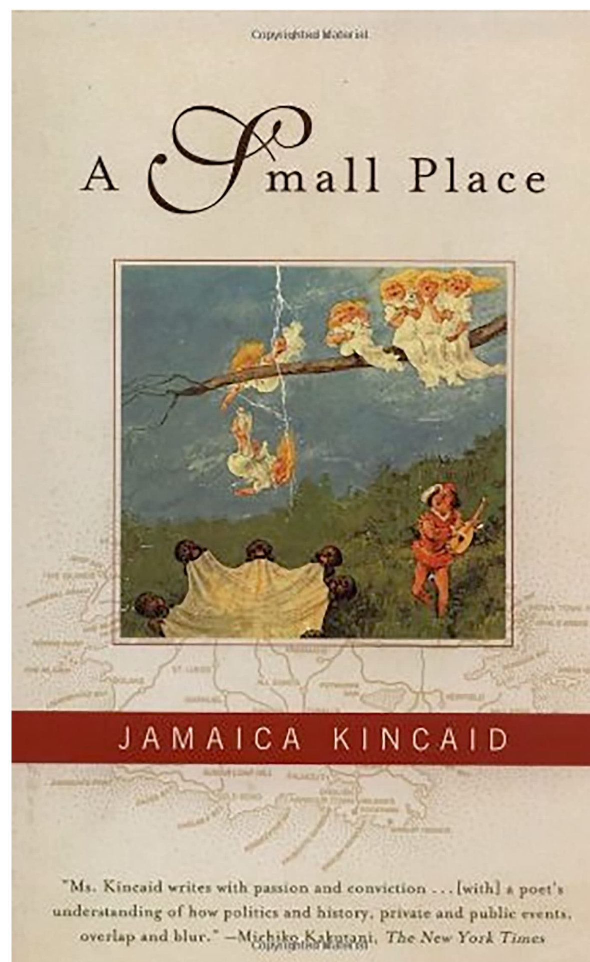
RADICAL TEACHER

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

Teaching Note

Writing in Place with Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place*

by Jesse Curran



JAMAICA KINCAID,. *A SMALL PLACE*. FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX, 1988.

Twenty years ago, when I was an undergraduate at SUNY Geneseo, all students were required to take two classes: "Humanities I" and "Humanities II." The sequence presented the Western Humanities from Greek beginnings to the twentieth century. It was a "great books" approach at the core of a liberal arts agenda and was challenging, formative, and riddled with discourses of dominant and oppressive ideologies. While instructors had some freedom to select representative texts, the narrative was fairly canonical. In my senior year, I was a Teaching Assistant for a section of Humanities II with an English professor who vocally advocated for her Marxist-Feminist-Postcolonial critical practices. She openly critiqued the canon, even as she rigorously read the texts and taught us to see the ideologies embedded in political discourse, philosophical hierarchies, and literary form. To finish the sequence, my professor, who became a mentor and life-long friend, chose to teach Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place,* which, as she argued, offered a necessary critique of the Western tradition. *A Small Place* was the text that intellectually undid what we had just done. The heft of Kincaid's sentences confronts the colonial legacies that are all too ubiquitous in works of the Western tradition. As Kincaid powerfully questions, "Do you wonder why people like me are shy about being capitalists? Well, it's because we, for as long as we have known you, *were* capital" (37).

Twenty years later, I find myself teaching a wide range of literature courses in a small English department that values multicultural content. One of the courses I now teach is "Literature Across Cultures: Theory." The course is designed to introduce students to a sampling of critical perspectives, so they might begin to develop their interpretive muscles through exploring different literary theories. In addition to critiquing a range of literary texts, we experiment with asking the same theoretical questions of children's books and popular movies in order to generate interpretations and to demonstrate the possibilities of divergent views.

When I was first tasked with teaching this course, I knew right away that I wanted to teach *A Small Place,* as it had been so highly formative in shaping my own sense of how identity-based literary theories had done–and continued to do–such valuable work in critiquing dominant power structures. *A Small Place* exposes many of the key ideas of postcolonial theory; it is also highly relevant to ecocritical and Marxist thought (two theories we address in the course). In the text, Kincaid reflects upon her experiences growing up in Antigua and the ways in which British colonial rule impacted education, government, economy, and daily life. Kincaid begins the book, "If you go to Antigua as a tourist, this is what you will see" -- and takes the reader on an insider's tour of Antigua, including stops at the airport, hotel, hospital, local library, and beyond (3). As her narrative moves through the place, she reveals details of her own childhood, with a particular focus on social issues like governmental corruption and economic inequity, making visible what is sometimes invisible for the tourist. I am particularly fascinated by what Kincaid does with genre, adapting the exploitative gaze of the travel narrative to force the reader into an uncomfortable space of feeling complicit in the extension of colonial and postcolonial history into a neocolonial present. The book had a profound effect on my perspective as a young person eager to travel and explore the world. When Kincaid calls the tourist "ugly" -- and the second person voice posits that ugly tourist as the reader -- contemporary complicity is exposed and it can be powerfully instructive.

Quite a number of students at my institution have ethnic roots in the Caribbean, so they bring an empathetic perspective to class discussions about the text, as they have experiences travelling to places like Antigua not necessarily as a tourist. For others, the Caribbean offers a relatively accessible "tropical paradise" vacation experience that is alluring. To facilitate discussion on the dynamics of Kincaid's framing of exploitative tourism, I show the class a six-minute "Antigua Vacation Travel Guide" video produced by Expedia. The students are able to easily identify the ways in which the place is being "sold" and how brief mentions of historical landmarks (connected to slavery, sugar plantations, colonial forts, etc.) are pleasantly framed in favor of the exultation of sandy beaches and "island time." We then begin to identify how Kincaid's text is extremely different, pointing out textual examples that are by no means featured on the travel video. For example, Kincaid writes: "the contents of your lavatory might, just might, graze gently against your ankle as you made carefree in the water, for you see, in Antigua, there is no proper sewage-disposal system. But the Caribbean Sea is very big and the Atlantic Ocean is even bigger; it would amaze even you to know the number of black slaves this ocean has swallowed" (14). We spend time unpacking examples like this, where Kincaid moves swiftly from problems in infrastructure to the history of slavery, suggesting ways in which the geographical sweep of the Atlantic swallows the historical memory her book works to reveal.

The student population at my institution is largely commuter, low-income, and first-generation; students usually balance school with full time employment and care-taking labor. I've noticed that my students are often exhausted and overwhelmed at the end of the semester with multiple capstone research essays. As a small way of responding to this larger end-of-term exhaustion, if the course requires a research essay, I schedule the paper mid-semester. I then present an alternative final assessment by designing an assignment that integrates a creative component. For example, students have reversed ekphrasis and have painted their interpretations of a poem. One student recently designed a costume from thrift store rummaging for *Othello's* Desdemona. Another student crocheted a crown of the flowers Ophelia tosses in *Hamlet.* The students then write a reflection supporting their creative choices, analyzing examples from the text specifically relevant to their creative choices. Students often express how much they enjoy this assignment at the end, noting how it allows them freedom to respond in ways that jive with their passions.

For "Literature Across Cultures: Theory," I have been experimenting with a new creative assignment connected to *A Small Place,* which is also tied to my current writing

project, a series of place-based essays and poems. In this writing project, I work to take a hard and critical look at the economic and racial inequities of my place -- and to examine my own privilege and complicity in ongoing segregation and environmental degradation. I challenge the students with writing their own postcolonial travelog, channeling Kincaid's tone and rhetorical strategies. I ask them to take on the second person and narrate the different and sometimes contradictory ways of seeing their hometowns or neighborhoods. We all start echoing Kincaid's language: *if you come to X* (Levittown, Farmingdale, Ozone Park), *this is what you will see.*

In order to encourage a shift in critical perspective concerning Long Island and the boroughs of New York City (where almost all of my students are from), for about two class sessions, I open discussions and informal workshops about local history. Very few students have much prior awareness of local history, and especially not local Indigenous history. Given time restraints, our dive isn't too deep, but is just enough to fathom and become aware of the depths we *could* explore. I am careful to outline questions that bear direct connections to Kincaid's work. For example, early in *A Small Place,* Kincaid notes whom the airport in Antigua is named after, so I ask my students to try to learn more about their local place names. Where did the word "Massapequa" come from? Who is the "Smith" in Smithtown? In addition, I provide them with some articles that discuss Long Island's racial and economic segregation. In our previous course unit, we explored ecocritical approaches, so I also introduce some of the basics of local environmental justice concerns (superfund sites, industrial plumes, differences in water quality and pollution based on socio-economic demographics, etc.). There isn't enough time to do a deep dive into research here, and perhaps more importantly, the introduction reveals the depths of our collective ignorance, and how this very "overlooking" becomes part of what practicing literary theory seeks to reveal. What do we overlook and why? What voices are missing? When we think about "our island," what are the narratives we have long been taught and who scripted those stories?

In order to encourage class discussion, I share with the students a sample essay that I wrote in response to the assignment, which reflects upon my own experiences growing up on Long Island. My essay largely negotiates how I grew up feeling ashamed of my family's working-class identity, as I lived on the fridges of a wealthy "gold coast" community. It also reflects how my friends and I were raised to participate in racist ways of thinking -- as we were told about "good" and "bad" sides of town, code words our elders used for racially segregated neighborhoods. I hope my own admission of uncomfortable emotions like shame and guilt, as well as using writing as a path toward atoning for my ignorance, helps open discussion of what can sometimes be uncomfortable to recognize and voice. I recall one student responding to my essay saying that she too "always felt poor," even as she realized her family was comfortably middle class.

Students often find that once they begin drafting, they have much material to interrogate and reflect upon. As a response to the structural segregation on Long Island, many students write about the invisible lines in their towns that separate people by class and race. Consider the example of a first-generation Salvadorian student who lives in Springs, a small hamlet near East Hampton. She offered a scathing and emotionally powerful critique of the economic oppression of the tourist economy that both sustains and often demeans her family, who largely work in service industries providing for summering celebrities and Manhattanites. Another student wrote about white flight through noticing the crumbling infrastructure and outdated textbooks in his neighborhood school in Queens. Another student wrote about never knowing that his hometown of Levittown had excluded non-white people from buying homes in post-war America. Students will write about their existential discomfort in walking down blocks with MAGA flags and tell stories of the silent suffering among their peers from opioids.

In many ways, this assignment asks students to write about something they know intimately, but perhaps have not yet had the critical frame or rhetorical position through which to write. Kincaid's book, in providing both the frame and the rhetorical gestures, offers a compelling point of entry. Emulating Kincaid's second person seems to liberate students to be as cynical and critical as they please. They also find a space for ambivalence, as they explore their desire to maintain nostalgic affection along with the other socio-economic realities that are part of their lived experience, particularly in connection to their identities as workers, immigrants, and members of other historically oppressed groups.

The most common comment that I receive from students through the drafting and discussion surrounding this assignment echoes "I never really thought about…." As one student writes, "I had driven down Thomas Powell Boulevard countless times but never ever thought to stop and question who he was." Turns out he was responsible for "purchasing" land from Indigenous tribes all across Long Island. Connected to their creative narrative, students also write a reflection identifying what ideas from literary theory helped them analyze their place. In our final class session, the students all read a paragraph from their travelogs–and we collectively listen and learn from one another. I sense we all learn a bit more about our "island" and all find a bit more courage to share our stories. Ultimately, *A Small Place* stands as an invaluable text in encouraging students to think theoretically. It also provides an opening for them to narrate their own stories, recognizing the layers of complexity and contradiction involved with being a resident of a place and a subject in history.

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Jesse Curran is a poet, essayist, scholar, and teacher. Trained as an environmental humanist, she is passionate about interdisciplinary approaches to the ethical restoration of place. Her creative work has appeared in dozens of literary journals, including *Blueline, After the Art, Green Humanities, About Place,* and *Ruminate*. Her academic work, which explores connections between ecopoetic theory and contemplative practices, has been published in *The Emily Dickinson Journal, The Trumpeter, The Arrow*, and in other edited volumes. She teaches full-time in the English department at SUNY Old Westbury.

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Teaching Note

Representation in an Age of Genocide

by Gregory Shafer

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Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question; unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; through others through the difficulty of rightly framing it.

– W.E.B. Dubois (54)

Information is a funny thing. It only works if it is freely available to the people of a society. Education is always ideological, but we must be critical thinkers to see its manipulation.

I make these statements as classes across the nation begin to assess the Israeli slaughter of thousands of innocent Palestinians and the incredible failure of media to cover this obvious act of genocide. As bombs reign over schools and hospitals in Gaza, American students are being warned that any acts of "anti-Semitism" -- any words that suggest Israel is culpable for stealing land and expunging indigenous people from their homes -- will result in severe punishments.

So much for information on the Palestinians and the history of racism they have endured. But this is only part of the story. This is only part of the Dubois unasked question. Happening alongside of this campaign of misinformation is an equally vexing attack on the writings of other marginalized groups in many conservative states. In January 2023, Florida sent a letter to the College Board rejecting its proposed Advanced Placement African American Studies course, citing concerns about six topics of study, including the Movement for Black Lives, Black feminism, and reparations. Governor. Ron DeSantis said the course violates the so-called Stop WOKE Act, which he signed last year.

So many "unasked questions" in a time of genocide and racism. So many questions that cannot be asked because powerful forces control a narrative that removes vital language from a nation's lexicon. Will mainstream American media include words like *genocide* in its reports on the brutal bombings in Gaza? In fact, they won't -- are not allowed to use such provocatively revealing words despite their obvious truths.

Challenging Students of Flint

In his book *Invisible Man,* Ralph Ellison talked of the failure of the white world to see him beyond an abstraction. "I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me" (3). In my class at Mott Community College in Flint, Michigan -- a class comprised of African American, Middle Eastern, and White students -- I challenged the writers to explore and think critically about media representation in much the same way I did six years earlier during the water crisis in our city. To begin the assignment, I talked at length about the concerns I had about not only the unrelenting bombing of innocent Palestinians but the skewed way the media covered the entire war. I explained my own observations about the failure of media outlets and academic institutions to provide a balanced perspective on the issue of Palestine and Israel, and provided resources on the history of the Zionist movement. How many knew that Palestinians had lived in Israel for hundreds of years before the migration of Jews? How many knew that the violence in Israel involved what many believe to be the stealing of land from indigenous people in much the same way that whites stole land from indigenous people in America?

As part of this unit, I showed them several short histories of the region and read excerpts from scholarship, including Rashid Khalidi's *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine* and Ilan Poppe's *Ten Myths about Israel*. In doing this, I invited students to consider the failure of media to represent people of color and to consider their own memories and feelings concerning the Flint water crisis and the way they and their city were depicted by mainstream media. Finally, I asked, "Would you be interested in critiquing the media and its presentation of marginalized groups. Would you like to have a voice in speaking to the way you and other marginalized groups have been portrayed by powerful media outlets? I think this is an issue that started with Flint and the water crisis and continues today with the massacre of Palestinians." In posing these questions, I followed in the paths of Freire, Bakhtin, and Giroux, who have argued that schools are always political and should be safe places to contest cultural and political norms, liberating students to "rewrite their experiences and perceptions through an engagement with various texts, ideological positions, and theories" (Giroux 176).

Indeed, in answering these questions, many students were excited to expose the injustice in the way media had defined them as Flint residents and defined other marginalized groups. Many had followed the months of bombing in Gaza and felt solidarity with the Palestinians, who were being subjected to the "same racism we endured in 2016." One Middle Eastern student claimed the media was pro-Israel and were promulgating a biased view of the war. "I was here during the water crisis and now I see what is happening to Palestinians," she said. "The media creates a vision of people of color that helps to keep us down -- that limits us in the eyes of society. We are not people. We are not individuals. How else can you explain the way they celebrated the rescue of Israeli hostages, while hundreds of nameless Palestinians died. We are disposable."

In arguing this, she reminded her peers that while media outlets discussed the poison water and the toxic damage done to black and brown children in Flint, most felt marginalized and invisible during the crisis. Most knew that white neighborhoods would never have been asked to tolerate water that turned colors and made their children sick. Most of the white victims would have been interviewed and been given names. Other students added to the discussion, wondering why they were depicted in such a monolithic way -- why Flint was seen as a helpless place that seemed congruent with countless images of minority cities that could not get their lives together because of something *they* failed to do. "I think of the images" argued a student, "and I know the entire world

sees us as poor and incompetent, waiting for white people to save us from ourselves."

In many of the discussions that followed -- as we began to explore the media coverage of Gaza and the Israeli offensive -- students reinforced the idea that Flint was a thriving city, filled with centers of higher learning and newly renovated condominiums that were victimized by the incompetence of a *white* governor who knew he could save money by treating people of color differently. For my students, representation was paramount. The desire to take charge of the narrative and become active change agents was integral to their motivation. As David Kirkland reminds us, "teachers are human rights workers, and our classrooms are progressive vineyards thirsty for liberation's laborers. Classrooms are never neutral sites" (Kirkland).

"What should we do?" I asked my students as we began to discuss this major writing assignment. In assigning this controversial topic, I wanted my class to recognize the way information works and the ideological elements of what many take for granted as facts. "Have we been inculcated to see Palestinians -- people who are dark -- as evil terrorists while also seeing Israelis as victims and heroes simply because of their long-term connection to America? And is there any consonance between this and the way Flint was characterized by a media that saw us as invisible?"

These are the first steps in introducing the issue of race, propaganda, and hegemony. In particular, I devoted much of a class to the idea of hegemony and what it means. I focused on cultural hegemony and the definition of a "hidden but pervasive power involving such an extreme domination of social life that we seldom recognize or question its legitimacy" (Howard 106). In introducing the definition, I discussed the way news organizations and educational institutions treat "truth." Is there an unspoken acceptance of certain ideas that have become so entrenched in our collective minds that we cease to question them? In the same way, how can schools and media become complicit in advancing a truth that perpetuates stereotypes and reinforces injustice and racism. We need to remember that media are made up of people who bring their own biases, their own entrenched prejudices to the reporting and writing of a story. And yet, I added, some of these stories become our truth.

Marcus, a student in my class, failed to find a single discussion of *genocide* by the mainstream media, noting that the articles focused on Israeli fear of terrorism and questions of when the bombing should stop but never about the justice of the bombing. "I read of thousands of Palestinians being killed -- of schools being leveled, but they never use the word genocide," added Marcus as he reviewed his research. Added a second student: When the Israeli kidnap victims were released, we knew their names. We saw them reunited with their families. And yet, with the Palestinians, we only see masses of people crying. There is no sense of humanity. What are the names of the dead Palestinians?"

Especially interesting was biased reporting by the *New York Times* about rapes committed by members of Hamas. When Marcus delved into the issue, he uncovered a pro-Israeli slant by the *Times* and the three writers who accused Hamas of rape. Indeed, much of Marcus's report focused on Anat Schwartz, one of the authors of the story. Schwartz, Marcus told the class, had been part of the Israeli Defense Force and had written anti-Palestinian comments before becoming part of the dubious report on rape. Despite this clear bias, her clear animus against Palestinians was never a factor in the publishing of an obviously biased piece against Hamas and the Palestinian people. In considering Marcus's research and the willingness of *the New York Time*s to publish a story that clearly lacked objectivity -- that reduced Palestinians to rapists and thugs--one thinks of Malcolm X's statement, "If you aren 't careful, the newspapers will have you hating the people who are being oppressed and loving the people who are doing the oppressing" (Malcolm X At The Audubon, 1964).

After discussing hegemony, I introduced students to major stories since the October 7th attack. I also showed them images of other headlines, including the Treyvon Martin case, where Martin was shown hooded and menacing, despite the fact that he was the victim of aggression. "The image helps shape how we see Treyvon Martin," I reminded students. A second image was of O.J. Simpson during his murder trial. In this case, Simpson's facial image was darkened to make him seem more threatening, more dangerous. "So much can be communicated before a word is ever said or written, and I want you to be critical -- to investigate and see if the media is being fair to marginalized groups."

The Essays

While students were at first hesitant, they quickly became excited about the project. Many of my African American students had long questioned the media's portrayal of Flint, Michigan and the constant references to dirty water, and wanted to interrogate the way the media create images of other marginalized people. "I have often thought that media people come to Flint to get an easy story about dirty water. I appreciate that but they need to show how resilient we are and how we have overcome the challenges," said Sonia. "We are more than poor people who drank dirty water. We are not only victims." Others were intrigued with the conspicuous lack of objectivity in reference to the Israeli bombing of Gaza, seeing connections to Flint. "The more that I read about this, the more I realize that this is about people being eradicated," said Blair. "Palestinians are darker. They're different -- like Black people and Native Americans. It's easy to treat them differently and see them as monsters or 'the other'."

Nadia's Essay

Nadia was born in the United States, but her parents were from Jordan, and she savored the opportunity to critique the media and what she argued were "lies and distortion due to a blind media." Nadia started her paper

by suggesting that "One person's terrorist is another person's patriot." She went on to write that "the media is driven by a Zionist point of view that refuses to allow the word *genocide* to be used while bemoaning anti-Semitism." In her essay, she suggested that American society is so slathered in Zionist propaganda that it can write about anti-Semitism while Israelis bomb and kill 30,000 Palestinians. Indeed, Nadia's paper referred to an *Atlantic* essay titled "The Golden Age of American Jews is Ending"; Nadia noted that since the massacre of Palestinians had started in October 2023, *The Atlantic* had published three articles on anti-Semitism, seemingly missing the irony that their lament was being discussed while Israel was in the midst of destroying another race of people. "Ellison wrote about not being seen, and I can write with certainty that Palestinians are not seen by an American nation that is completely controlled by Zionist voices. What's hilarious and sad is how oblivious these Zionist voices are to their own entitlement. How else could a group bemoan its poor treatment while watching and participating in another group's annihilation?" said Nadia with disdain.

Nadia's paper brought a silent awe to the class. Most students eschew the political, but her passion turned heads and empowered others to think more deeply and critically about race, color, media, and representation. Jasmin later changed her topic and wrote about media and its representation of African Americans, arguing that much of the media tries to make Black people white by straightening their hair and changing their color to fit an appearance that satisfies white audiences. Jasmin's paper was fascinating. She examined the look of African American women in a series of commercials and one T.V. show, *Abbott Elementary*, and argued that stereotypes were both prevalent and disturbing. "It is easy to see how funny many of these representations of black people are to white audiences. They make being black a compromise. It's sad." Jasmin was also able to come full circle, making connections with the hegemonic treatment of Palestinians, suggesting that "neither African Americans nor Palestinians have any power when it comes to either their lives or how they are represented in the media and other places of power. They are included in the media but their representation is not their own."

Nathan volunteered next and wrote about the cultural genocide against black people, beginning his paper with an essay by actor Ossie Davis, who bemoans the many ways that the word *black* has become a word of derision, despite its seemingly neutral place as a color. Marcus began his draft by writing:

When we all think of *Black,* we think of evil, darkness, bad luck, dirtiness, and inferiority. Why is that? Why is white pure and heavenly. Why are angels white while darkness is associated with villains? Why do corrupt cowboys wear black hats? This is not an immutable truth. It is a product of years of information that has been given to us. Our representation has been constructed by media, by popular westerns, by television shows that make us pimps and drug dealers? This is the media at work, crafting our lives for us.

Nathan's paper was not the perfunctory examination of facts, but rather an effusive and sometimes angry exploration of media in its various forms. After reading his paper, he included a brief power point that examined the various ways that black has been socially constructed to make African Americans hate themselves. He also discussed the way Nat's Turner's life and eventual execution had been fought over by both Black and White writers who sought to produce their own truth about the slave and controversial rebel. "I leave you with this question: If African Americans cannot take control of their own identity -- of their own stories like Nat Turner -- how can we expect Palestinians to do anything about the lies told about them?"

In the end, my students seemed empowered to ask many of the questions that W.E.B. Dubois felt were unasked. To engage in true praxis, which involved the synthesis of critical thinking and action, students must be liberated to contest the wisdom and verities of established structures of power and authority. They must become active agents in questioning media and the representations that have been established for them. They must transcend what is given and create their own empowered image of themselves. bell hooks calls this "engaged pedagogy," arguing that we must restore students and their will to be fully self-actualized (Teaching 18). I agree with Baker Bell, Jones Stanbrough, and Everett when they argue that "Teaching Black youth to be critical of the mainstream agenda and to advocate for themselves by becoming authors of their own stories can be a powerful act of social activism and is essential for social transformation" (131). It also, in many ways, empowers students to ask those questions they never would feel able to ask as they wend their way through a very political educational world. Democracy and justice must be our goals as we invite our students to question power and find their voices -- their own identities -- in the process.

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Gregory Shafer teaches at Mott Community College in Flint, Michigan and is past president of the Michigan Council of Teachers of English. He continues to push in any way he can, for peace in the Middle East and a more balanced approach to the two state solution.

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RADICAL TEACHER

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

Review

Welcome to Commie High

by Pamela Annas

WELCOME TO COMMIE HIGH. DIRECTED AND PRODUCED BY DONALD HARRISON. (2023). BULLFROG FILMS. 94 MINUTES. AVAILABLE FOR ACADEMIC STREAMING ON DOCUSEEK2.

Welcome to Commie High. Directed and produced by Donald Harrison. (2023). Bullfrog Films. 94 minutes. Available for academic streaming on Docuseek2.

Welcome to Commie High is an engaging documentary film about one enduring educational experiment begun in the Free School Movement of the late '60s and early '70s. Inspired by School Without Walls and Philadelphia's New Park School, a group of radical educators created an alternative high school in Ann Arbor, Michigan—Community High School. The film is fab, and your students in education and American history will be astonished and energized by its story.

The documentary was filmed over the course of a school year as it relates through interviews with current and former students as well as current and former faculty the history of Community High School from its beginnings in 1972. Amazingly, Community HS is still going strong, one of the very few such alternative schools which survived the past 50 years.

At the beginning, admission was first come/first served. Prospective students camped out on the grounds for days and weeks to get in. Community HS took in students, said a faculty member, who were failing at other schools and/or were geniuses. "It was a place where you could fit in where you never were able to fit in before," said a student. So many 13- and 14-year-olds wanted to apply that, in order to provide equal access, the school finally had to switch to a lottery system. By the 1990s, Community High School was outperforming all the other high schools in the Ann Arbor area. As one student remarked: "It became the cool school because it became the smart school."

The heart of the school is the forum, "a homeroom on steroids," said a teacher who is one of the founding members of the faculty and is still teaching there. Every student is assigned to a forum, which meets every day. From the beginning, it was more like a (good) family in providing support, modeling critical thinking, discovering what each student was passionate about, and then providing academic and community resources so students could explore their interests. Some students spent more time outside the school walls than in—internships, camping trips; working in the school's nursery; and creating artistic, political, community and intellectual projects. One project was a protest march to the local courthouse where a student's father, a Muslim man who had immigrated 18 years before and raised his family in the community, was up for a hearing that might have led to him being deported. Spoiler alert: His case was dismissed.

Students are interviewed in the documentary as well as faculty and former faculty. Many of the current faculty have been there for many years or were once students at Commie High [either 'Commie High' or Community HS ??], graduated, got a few academic degrees and came back to teach at the school. One featured former student, a single mom, sits at the kitchen table with her 14-year-old daughter who has applied and, because of the lottery, has a one in four chance of getting in. No legacy kids here. The lottery is public, and faculty pull names of applicants out of a bowl.

The amazing feature of 'Commie High'[quote marks?] is that it is indeed like a family. It is clear from interviews with faculty who had graduated from the school that going back to teach there is like going home. And my sense is that that is why the school succeeded when so many of the promising free school movement schools did not. The schools which didn't survive were schools which stayed "hippie schools," remarked one of the teachers, schools which did not stay connected to their communities and which did not evolve as the times changed.

I invited a friend over to watch the film who had gone to an alternative high school in Newton, MA. from 1972 to 1974. A radical lawyer rather than an educator, he was impressed with the story of this alternative high school and said, "yeah, mine was definitely a hippie high school with very little connection to the community. We were the outsiders. It lasted less than 10 years."

'Commie High,' Community High School, seems to have had from the beginning deep ties to the larger community around it as well as its student-centered structure and a faculty and administration totally committed to student-centered learning. The number of its students coming back to teach provided continuity and, in this riveting film, the history of a remarkable school.

Pamela Annas is Professor Emerita of English at University of Massachusetts, Boston, where she taught courses on American working-class literature, modern and contemporary poets, science fiction, and writing. Recipient of a Mina Shaughnessy Fellowship and an NEH Seminar, she has published articles on feminist approaches to teaching writing, on working-class literature, and in feminist criticism. Books include Sylvia Plath: A Disturbance in Mirrorsand, with Robert C. Rosen, four editions of a textbook/anthology, Literature and Society. Her poetry has appeared in anthologies and journals. She directed a lively residential American Studies program, Semester on Nantucket, for three fall semesters, and was recruited by students at Goddard Cambridge Graduate School for Social Change to teach seminars in feminist writing. She has served on the Radical Teachereditorial board since 1979.

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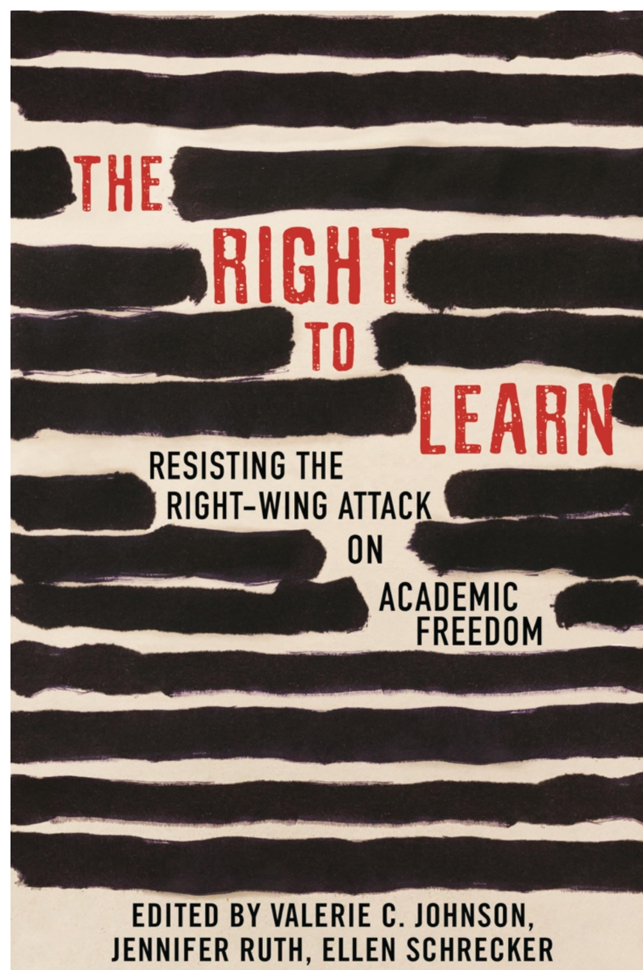
Review

The Right to Learn: Resisting the Right Wing Attack on Academic Freedom

by Robert Cohen



THE RIGHT TO LEARN: RESISTING THE RIGHT WING ATTACK ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM, EDITED BY VALERIE C. JOHNSON, JENNIFER RUTH, AND ELLEN SCHRECKER (2024). BEACON PRESS.

The Right to Learn: Resisting the Right Wing Attack on Academic Freedom, Edited by Valerie C. Johnson, Jennifer Ruth, and Ellen Schrecker (2024). Beacon Press.

Keeping up with the American right wing's authoritarian tendencies is a daunting task. Day by day, the right opens new fronts in its war on democracy, free speech, and academic freedom, fueled by lies and lavishly funded misinformation and disinformation campaigns. Journalists seem best suited to keep track of this parade of atrocities, since those working for newspapers can supplement the record on a daily basis, much like the Washington Post's fact checkers– who by the end of the Trump presidency had tabulated 30,573 false and misleading statements by the twice-impeached president.

The dizzying pace of right-wing lies and authoritarian initiatives made it impossible for the editors of The Right to Learn: Resisting the Right Wing Attack on Academic Freedom to keep up, since this brilliant and important new anthology, edited by Valerie C. Johnson, Jennifer Ruth, and Ellen Schrecker, took more than a year to research and publish, and went to press before right wingers in Congress and the donor class ushered in the most recent wave of academic unfreedom and free-speech violations, which was the nationwide suppression of the campus movement against the war in Gaza. But though we will need another book to cover this year's firings of college presidents and faculty critics of the war, not to mention the censored graduation speakers and the mass arrests of non-violent student antiwar protesters, The Right to Learn is the book we have all been waiting for about the earlier– and ongoing round of rightwing repression aimed at stifling critical teaching on race, gender, and sexuality. The collection features 13 informative chapters by leading scholars and activists who have been both studying and resisting the attempts of right-wing politicians, billionaires, and think tanks to ban the teaching of Critical Race theory, LGBTQ+ history and anti-racist education, to silence progressive, dissenting voices in K-12 and higher education, and to replace them with a cheerleading American exceptionalist approach to the teaching and learning of politics and history.

The editors of The Right to Learn also bring to this work impressive credentials as defenders of academic freedom: Valerie C. Johnson helped lead the national campaign of the African American Policy Forum, mobilizing faculty senates on 80 campuses to pass resolutions against the recently enacted right-wing-initiated laws and policies barring the teaching of Critical Race Theory and other supposedly divisive topics on racial and gender justice. Jennifer Ruth and Ellen Schrecker have been central figures in the American Association of University Professors' initiatives to preserve academic freedom in the face of a relentless right-wing assault. These editors bring to this volume a sense of urgency that make it–despite its intellectual rigor–far more than a scholarly tome documenting the trampling of academic freedom in Trumpifed America; it is a call to resist, to stand up for the right to teach our students honestly and critically about race and racism, [the] African American experience, gender, sexual identity, and[the] LGBTQ+ experience in the US.

This activist ethos is reflected in the title of The Right to Learn's introductory chapter, "A Time for Faculty to Act," and in the book's structure, which includes not only sections on "the current culture war" that impressively document the academic freedom crisis we face, but also a final section "Collective Action and Visible Resistance." This resistance section narrates stories by faculty, including two riveting accounts from Florida (whose far-right governor, Ron De Santis, has made it ground zero for the trampling of academic freedom), by Sharon Austin and Katie Rainwater, who stood up courageously and effectively for their freedom to teach and deploy their expertise on topics reactionaries seek to ban. Such stories offer powerful evidence that– if they choose to use it– faculty both collectively and individually can defy the would-be censors of the American and inspire others to do the same.

The Right to Learn offers convincing evidence, both quantitative and qualitative, of how extensive and extreme the right-wing legislative offensive has been to restrict the teaching of controversial topics. PEN America refers to these laws as "educational gag orders," and in the informative chapter by PEN organizer Jonathan Friedman and his colleagues Jeremy C. Young and James Tager, we learn that since 2021 state legislators introduced 306 bills in 45 states attempting to enact such gag orders, resulting in the passage of 26 laws in 17 states (47). If such statistics are depressing, even more alarming is the point made by Ellen Schrecker–author of No Ivory Tower, the classic study of McCarthyism's impact on campus–that this recent wave of educational repression is "worse than McCarthyism, which only targeted individual dissenters," while "today's culture wars invade the curriculum and the classroom" (1).

These attempts at repression cannot be viewed in isolation from the larger political climate, most notably the desire of the Trumpist movement to turn the clock back on race and gender equity. As Johnson, Ruth, and Schrecker put it, the educational gag orders have been "fueled by a desire to stall or reverse the gains made by progressive social movements since the 1960s " (2). The case studies in The Right to Learn attest that whether it is a white supremacist or homophobic impulse that yields the gag orders, the motivation is the same, fomenting what Johnson in her insightful chapter terms "an epistemology of ignorance," leaving students untaught and thus clueless about the history and persistence of bigotry and inequality (59). Issac Kamola's chapter documents the ways that a powerful network of right-wing billionaires, think tanks, and pundits have served this mission in their crude assaults on Critical Race Theory and the 1619 Project on slavery. The lesson seems to be that no matter how cynical or intellectually shabby the attacks, they can be impactful if propped up by big bucks and the right-wing media echo chamber. Even the Constitution, when properly distorted, can be enlisted in this assault, as Dennis Parker's brilliant chapter on the 14th amendment attests. This Radical Reconstruction amendment, designed to protect the rights

of formerly enslaved African Americans, is reinvented by the right as a tool for a mythological "color blind" constitution and history of the US, and accordingly is used to claim that Critical Race Theory, in viewing that history more realistically through a lens highlighting systemic racism, is somehow unconstitutional and un-American.

Among the most valuable chapters in The Right to Learn is Ellen Schrecker's, which historicizes the Trumpist assault on academic freedom by tracing its roots to the right-wing backlash against the student movement of the 1960s. She sees that backlash as first eroding and then nearly dissolving the prestige and influence of the university in the US, which the right came to loathe as an institution hijacked by the Left. So unlike what she sees as the university's Golden Age in the Cold War 1950s, the now Left-leaning university and its racially and gender-inclusive curriculum evoked not respect and generous funding, but defunding and disdain from the right as a kind of cultural fifth column, whose iconoclastic teachings, especially on racial and gender equity, were targeted for censorship and erasure.

This '60s backlash argument is helpful in a number of respects, especially with regard to the fiscal crises in higher education, which yielded increasing reliance on contingent–part time and non-tenure line–faculty who so often lack the academic freedom to stand up to would-be censors. This does, as Schrecker notes, make it difficult for faculty to unite to defend academic freedom.

But the idea that higher educational institutions have lost influence since the 1960s–in that supposedly Golden Age back then–seems dubious. There are in fact more than twice as many college students today as there were in the early 1960s. With many polls showing college students leaning left in our own century (most notably when democratic socialist Bernie Sanders was winning presidential college straw polls in 2016), it seems evident that right wingers, from the Wall Street Journal editorial page to Fox News, are upset because colleges and universities have too much influence, and fear that Left-liberal influence has spread to the K-12 curriculum. Of course, such fears are overdrawn, as evidenced by the fact that the #1 major on college campuses since the 1960s has been business. What it really comes down to is that no matter how many elections right-wing Republicans win, they cannot purge university liberalism, cannot control the democratic political ideas and cultural innovations generated by universities, and this–much like the disdain of the Right for Hollywood–ends in right-wing frustration, derision, and attempts at censorship and repression.

Even if we accept the 1960s backlash thesis concerning higher education, this still cannot fully account for the recent tidal wave of educational gag orders, since most of them target K-12 schools, not higher education. According to PEN America, it is only 39% of those orders that target colleges and universities (52). Since there was no mass student rebellion in the K-12 world in the 1960s, a backlash argument does not really work for this pre-college world. Here it seems that a much older reactionary educational ideal is at work. One might characterize this as a right-wing version of reproduction theory. From Samuel Bowles and Hebert Gintis's classic work, Schooling in Capitalist America (1976) through today, leftist critics have bemoaned the way school systems reproduce social inequality and uphold the status quo in the American social order. On the right, on the other hand, such social reproduction in K-12 education is viewed as a plus, as the schools are viewed as an institution designed to serve and preserve the status quo, upholding traditional values. Since this conservative social function is undermined by curricula that challenges racism, homophobia, and sexism, it is little wonder that at school boards, legislative halls, and governors' offices across red-state America such curricular innovations have become a popular punching bag.

If there is any weakness in The Right to Learn it is that none of the chapters focus on school teachers or on their actual classroom experience in the world of K-12 education amidst this era of censorship and book bans. One wants to hear from working teachers, especially those on the front lines of the culture wars, who in red-state America struggle to teach critical thinking in a school world in which it is being outlawed. My own connections with high school teachers in that world suggest a wide spectrum of responses, from fear and compliance to anger and defiance. The history of these teachers, and their colleagues at the middle and primary school level, has yet to be written, and one wishes that some of that history was captured in The Right to Learn.

The alarmist tone of The Right to Learn seems more than justified by the rich and memorable case studies, autobiographical narratives, oral and legislative histories offered by its contributors, as they track the right wing's war on academic freedom. I would be the last person to bemoan this sounding of a fire bell in the night to warn us about right-wing authoritarianism, especially in the wake of January 6. Yet, at the risk of seeming pollyannaish, I suspect that despite all the sound and fury of this 400-pound Trumpist gorilla, its assaults on academic freedom are a sign of weakness, not strength. Generations of progressive scholars, inspired by the social movements of and since the 1960s, have produced powerful empirical and theoretical work that has challenged bigotry, taking us beyond the white parochialism, Eurocentrism, and heteronormativity that once dominated the curriculum. All this has been reinforced for decades through the work of a supremely talented and diverse multitude of novelists, journalists, visual artists, filmmakers, musicians, poets, and playwrights. While, of course, it is sad that red-state America's political elite wants to shutter their classrooms to this culturally cosmopolitan world–and it is important for us, as The Right to Learn insists, to oppose such repression–even there students will encounter this cosmopolitanism and diversity when they go to a movie, watch TV, read a novel, or open a newspaper or their computers. Thus it seems not merely atavistic but pathetic for politicians on the right to imagine that they can reverse a cultural revolution this far advanced via repressive, anti-intellectual state laws that dumb down their schools. The Trumpist attempt to turn the clock back seems fated to fail, and one hopes that books like The Right to Learn, by

inspiring resistance to such revanchism, will make a major contribution to that failure.

Robert Cohen is a professor of social studies and history at NYU. He is currently the senior fellow at the University of California National Center for Free Speech and Civic Engagement. His most recent books are Confronting Jim Crow: Race, Memory, and the University of Georgia in the Twentieth Century (2024) and Rethinking America's Past: Howard Zinn's A People's History of the United States in the Classroom and Beyond, (2021), co-authored by Sonia E. Murrow.

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Poetry

My First Black Friend

by Linda Vandlac Smith

STILL WE REACH FOR ONE ANOTHER BY KATE MORALES VIA JUST SEEDS OPEN ACCESS GRAPHICS COLLECTION

My First Black Friend

-for Ernest

Am I racist? I don't know, but my first black friend might,
my first black friend if you don't count Fred whom I team-
taught and joked around with at work before he lost his
heart and transplanted elsewhere.

I attended the wedding when my first black friend married
a Jewish woman, a ceremony planned with Jewish rituals
on her side of things though my first black friend wanted
his culture represented too. I suggested jumping the broom
with a white self-assurance gleaned from a few novels and
various Oprah Winfrey shows. So after a glass was crushed
beneath a towel, they half-heartedly leapt, and I was never
sure if he did that for himself or for me.

Am I racist? My white kids think so, especially the night
they found me cutting out a coupon for southern fried
chicken from a flier. *You can't give a fried chicken coupon
to a black man*, they objected, horrified, when I explained
it was for my first black friend. *That's stereotyping*, they
argued on script. *Yes, I can*, I said, *because this afternoon
my first black friend confided that he was really missing
southern fried chicken from home. And when I checked
today's mail, I found this coupon. It's providence, isn't it?*

The next day I offered my first black friend the coupon,
carefully reminding him of our previous conversation
saying, *You could use my coupon if you're still hungry
for that chicken,* with an uneasiness that my caution
might be racist.

My first black friend lived in a nearby town not far
from where I grew up where he became friends
with another black man whom he referred to as
"the other black guy in town." There were probably
more than two black men living there, but none
that I could name. Still it was nice that there were
two so each could have one black friend too.

Because my first black friend had a wealth of
white friends at work and around the community.

On MLK Day, he’d visit local public schools and add
authenticity to presentations and performances
on black history. Students loved him, teachers
loved him. My first black friend became well-
known. And in each town, he’d stop to introduce
himself to police, security guards, even a few
women of the DAR if he could catch them before
they jaywalked across main street. Small in
stature but large of voice, my first black friend
could be heard calling to others blocks away.

Am I racist because I feel compelled to tell you
about my first black friend? Maybe it’s up to
my first black friend to say. But that option has
expired, cut off too soon by a malignancy within
hope or purpose, with prescribed poison snaking
through veins like tobacco smoke, through the
drives home from oncology in my compact car
fatigue treated by just being, just being, that
and the dozens of painted handprints from
friends of my first black friend on a homemade
quilt that became his shroud so each of us
could push away loss, and, in the only way
I knew, to hold onto my first black friend.

Linda Vandlac Smith writes in a semi-rural valley north of Seattle. Much of her poetry focuses on interpersonal relationships, Pacific Northwest lifestyles, and their intersections. More than three dozen of her poems have appeared in print and online publications such as *Daily Rattle*, *Chiron Review*, *Permafrost, Pontoon Poetry,* and *Bellingham Review* and anthologies such as *Lavanderia* and *Flip Sides.*

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