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A Curricular Guide for "Reclaiming Humanity: Saving Seattle's First Filipinx US History Course"

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Abstract

In September 2022, Seattle Public Schools (SPS) offered its first Filipinx American US History Course, a high school course that could go towards students' U.S. History graduation requirement. For 50 years, the Filipino American community of Seattle had fought for this course to be implemented and yet, in the same year it was introduced, SPS threatened to cut it from course offerings. The documentary that was created as a result of this, "Reclaiming Humanity: Saving Seattle's First Filipinx American US History Course," follows the students, teachers, and community members in their fight to preserve cross-community liberatory ethnic studies. Since its production, the documentary has been integral to saving the course and is an impactful example of how people can use documentary film for liberatory education. It has been featured at community events, film festivals, and conferences across the country, and has been used in educational and professional settings. We have provided a brief history, impacts, and a curricular guide for those interested in screening the film. Wherever this film is used, we hope that it reminds viewers of the power of community, and shows an example of what it means to reclaim our collective humanity.

Keywords: Filipinx American US History, Ethnic Studies, Community-based Curriculum, Educational Documentary

For 50 years, the Filipino American community of Seattle has tirelessly advocated for the inclusion of our history in Seattle Public Schools. Filipinos have played an important role in shaping the history of Seattle, the Northwest, and California. By studying the rich history and culture of Filipinx Americans, students are able to develop a greater appreciation for diversity and cultural awareness, enrich their educational experience, and strengthen the fabric of our community.

With the hard work of our community board, composed of organizations and individuals including Filipino American National Historical Society, Filipino American Educators of Washington, and University of Washington's AAS 360 Filipino American History students, a Filipinx American History Class was created and approved by the Seattle School Board and fulfilled the US history graduation credit. This was a significant victory towards achieving the recognition of our history in schools, but within its first year it was threatened to be cut due to the $131 million deficit in Seattle Public Schools. Through our documentary "Reclaiming Humanity" we follow the students,

teachers, and community members in their historic fight to preserve cross community liberatory ethnic studies.

When the idea for the documentary first began, Tianna was in the middle of her first year teaching the Filipinx American US History course at Seattle Public Schools (SPS), and had been pulled into a meeting with her supervisor. At the meeting, they were informed that they would no longer be working at Seattle Public Schools next year because they were cutting the course. Out of 15 other Ethnic Studies courses, SPS sought to cut 13 of them—Native American Composition Literature, Black Studies, Women's Literature, Kiswahili, and more were all on the chopping block.

We started recording interviews and clips to capture this mistreatment of Ethnic Studies. We were so easily discarded and yet, district administrators and certain school board members never saw what happened in our classes. They didn't see the value of bringing community into the classroom, and bringing the classroom out to the community. They didn't see the value of cross cultural solidarity building or of students feeling empowered in their identities. They refused to prioritize Ethnic studies. But as our ancestors did, time and time again, the students of these courses resisted. Students organized a campaign, mobilized with the community, and saved the course for another year. They set the tone for how we fight for our futures, and set a precedent for others nationwide. We knew in those moments that if we didn't document this struggle, we might end up hearing a version of our story that was not ours.

Making "Reclaiming Humanity: Saving Seattle's First Filipinx US History" allowed us to preserve community histories and advocate for social justice by amplifying stories that might otherwise go unheard. Despite the significant contributions of Filipinx people in Seattle and beyond, there is little evidence that educational institutions have made a deliberate effort to center these voices within the traditionally eurocentric narratives embedded in the dominant curriculum. Students in the Seattle Public Schools Filipinx American class found self-worth and empowerment in the curriculum and filmmaking process. As Clark and Aufderheide (2014) write, "People come in as participants in a media project and leave, recognizing themselves as members of a public—a group of people commonly affected by an issue. They have found each other and exchanged information on an issue in which they all see themselves as having a stake." Two students reflected on the impact of the class, with one saying, "It really opened my eyes to how much Filipinos impacted not just America, but the whole world," and another adding, "It was a really supported environment and it felt like information and concepts that were actually new, interesting, and important" (Andresen & Aguilar, 2024).The creation of the film included not only the voices of a historically marginalized group, but also celebrated efforts to bring the community together, recover ancestral knowledge, and build solidarity in challenging systems of oppression. "Documentaries have the power to engage minds and hearts on an empathetic, human level. Unlike most news and academic information, they connect real lives and places to issues and ideas that might otherwise seem abstract. Paired with resources that help audiences reflect and reframe the issues, documentaries can also inspire real change" (Not About Me, n.d.). The film and the curricular guide serve as tools to educate not just a particular community but to create an environment centered around learning, compassion and justice.

The last few years since we finished the documentary were transformative and reinforced our dedication to Ethnic Studies, and most importantly, to the next generation of critical thinkers, learners, and organizers. The documentary has taken us across the country in educational,

community, and even restaurant spaces. We have talked to public defenders in Los Angeles about the legal struggles we faced to support their work in fighting for Ethnic studies. We have shown our film at a film festival in the park of Seattle's Historic Chinatown for the Seattle Asian American Film Festival, and have broken bread at Archipelago restaurant in Seattle, where they use parts of the course curriculum to serve Filipinx American history with their seven course meals. We have hosted panel discussions at the Filipino American National Historical Society Conference, the American Studies Association Conference and universities that feature the students from the course and immerse participants in our classroom. The documentary has been used to fundraise for the Filipinx American US History Course itself, supporting student materials, transportation to field trips, and honorariums for prominent Filipinx American guest speakers. "Reclaiming Humanity" has become a storytelling tool, and a shining example of why documenting our stories is important. Instead of convincing people that this work has happened, we get to show them.

The documentary has also brought us closer to other ethnic studies and Filipinx American studies fights nationwide. We are in a community with fights for Ethnic Studies in Hawai'i, the San Francisco Bay Area, New York, Chicago, Houston, Alaska, Las Vegas, other parts of Washington State, and even in the Philippines. Currently, we are organizing additional screenings at community centers, conferences, and film festivals. We even have a social media presence where people get updates on the class and film screenings. This documentary is the story of a people who refuse to be forgotten. We hope you find yourself and those around you in our story: https://youtu.be/tTy0abuvf4w?feature=shared.

Curricular Guide

The following are our recommendations and suggested activities for teaching the documentary. We encourage holding space for conversation after the film. If possible, have food and drinks, as this is meant to celebrate the community and bring them into the classroom. Have fun with it! Prior to screening, get familiar with the film and the community behind it: https://www.filameducatorsofwa.org/projects. Consider your audience. What will be most engaging or useful for them? What challenges do they face?

Guiding Questions

- Archival histories and the importance of Telling our Stories
  - What stories, values, and/or lessons have been passed down in your family?
  - What is the role of oral histories in understanding the heartbeat of a community or how a community grows and flourishes in times where their stories are often silenced or invisible?
- Fights for Ethnic Studies
  - How would learning about all the contributions that BIPOC communities made in the formation of this country impact the way students interact in a global society?
  - What lessons can we learn from bringing community experiences into the classroom? How do first person narratives provide multiple perspectives to a single point in history?
- Developing your own community-based curriculum
  - What are the benefits in building a community map and including community in educating ourselves and others?

  - What does it mean to include community in the classroom?
  - What skills, passions, and connections do you have that can contribute to the classroom?
- Student Autonomy and Capacity for Change
  - What skills, passions, and connections do you have that you want to bring into the classroom?
  - What changes do you want to make in your school? In your community?
  - How would you go about this change?

Suggested Format

- Introduction to your organization or program
- Land, Ancestor, and Labor Acknowledgments in relation to the film's contents
  - Example of how to create a relevant audience/event specific Land Acknowledgment: https://www.ramaytush.org/land-acknowledgement.html
  - Ancestor Acknowledgement: Who do we want to bring into the space?
  - Labor Acknowledgment: Whose labor made it possible for us to be here today?
    - e.g.: Event organizers, Janitorial staff who keep the room clean, farmers and chefs who made our food offerings possible, etc.
- Host an initial group discussion that allows for participants to reflect on their stories and why they showed up today. This can be a group discussion or a think, pair, share. Remind participants that their stories matter!
  - Where is your family from?
  - What pieces of your identity are you proud of?
  - How did you get to where you are now? (physically, emotionally, philosophically, etc.)
  - How do you show up as an ____? (educator, student, community member, etc.).
  - What brought you here today?
- After sharing out, transition into screening the film.

Group Discussion/Activity After Screening the Film

- Take a moment to reflect on the film and any guiding questions related to your event/audience. Ask for participants' initial reactions, connections, questions, etc.

Activity Name	Proposed Audience	Themes	Steps	Materials
Our Timeline	Students, Community	Archival histories, the importance of telling our stories	Ask participants to use post-it notes to mark important events in their family/community history on the timeline. Make connections between the events through student community led discussion	Use the Filipino American Curriculum Team Timeline. Email faew1972@gmail.com to download Tape
Community Mapping	Community, Organization,	Building capacity for	Ask participants to identify places, people, programs/events, and	Paper

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	Curriculum Development	community, Developing your own community-based curriculum	platforms in their community. If they don't know, ask them who they could potentially reach out to to find out. This can be an affinity group activity, individual, or based on location. Brainstorm one "event" or lesson plan that includes one person, one place, one program, one platform, etc. Ask participants to share. Bonus: Compile a collective document for everyone to use as a resource!	Writing Utensils
Journal Reflections	Varying audiences	Personal role in liberatory movements	Have participants journal on our guiding questions.	Writing utensils
Sign Making	Elementary	Student autonomy and capacity for change	Have students create signs about something they want to change in their school and why. Host a classroom parade! Let students present to each other.	Cardboard/Paper Markers/Stickers Optional" Sticks to hold signs
Panel	Community, Education, Organizations	Local fights for Ethnic Studies	Organize a panel of Ethnic studies educators, students, and community members. Or contact Edmundo Aguilar or Tianna Mae Andresen to come in and speak.	

Post Activity

- Encourage participants to follow our current efforts (@filamushistory206 on Instagram) or join our Filipinx American Curriculum Educator Professional Development Program (email faew1976@gmail.com)
- Emphasize the relevance of the film's themes to your audience, event, and purpose. The film was made to educate the community and archive these fights for Ethnic studies across the nation. We want participants to know they have a role in this movement!

Post Event

- Assess the demographics of who attended.
- Send a follow up message thanking participants. If you created a collective resource during the screening, send it out as well.
- Reflect with each other! What went well? What can be done next time? What are our next steps?

References

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Figure 1. High up shot of Auntie Dorothy's hands holding a map of Seattle's historic neighborhoods with lines marking Filipinx neighborhoods. The brown paper matches her brown skin, making the lines and her veins merge together.

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Figure 2. Young Filipina student with long black hair and blonde highlights smiling at the camera. She is wearing a white button up that is open, revealing a black t-shirt. The background is a sunny backdrop of Lake Washington in Seattle Washington. One can see the grassy hills that people are sitting on, the blue water of the lake, green bushes, and the glimmering Seattle skyline and its buildings.

Figure 3. A young Filipina sitting in a classroom smiling at the camera. They have long black hair with bangs and is wearing a grey shirt and a pearl necklace. Their hands are clasped in front of their chest as they appear to be speaking mid sentence. The classroom has white tables, black chairs, a teaching podium and green chalkboard in view.

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Figure 4. A photo of a chef in black shirt with black hair speaking to a group of patrons from behind the counter and viewable kitchen. The L shaped brown wood counter holds various wine glasses on top, accompanied by patrons sitting around the table. In the background is a green curtain and shelves holding wine bottles. The kitchen has a silver stove with a plant next to it, and has light brown shelves hovering over it. The shelves have photo frames and other various kitchen items.