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ABOUT THE JOURNAL

Ethnic Studies Pedagogies is an open access online journal committed to critical race, decolonial, and ethnic studies movements, bridging public pedagogies with PK-12 contexts. We invite submissions using critical frameworks and methodologies that theorize, investigate, and reflect upon the ecologies of power and resistance both inside and outside the PK-12 classroom.

All submissions are reviewed by editorial board members, scholars, together with teachers and community members. We invite submissions from scholar-activists, educators, organizers, and students in the form of scholarly research, archival histories, action research pedagogies, testimonios, photo essays, and art.

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ISSUE THEME

Re-Rooting Intersectional Ethnic Studies: Racial Capitalism, Coloniality, and Resistance

LEAD EDITORS

Enrique C. Ochoa and Gilda L. Ochoa

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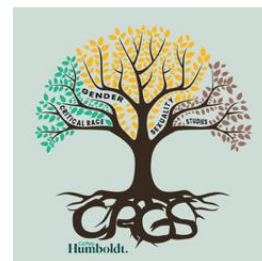
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- Institute for Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Learning and Teaching, New Mexico Highlands University
- Critical Race, Gender & Sexuality Studies, Cal Poly Humboldt



New Mexico
Highlands University



Introduction

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This has been a year of terror. The new presidential administration used 2025 to wage war on immigrant communities and queer and trans people, seeking to erase the remaining gains of the Civil Rights and Power movements. Nearly every day the administration demonstrated its authoritarian grab for power by issuing executive orders targeting particular groups, weakening social and political rights, militarizing the streets, and widening the wealth gap. In response to these assaults there have been incredible acts of resistance from Los Angeles to Chicago, Portland, New York, and Charleston. From mutual aid groups rising to support neighbors to ICE patrols and local and national demonstrations, neighbors have stood in solidarity against violent state measures aimed at ripping apart families, dividing communities, and bolstering capitalist white supremacy. Such everyday and collective activism is a reminder that communities have deep histories of resistance that build from collective knowledges, histories, and experiences.

There are multiple roots and branches of critical ethnic studies. Its seeds and sprouts are everywhere from classrooms, homes, bars, clubs, community spaces, kitchen tables, and picket-lines (to name a few). Centuries of struggles for land, liberty, autonomy, and liberation by Indigenous, Black, and communities of color have created liberated spaces that serve as inspirations for ongoing and future struggles. Such resistance and critical analyses of structures of capitalism, settler colonialism, racism, and cis-hetero patriarchy have also thrived in communities for hundreds of years outside the gaze of colonizers, enslavers, and others holding up the structures and ideologies of inequality. These analyses have numerous influences, including and not limited to Marxist approaches, Third World revolutionary struggles in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the U.S., radical feminist movements, and popular education projects in working-class and rural communities.

As the backlash against Ethnic Studies PK-University intensifies throughout the U.S., it is more important than ever to nurture these diverse genealogies and spaces where critical education takes place. Likewise, as some school districts in California and elsewhere respond to the national attack on education, attention to the specificity of place, histories, and experiences are important for avoiding homogenized, canned curriculum that undermines the power and possibilities of ethnic studies.

Within this context, we received powerful contributions from educators, organizers, cultural workers, interdisciplinary scholars, students, and community members who are rooting and nourishing critical ethnic studies approaches that interrogate and aim to restructure power in classrooms and communities. Reflecting the depth of commitment to ethnic studies and generations of struggle, we received many more submissions than unfortunately could be included in this issue. Informed by a feminist ethnic studies ethos, we worked with contributors and followed a transparent and supportive review process leading to the publication of sixteen works that take a variety of forms, including but not limited to research and praxis articles, reflections, poetry, visual art, archival histories, creative writing, film, and photography. They offer

multifaceted and inspiring frameworks and examples of community and resistance, including in less written about places.

As we looked for cover images to help introduce this issue and the breadth of contributions, we kept returning to the photo of this tree because it encapsulates some of the context and themes of the issue. Firmly rooted on the land of the Tongva-Gabrielino people, this tree stands in the courtyard of Martin Luther King Hall at California State University, Los Angeles. Enrique took this photo during an April 2025 Building Bridges, Not Walls encuentro we helped organize with community members, faculty, and students from Juntos Podemos/Together We Can, the Claremont Colleges, Cal State Fullerton, Cal State Los Angeles, and Nikkei Progressives. The gathering focused on building community, sharing knowledge, and imagining other possibilities across generations, campuses, and communities.

Wanting an open, inclusive, and dialogical space not constrained by physical classrooms, we planned to meet outside at a community park with trees as our shelter. However, as the federal government increased ICE raids and inflamed hateful rhetoric, we worried about the safety of participants and moved the gathering to Cal State LA. While we are under no illusion that universities will save us, they have been important places of activism and resistance thanks to community pressure, and as the largest working-class public university in LA, Cal State LA has been no exception. Likewise, across the U.S., the latest federal attacks on academic freedom; research; Middle East, Queer, gender and ethnic studies departments; and Trans, Muslim, Palestinian, and immigrants have once again made colleges and knowledge production overt sites of contestation.

Refusing to normalize multiple forms of state violence and have their voices silenced, high school and college ethnic studies students created zines, films, and art installations such as the ones surrounding the tree calling out the devastating tolls of racial capitalism, multinational corporations, and the power elite on communities and the planet. Meanwhile, outside of the camera's lens were the everyday actions needed to organize the gathering and the many people who united that Saturday to myth-bust, storytell, and strategize. Amidst this work, there was dancing, eating, and conviviality. Some left early to attend demonstrations in support of Palestine and others stayed afterward to clean up. Each of these actions are crucial parts of larger forms of resistance.

Like the contributions in this issue, this picture and the stories behind it call upon us to name and change structures of power collectively and cross-generationally. This involves forming alternative spaces that allow us to imagine and to practice a more just education. Other times, this involves direct confrontation. It is similar moments and possibilities that this issue's contributors recount through research, pictures, poetry and storytelling in places from New York, New Mexico, California to Michoacán. Many of these contributions are also collaborative—embodying collectivist approaches that draw on ancestral, familial, and community knowledges and histories.

A los asoleados

R. Joseph Rodríguez

Los veo por todos lados:

en los caminos

casas

campos

hospitales

restaurantes

ranchos

y por todos lados

invisibles a algunos.

Pero los reconozco como ayer.

Y bajo la cabeza.

Hay dignidad y honor en sus obras.

Nuestras copas rebosan en su presencia.

Son la fuerza y alianza del pueblo y cielo.

To the Sun-Kissed

R. Joseph Rodríguez

I see them everywhere:

on the highways

in houses

prairies

hospitals

restaurants

ranches

and everywhere

invisible to some.

But I notice you as if just yesterday.

And I bow.

There is dignity and honor in your work.

Our cups overflow in your presence.

You are the strength and covenant of the land and sky.

Constellations and Collectivity: Youth Storytelling as Re- Rooting Methodology

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Abstract

In this collectively-written autoethnographic piece by youth and adult allies from *The Localized History Project*—a youth-driven participatory action research project advocating for the inclusion of radical, solidarity oriented and movement driven Asian American Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander history—we share and analyze the experiences of our youth during a three day Storytelling Retreat. We frame the storytelling as a “re-rooting” methodology, by which AANHPI youth are able to anchor themselves in histories of resistance, solidarity, and liberation. Through an analysis of photographs, written reflections, and survey collection, we share the following reflections: Firstly, storytelling is a “re-rooting” process as AANHPI youth were able to anchor themselves in histories of resistance, solidarity, and liberation. Secondly, storytelling is a form of a living archive, by which we move from individual stories to a broader sense of collectivity. Finally, we find that storytelling as a practice helps us deepen our commitments to collective liberation both within and beyond our community.

Keywords: Storytelling, Radical History, AANHPI, YPAR

Introduction

It was the first time many of us had seen stars. Shortly after our arrival following a three-hour bus ride to Frost Valley YMCA in Claryville, New York, a group of youth and adult allies from New York City, Westchester County, and Long Island found ourselves craning our necks, staring up at an ink-black sky, with speckles of light sparkling across the darkness. The light pollution of New York City and its surrounding suburbs made it such that we had never seen stars like this—so many and so bright, with the faint swirling pattern of the Milky Way spreading blue within the black. By the end of our two-day storytelling retreat trip, it was clear that the stars we saw at the beginning of the trip were not just lone shining entities, but powerful bodies strung together in constellations—*bright things made more legible by collectivity*.

In the fall of 2024, one adult ally, four AANHPI site directors, and twelve AANHPI youth researchers gathered in cabins in upstate New York, creating a rare affinity space where many experienced, for the first time, a physical and intellectual environment centered on both identities, and broader structural histories. Simple yet profound moments—such as removing shoes at the door, discussing cultural heritage and name origins, and engaging with fiction and oral storytelling archives rarely included in traditional curricula—became acts of reclamation.

This piece thus centers the efforts of *The Localized Histories Project*, a youth-produced critical archive seeking to increase the inclusion of Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) history in New York State classrooms through youth-driven curricula. In our work, we put forth a theory of change that Asian American youth should not just be learners but pedagogues, and that, through oral storytelling and intimate archiving, we can produce a “living” history, one that challenges the colonial logics of the traditional history classroom (Sunderram, 2023). In this collectively written autoethnography by youth researchers and an adult ally of the project, we reflect on our experiences during the storytelling retreat, drawing upon ephemera from our trip such as written reflections and photos.

During our storytelling retreat, we listened to oral histories of garment workers on strike in Sunset Parks' Chinatown, we painted a mural drawing from liberation struggles that inspired us, and heard fictional accounts and oral histories of South Asian migrant mothers. In this article, we hope to build on existing studies that frame storytelling as a form of living archive (Gallager, 2011; Mozeley et al., 2025; Sonoda & Garrison, 2023; Vö & Bonus, 2009; Wang et al., 2024). Ultimately, this piece asserts that youth-led storytelling is a critical pedagogical intervention in ethnic studies, that it serves as a "re-rooting" in lineages of collectivity, by which we were able to anchor ourselves in histories of resistance, solidarity, and liberation.

Literature Review

The traditional history classroom excludes the history of Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) peoples (An, 2016). When the AANHPI community is included, the history that is taught primarily centers the teaching of "Big People" history—history that focuses on famous figures, military actions, and hegemonic powers, and rarely centers movements, solidarities, and working class communities (Sunderram, 2023). Outside of content, the pedagogy of history classrooms often emphasizes rote memorization, and the ideology of the history classroom becomes one of maintaining status quo power structures—rarely is power distributed between student and teacher, by which learning is a collective practice (Apple, 2004; Barton & Levstik, 2004; Mathison et al., 2001; Ross, 2006a).

As Freire writes, when power is distributed in classrooms such that teachers and students teach and learn collectively, we move towards a place of liberatory pedagogy (Freire, 2000). Given that schooling is so often determined by testing and state mandates, it is difficult for this kind of distributed model to take place. Thus, oftentimes the sites in which collective learning takes place are cultural affinity spaces—"loosely organized" social and cultural groups that connect people through shared passions and interests (Gee, 2007, 2018).

Within cultural affinity spaces, this collective learning can take the form of oral storytelling. Storytelling maintains and "safeguard[s]" cultural identity while allowing for "continuity" with future generations (Monteiro et al., 2017). As Ladzekpo et al. (2024) paraphrases of Hammack, oral storytelling is a form of "cultural resilience and resistance," especially for communities that have long endured marginalization or experienced historical injustices). Further, storytelling allows for critical analysis of histories as youth can "revisit, review . . . challenge, question, and change" narratives independent of "teacher intervention" (Al-Jafar, 2004). Storytelling allows activists to



The first time we saw stars.

defy problematic narratives, understand their own narratives, and share them with others—all of which strengthen the social movements the activists are fighting for (Moyer et al., 2020). Crucially, storytelling does more than merely replace the dominant narrative; it empowers marginalized groups to talk about their narratives while also examining how they interact with the dominant one (Williams, 2004).

Storytelling is used in advocacy moments by and for young students of color. For example, for undocumented youth advocacy movements in Chicago, storytelling serves three purposes: it is a boon to community-building, it promotes mobilization, and it allows for claims-making (Swerts, 2015). For Korean American students in the southern United States, it provided a means of “collective reflection on shared experiences...that acknowledges complexity and diversity in individual’s experiences,” encouraging learners to look for oppressive structures (Chung, 2024, p. 127). For Pacific Islander students, storytelling is also rooted in long-standing traditions of *Talanoa*, which calls for storytelling without concealment, with the end goal of consensus-building (Hautzinger, 2024).

It is through these processes of community building, mobilization, and claims-making that youth undergo a process known as “re-rooting.” Drawn from the above literature, we define re-rooting as a practice by which young people who are typically disconnected from their histories and sense of identity are able to re-find it through practices of storytelling, collective learning, and historical relearnings, and critically, that empowered and secured by this re-rooting practice, we can then move to spaces of collective action. In our reflections below, we share moments from our retreat in which re-rooting took place, and the impacts they had on our activism.

Methods

Below, we will go through our reflections on how storytelling was a re-rooting process for the AANHPI youth researchers. Firstly, storytelling allows us to anchor ourselves in histories of resistance, solidarity, and liberation. Secondly, storytelling is a form of a living archive, by which we move from individual stories to a broader sense of collectivity (Gallager, 2011; Mozeley et al., 2025; Ouyang & Chanani, 2024; Sonoda & Garrison, 2023; Vö & Bonus, 2009; Wang et al., 2024). Finally, we find that storytelling as a practice helps us deepen our commitments to collective liberation both within and beyond our community.

This piece draws on auto-ethnographic methodologies of reflection (Butz & Besio, 2009). Specifically, the category of autoethnographic practice we draw most heavily on is narrative ethnography, such that the youth researchers and adult allies involved in this project “analyze how they are situated in relation to the people and worlds they are studying, and to the fields of power that constitute those relationships” (Butz & Besio, 2009). For the Localized History Project, the youth researchers and adult ally reflected on how they are situated in relation to the broader AANHPI community, as well as the world of youth advocacy and educational spaces in New York. After the Storytelling Retreat, the four site directors developed a survey and facilitated a space for autoethnographic reflection among the twelve AANHPI youth researchers. The survey, which included both qualitative and quantitative prompts, gathered feedback on aspects such as feelings of community and social connection, as well as understanding of the Localized History project's goals. In addition, youth researchers were invited to write personal autoethnographic reflections, sharing their experiences in their own words.

Reflections

Storytelling Roots us in Intimate and Personal Stories

Throughout the Storytelling Retreat, we had activities that focused on utilizing our stories to better connect with one another. After discussing garment strike documentaries and analyzing AAPI literature, we developed a new understanding of what it means to be living history/archive historians. Furthermore, by holding campfire talks to explain the stories behind our names, important cultural centers, and family histories, we created paths that help others understand cultural concepts that otherwise would not have been learned/taught. As one youth explained, their experience at the retreat taught them the “importance of having nuance, time, and spaces to explore AANHPI history together.” Within these spaces, the youth also explained that they were able to “not just connect with people immediately connected to [them], but also other marginalized AANHPI[s].”



First day bonfire, 2024.

Moreover, the activities that we planned were structured for us to discuss the collective by focusing on our own individual experiences. During the different games and activities, we all heard stories from each other’s everyday lives—about what it feels like to be both Asian and Latinx, what it feels like to be an Asian American growing up in a predominantly White neighborhood. Even though we obviously couldn’t relate with each nuance to every single story, we were able to see them through our own lens; we found joy in the act of listening to someone who felt safe enough to open up to us about their experiences.

A lot of the opportunities for storytelling were structured through games. For example, we played a memory game where everyone anonymously wrote down something that fit under a proposed category (for example, the initial category was “landmarks” and many people wrote the Statue of Liberty). The goal was for us to figure out who wrote what submission and to not get caught; if you were caught, you teamed up with the person who identified you correctly to help them identify the others. Though, on the surface, it might not seem like this game would have led to meaningful storytelling about AANHPI identity, the explanations for why people chose to submit the things they submitted were revealing and heartfelt. In particular, when the category was “events in AANHPI history,” participants would tell stories about why they chose the events they did. One youth researcher talked about Bengali Harlem and how learning about Bengali migration to New York City felt empowering for them. Another youth researcher explained their reasons for choosing to talk about the U.S. annexation of Hawaii, which led to a discussion about how many of us only began to see the U.S. as a colonial power during high school. The things they

submitted were revealing and heartfelt. These games enabled us as youth researchers to see history and how it's taught through each other's eyes. Through repeatedly telling each other our own experiences and how they related to various AANHPI historical events that were important to us, we were able to both identify the gaps in the history curriculum that we learned and legitimized their importance outside of the various planned games, we also had opportunities to tell personal and intimate stories through creating art and sharing literature. When we crafted a 'Localized Histories' mural, we had to brainstorm ideas for how to decorate it—though we knew that the words 'Localized Histories' would be on it, there were a lot of ideas for how we could decorate the rest of the blank canvas. Ultimately, the idea we landed on were flowers that were significant symbols in our respective cultures. Though most of us had ideas of what the national flowers of ancestral homelands were, this also marked most of our first times having the opportunity to explore and explain the story behind them. As examples, one youth researcher painted the *teuila*, the Samoan national flower, and its role in the annual Samoa Teuila Festival; another youth researcher chose to paint the Hong Kong Orchid Tree, while telling others that photos don't capture the true beauty they have in person. Finally, we painted poppies to name our solidarity with Palestinian people amidst ongoing genocide.

When we were allowed some free time to rest, we continued to relay personal stories to each other about the things we had in common—our experiences in the New York public school system, our favorite New York restaurants, and places throughout New York that were perhaps only notable because of their personal significance to us. In this way, storytelling built a foundation for community building that allowed for critical connection, but also built the spaces necessary to then think beyond our own lives. As one participant noted, "This trip helped me find a sense of community I haven't found anywhere else." Another added, "It was specifically because it was centered around storytelling and histories that it added another layer beyond just getting to know one another."



Community building in the lodge!



Creating a Localized History Project Banner.

Storytelling Roots Us in Histories of Resistance and Solidarity

Moving from individual stories to collective and shared histories is a liberatory practice. During the retreat, we centered the idea of a collective AANHPI diasporic experience, understanding similarities in our struggles, hopes, and aspirations. In small groups, we read literature from a range of texts by AANHPI writers and allies to build a foundation of collective action and solidarity. For instance, one group read a piece by Michelle Caswell, a White-American archivist who helped create the South Asian American Digital Archive; others read primary source accounts from the South Asian American Digital Archive about the experiences of Muslim women in the United States. Reading these texts brought awareness to new perspectives we would not have encountered in a traditional classroom setting, expanding our views of past and ongoing efforts to tell AANHPI histories. Importantly, the texts shone light on approaches that involved collaborative, liberatory practices through communities, instead of individuals working in isolation.



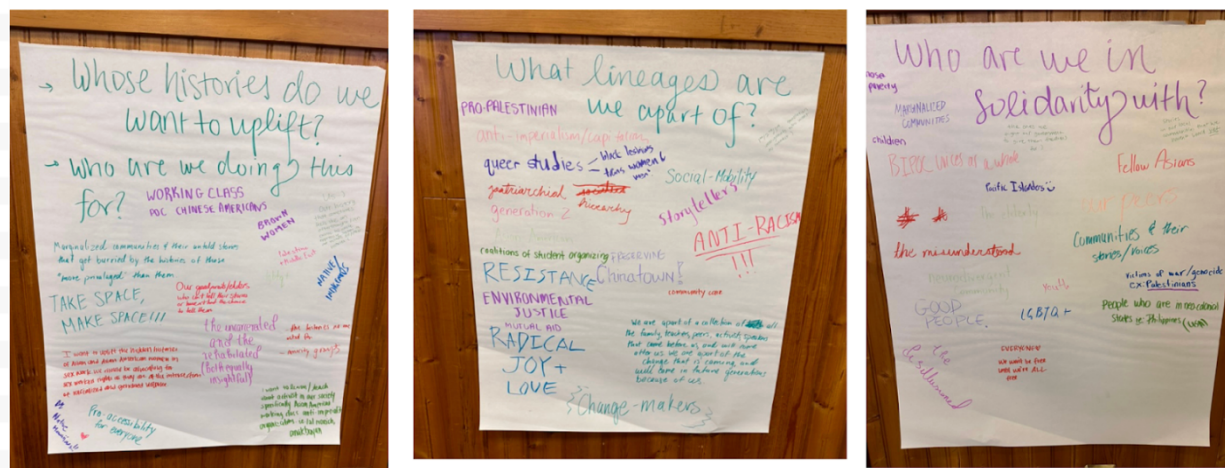
Taking a break for dinner!

During the course of the retreat, we engaged with histories of resistance within the AANHPI community—histories we are not taught in school. We learned about the history of the Bengali Harlem community, a community of migrants who lived in New York City in the 1930s, and found solidarity and kinship with Black and Puerto Rican communities. We also learned about the Sunset Park Hunger Strike of 1995, where eight Chinese American students went on strike in protest of the horrific working conditions of their mothers. Learning this history was really critical in shifting our programming from intimate and personal, to collective. As one participant noted, “I felt both ashamed [that this was the first time I was learning this history] and empowered when learning about Bengali Harlem and the Garment Worker Student Protests in Sunset Park . . . watching the documentary about the sweatshop workers making 0.75 cents an hour . . . made me understand that no one else is telling these stories so we have to.”



Discussions and workshops.

Storytelling Deepens Our Commitments to Collective Liberation



Youth Researchers respond to three prompts on whose histories we want to uplift, what lineages we are apart of, and who we are in solidarity with.

After anchoring ourselves in history, we came together as a group to respond to prompts on papers with the following questions; **“Who are we in solidarity with?”**, **“Whose histories do we want to uplift? Who are we doing this for?”**, and **“What lineages are we a part of?”** Shuffling around the room with a myriad of colored markers, we, sometimes sloppily or in beautiful penmanship, wrote our thoughts to these questions, actively interacting with one another, whether writing above a peer’s head in close proximity, or giggling after bumping into another. Even though we each wrote our personal thoughts to these questions, it became clear our wishes were not isolated despite coming from different backgrounds. We wanted to uplift the stories of “Native Hawaiians!”, “our grandparents/elders who can’t tell their stories or haven’t had the chance to tell them,” “working class POC Chinese Americans,” “Brown women,” “the histories no one asked for,” keeping in mind that “our history . . . sometimes feels like an afterthought and an excuse by White oppressive systems to not include all/other histories.”



The group sharing final reflections on the retreat and on AANHPI history before returning to New York City.

In response to “What lineages are we a part of,” some students wrote “storytellers,” “RESISTANCE,” “community care,” “coalitions of student organizing,” “queer studies—Black lesbians, trans women and men!,” “radical joy + love,” “mutual aid,” and more. Put succinctly, one

youth wrote to the lineage question, “We are a part of a collection of all the family, teachers, peers, activists, speakers that came before us and will roam after us. We are a part of the change that is coming, and will come in future generations because of us.” Sharing these sentiments based on our personal, lived experiences was a form of storytelling itself; one that allowed us to literally visualize the shared gaps we see missing from traditional school curricula on poster paper. As one youth researcher stated, we are not often taught to think of our personal histories as *real history*. They shared, “Normally I would not focus on something related to my immediate circle but talking with everyone has demonstrated that my personal history is part of our collective history.” This shift was a significant one for many participants, who have been often taught in school that history looks like one thing—often, the stories of dominant and hegemonic cultures. Or, that when our histories are taught, they must be taught through tokenized figures like Mao and Gandhi (Sunderram, 2023). Rarely do we view our own experiences and personal histories to be significant enough to be a history taught in schools.

Learning these stories, in other words, began to motivate participants to fight towards changes, either in school policy and curriculum, or more broadly. One participant shared how these activities concretized for her a “north star in her fight towards Asian American abolition.” Another participant added, “A lot of the topics we cover[ed] [were] heavy and painful histories, but liberation and resistance are also about joy. Ultimately, students and young people are major agents of change.” This sentiment, that learning histories sharpens our commitments to making change, was held by and mentioned in reflections by all 15 participants. One participant wrote the following poem:

*Liberating:
the mutual respect and understanding of an energy, once ignored or forgotten or underappreciated,
new bloomings to reflect new beginnings/opportunities.
To seek refuge in ones who can understand your struggles as a part of a collective that has needed to
fight for so long,
and will fight with you against the institutions that tried to but will not, mold us.
Thankful for all the time well spent with new friends.*

Conclusion

In Michelle Caswell's (2021) *Urgent Archives*, she writes “on the joy of troublemaking in the present,” instead of deferring to “hope.” She continues that “hope is inherently future-oriented; it can be an oppressive affective demand for those whose experiences teach them to be pessimistic about systemic change in systems designed to oppress.” In a time when future-orientation feels difficult to take for granted, it is important, and in fact critical, that we find joy in the troublemaking, and in making resistance. While storytelling might feel like a trivial or self-indulgent act, it is in fact the necessary foundation, the root-taking and root-making, that allows for collective action to grow. Further, if we do not anchor ourselves in the stories of lineages of resistance, we too often fall victim to the belief that we are the first ones in history to face these fights, the first ones in history to want to build something different. Our ignorance produces at best a sense of helplessness, and worse, a sense of vanity. It is requisite for any movement building to be reminded that there are things to be learned from those who have fought before us. To paraphrase Ruth Wilson Gilmore et al. (2024), *struggles have ancestors too*, and the act of remembering and collectively anchoring in these histories bring us a sense of urgency, and a sense of hope. We

define hope, not as Caswell writes it—as oppressively affective—but instead as Mariame Kaba (2021) defines hope—as a force of discipline, motivation, and activation.

Storytelling then, is a re-rooting and embodied act, one that reminds us who came before us, and who we can be. It is embodied, and through it we form collectivity and community, and breathes new life into our actions. Through silliness and levity, it brings us the joy that might fuel troublemaking; we are anchored by it in our histories, ancestors, and struggles. In her reflection to the storytelling retreat, Shreya, our adult ally wrote: “This weekend made me feel deeply connected to the idea of futurities, of what Asian Americaness can look like for all of us and who it can hold. How being at the periphery lends itself to both loneliness but also an acute criticality of what we want belonging to look like.” The *Localized History Project* works to build more inclusive, just, and collectivist classrooms that share power and tell better, richer, deeper, stories. We fervently believe that it is through storytelling that we build juster, kinder worlds.



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Deep Roots, Open Skies: The Quotidian Life of Ethnic Studies Outside of Academia

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Abstract

This essay brings together four Chicana/Latina scholar-activists whose lives span the El Paso borderlands, San Francisco's Mission District, San Ysidro, and California's Central Valley to show how Ethnic Studies lives beyond the academy in the everyday praxis of those navigating colluding systems of power. Through auto/collective ethnographic vignettes across diverse geographies, we show how Ethnic Studies emerges not through textbooks, but through the survival strategies, collective memory, and community praxis of those long excluded from the Ivory Tower. We center community as a site of rigorous theorizing and transformative praxis—where the poor, undocumented, criminalized, and forgotten engage critical analysis through care, resistance, and mutual aid. Against racial capitalism and settler colonialism, we uplift five core practices: Accompaniment, Barrio Mothering as Mutual Aid, Bridge Building, Popular Education, and Centering Those Often Forgotten. We reflect on our individual and collective work—across juvenile and immigration detention centers, county jails, prisons, afterschool programs, and through our mentoring and mothering relationships as we center collectivity and community engagement as a locus of theorizing and transformative praxis. This chapter is a call to push Ethnic Studies beyond the academy and to prioritize the places and partners with whom it will be the most impactful.

Keywords: Ethnic studies, radical accompaniment, critical consciousness, activist-scholars, and popular education

Introduction

Ethnic Studies looks like the power of prophecy when done right. When Trump likened Mexican immigrants to “criminals,” undermined Black achievement, and scrubbed our histories from public memory, scholars of color warned that these were not isolated acts but steps toward white supremacist repression (Burden-Stelly, 2025; Canizales & Vallejo, 2021; Molina, 2014; Rodríguez, 2020). However, when you lack historical memory and strip cultura from consciousness, it's easy for history to repeat itself and make genocides and racially motivated attacks appear as exceptions as opposed to the rule. Ethnic Studies has long warned this is the making of a fascist regime (Kelley, 2025). However, while the people *in* and *from* the proverbial streets have been ringing the alarm, the ivory tower has sat in relative silence—manufacturing consent by way of intimidation by

enforcing neoliberal policies that punish democratic dissent (e.g., the imposition of Time, Place, Manner [TPM] disciplinary infractions on pro-Palestinian student encampments; caving into federal pressure to shut down DEI programming and offices; and handing over to the federal government the personal information of faculty, staff, and students involved in activism on campus) (Kelley, 2025).

As institutions sit back and watch aggrieved communities hunted for deportation by violent state sanctioned entities, it is the “working poor living in the shadow of the ever-growing master’s house” who resist (Gilmore, 1993, p. 73). In Los Angeles, the booms of tear gas echo those deployed in Guatemala; protestors cover their mouths with the same paños farmworkers used against pesticides in the San Joaquin Valley. In San Diego and across digital spaces, communities organize patrols and use multilinguistic slang to warn each other of Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) checkpoints. This barrio-rooted praxis is informed by the diasporic experiences of struggle in solidarity of marginalized communities.

Despite most of our community(ies) not having accessed academia, these practices are Ethnic Studies in motion. Akin to the Black Radical Tradition (Robinson, 2000), communities resist not in *spite* of struggle, but *because* of it. These experiences have cultivated epistemological and ontological prowess that exist beyond the walls of the ivory tower (Kelley, 2002, p. 9). This social formation, rooted in and sustained by community, cultivates a critical consciousness (Freire, 2000) that challenges the hierarchical power relations pervasive in academia—relations shaped by white supremacy and driven by extractive individualism at the expense of community. This is knowledge rooted in survival, struggle, and community—knowledge academia often exploits but rarely honors (Simpson, 2017; Smith, 2021). As Unanga scholar Eve Tuck (2009) asserts, “It looks to historical exploitation, domination, and colonization to explain contemporary brokenness, such as poverty, poor health, and low literacy . . . a pathologizing approach in which the oppression singularly defines a community” (p. 413).

Mapping the Terrain

Instead, the unique optic that is Ethnic Studies is oriented towards connecting the specificities of the local to the structural and destabilizing power imbalances in favor of the collective. This may look like refuting the types of “performance culture” (Ahmed, 2012, p. 84) that the neoliberal reorder of things (Ferguson, 2012) favors. Whereas success is determined by an institutional legibility that is achieved through securing grants and visibility for university stakeholders, Ethnic Studies in praxis isn’t contingent on institutional constraints or 501(c)(3) status, but on shapeshifting to meet the needs and conditions of everyday people. As Fred Hampton eloquently said, “You can jail a revolutionary, but you can’t jail the revolution.”

Rooted in an Ethnic Studies praxis that is not constrained by the boundaries of academia, we offer a glimpse into the ways that we, four Ethnic Studies practitioners from diverse geopolitical spaces and positionalities, reflect the ethos and liberatory pedagogies of Ethnic Studies in our lives outside of academia. This approach is significant because it leans into Angela Davis’ assertion that to be “radical simply means ‘grasping things at the root’” (1989/2012); as the roots of Ethnic Studies have always been in community, not in the ivory tower. By situating theory in lived struggle, it honors our diverse communities as the original and enduring site of theory, praxis, and purpose.

The five themes that surfaced—Identifying Accompaniment as Radical Solidarity through El Hilo, Barrio Mothering as Mutual Aid, Bridge Building as Liberation Pedagogy, Popular Education, Centering Those Often Forgotten—emerged organically from our lived experiences. We did not select these themes; rather, they revealed themselves through the contours of our practice. As critical elements of our praxis, we compel those concerned with the political project that is Ethnic Studies to not only consider taking Ethnic Studies to the streets, but also to reimagine the terrain and population(s) that Ethnic Studies can grow most abundantly.

From these emergent themes, we invite you to move with us through a journey that traces how Ethnic Studies lives and moves beyond the classroom. As we see it, the quotidian life of Ethnic Studies is always in motion. It must be so, as life is not stagnant, but an ever-flowing river making valleys and shaping land over time. In this paper, we follow this river, making four stops along the way. These “stops” are what we consider essential movements in movement building. Each of us from distinct social geographies have gathered, through time and space, important lessons carried from place to place, impacting and being impacted by community, culture, and collectives. Andrea, scholar of immigration and movement-building, reimagines how accompaniment as an act of radical solidarity reshapes the landscape of migration research. Andrea draws from the Zapatistas (Marcos & de Leon, 2002; Simonelli et al., 2004) and liberation psychology rooted in Latin America’s liberation theology, accompaniment (*acompañar*) as a practice of mutual learning, presence, and solidarity guided by communities’ own goals (Farmer, 2012). Historically used in resistance movements during the Guatemalan and Salvadoran civil wars (Berryman, 1987), accompaniment resists charity and saviorism by centering witness, co-resistance, and *convivencia*, or living and struggling together.

Building on this lineage, Abrego (2024) frames research as accompaniment, while Andrea’s theory of El Hilo extends this tradition as a decolonial and abolitionist method. El Hilo is both theory and praxis, a way of being-with, knowing-with, and walking-with others across the ruptures of migration, violence and systemic abandonment. Reflecting on the deep well of *barrio mothering* as an original source of life-sustaining practices, Marisa, scholar of carceral geographies, institutional inequality, and intersectionality illuminates its role as the foundation of what we now call mutual aid. In conversation with the Chicana M(other)work Collective (Caballero et al., 2019), Marisa draws from the idea that *barrio mothering* is a praxis, and not simply an identity. This politicized praxis is oriented to solidarity, community sustenance, and collective survival, whereby the institutions they traverse best serve the needs of marginalized communities when repurposed as community-based institutions that couple resources with their primary functions so that the holistic needs of community members are met (Maier et al., 2017). Like Kelley (2002), she demonstrates that “in the poetics of struggle and lived experience, in the utterances of ordinary folks . . . we discover the many different cognitive maps of the future, of the world not yet born” (p. 10), as she extends the innovative configurations of community self-determination methods cultivated out of the lived experiences of working-class Latina mothers as cunningly insightful insurgent pedagogies for community care and social movement praxis.

Julissa, scholar of education, carceral studies, and abolition remembers the bridge-building at the heart of ethnic studies education, made possible by bordertown teachers who helped her reconnect with her past to make way for her future as an Ethnic Studies teacher and scholar. Drawing from Casar and Noguera’s (2025) powerful call to honor the “right to the word,” whereby marginalized students and communities should be able to narrate their own (hi)stories without

institutional actors speaking for, erasing, or distorting their experiences, Julissa demonstrates the powerful role of Ethnic Studies in creating intellectual and spatial bridges that lead students to reclaim their histories and engage in knowledge production. Recalling moments of humanization within one of the most dehumanizing spaces—a county jail—Marlene, scholar of Chicana/x Carework and critical carceral studies, highlights how popular education was mobilized to uplift a community of knowledge keepers. Drawing from Gloria Anzaldúa's (2002) theorization of *mindbodyspirit*, Francesca López's (2018) work on *confianza*, Tara Yosso's (2005) framework of cultural wealth, and Rosie Bermudez's (2020) articulation of Chicana militant dignity, Marlene illuminates how popular education and Chicana Carework emerge from the lived experiences, challenging colonial curricula and affirming the knowledge-making practices of those often left at the margins. Together, these movements remind us that Ethnic Studies is not confined to classrooms or institutions, but lives in the everyday practices of struggle, care, and radical collective imagination.

El Hilo: Accompaniment as Radical Solidarity—Andrea

I was 17 years old, in my final year of a rigorous college-prep high school, deeply resistant to the idea of more schooling. Having grown up as an immigrant, I was not foreign to feeling different, but there was something especially isolating about my schooling. Instead of feeling supported and welcomed, school felt empty and hostile, so I often slipped away to places that felt safer. One day senior year, my counselor told me I was close to failing a class required for graduation and would have to attend night school. This meant missing the choir performance and play I'd been cast in. I was devastated.

When I cut class, I often went to City Lights Bookstore in San Francisco to be silent, get lost in the aisles, and learn. That day, adrift, I sat staring at the book stacks. The faded yellow and black cover contrasted with bold red letters. Then I saw her eyes. Assata. Without hesitation, I stuffed it into my backpack. That night I stayed up reading, captivated by her story, her philosophy. Filled with rage, sadness, and fear, I cried, believing the tears were a spiritual *desahogo*. Turning the final page of Assata Shakur's autobiography, I closed a chapter of educational deception and began one of curiosity and consciousness raising, accompanied by Assata toward liberation.

Years later, I received a degree in Ethnic Studies. Yet, as Assata (1987) wrote, "Before going back to college, I knew I didn't want to be an intellectual, spending my life in books and libraries without knowing what the hell is going on in the streets" (p. 196). So I spent over a decade unlearning what institutions had instilled in me and reclaiming an education in my community as a youth-worker and organizer. Those lessons remain at the core of my praxis as an activist-scholar and breathe life into my research in a way no formal training could. This was the Ethnic Studies education that preceded academic knowledge.

Twenty years after picking up Assata's autobiography, I embarked on an accompaniment of words of my own. As a graduate student volunteering with a social-legal team, I traveled to ICE detention centers and border cities as an interpreter for asylum seekers. I remember sitting in a frigid courtroom, listening as a young man was stripped of dignity before a judge determining "credible fear," then denied asylum and deported. I recall a mother in detention, clutching her toddler with a distended belly, whispering "no quiere comer" as I held her hand. I think back to drawing pictures

with children in a church shelter, recently released from detention, sketching superheroes, broken chains, and open skies after crossing the treacherous Darien Gap.

In each instance, I drew not from training but from the deepest well of my humanity. I was present with rage, grief, love, and imagination, as I had been in healing circles, mutual-aid meetings, and kitchen tables in my community. Accompaniment was not just advocacy, but a spiritually aligned commitment to walk with people, a concept I have come to describe as *El Hilo*. Not ahead as a leader, nor behind as a witness, but alongside, like kin. *El Hilo* is the unbreakable thread of accompaniment and life-affirming practices, a living weave that carries memory, care, and collective struggle across migration, loss, and the everyday work of creating worlds together. Perhaps the academy will never fully be a place for *El Hilo*'s vision for accompaniment as radical solidarity, yet despite bureaucratic borders that keep us from our communities, it is our duty as activist-scholars in the Ethnic Studies tradition to fight for freedom. It is the difference between merely documenting pain and joy, and instead, offering a warm hand that says, "I am with you," as we walk together toward liberation.

Barrio Mothering as Mutual Aid—Marisa

"Mother" is less a noun than a verb.

As a working-class origin, multigeneration Chicana from the San Joaquin Valley, I reflect on the contradictions. We grew up being told of the vitality of our *tierra* that birthed life that fed the world, yet California's prison alley (Gilmore, 2007) being home meant that the social death that filled carceral cages around us also closed in on us as we experienced the symptomology of intergenerational concentrated rural poverty. Despite growing up down the street from grape fields that began a boycott that spawned into a movement felt around the world, our primarily poor and working-class, heavily migrant, communities of color didn't learn of the virtues of Ethnic Studies in classrooms, but in community trying to survive (Garcia, 2012).

What is now called "mutual aid" was our way of being (Caballero et al., 2019). Our material conditions necessitated infrastructures of care. Most came from poor, mixed legal status, families of color without health insurance, steady medical care, and under hypersurveillance. This required crowd-sourced resources that incorporated family and avoided shame. I got a front seat to *barrio mothering as mutual aid* because my mother was the "Parent Coordinator" of our under-resourced Title 1 school. Responsible for bridging the community and school, my mother was a community organizer.

This *barrio mothering*, rooted in a social justice praxis, took many forms. This looked like covertly defying orders requiring summer school cafeteria workers throw away perfectly good food. Knowing the hunger in the community, she discretely instructed families on where to find wrapped boxes of food hidden for them near the dumpster once the school day concluded.

Centering the most marginalized wasn't an ideological aspiration, but a practical imperative. She mobilized school as an institution that reflected the community by grounding it in providing resources catered to their needs (Maier et al., 2017). Immunizations were administered at school so parents could walk to access them. Her annual carnival, "*Día de la Familia*," featured \$1.25 meals with a modest number of free tickets that could be increased by contributing to the community

event. This public space served the collective in needed ways as booths invited community members to learn more about public resources like SNAP, WIC, and MediCal. Families happily commenced the single family outing they could afford by breaking down the set-up, taking home frozen hamburger patties and chips that stretched food reserves by a week—a tremendous gift when living paycheck to paycheck.

Her ability to cultivate spaces where aggrieved communities could congregate, love one another, and get exactly the resources they need within community was significant (Camp & Heatherton, 2016). There's a knowing there that can't come from outside; an approach not taught in most books (Kelley, 2002). She conceived of the campus community broadly, including señoras that lived around the school and abuelitas that walked their grandkids to school daily. Rather than forcing faux relationships, she created "Coffee Club," a gathering of community members that could platicar and discuss issues over cafecito and pan dulce. This space allowed those who felt unseen to commune and discuss issues from domestic violence to classroom advocacy.

I carry the ethos of barrio mothering as mutual aid with me. In a conversation with my 6-year-old, he was devastated by the state sanctioned violence inflicted on our people. His righteous anger erupted into wanting to confront ICE like protestors. I affirmed his anger but told him that while many are righteously focusing on ICE, we needed to make sure that those directly impacted aren't neglected. I explained how many were in hiding and how our resistance must include helping impacted folks pay rent, get groceries, access safe transport and medication. My barrio mothering-lessons learned in community and affirmed in Ethnic Studies, centers ecologies of care grounded in a deep knowing that *solo el pueblo salva al pueblo* (Kelley, 2002). While this praxis of self-preservation and autonomy may not be legible to institutions nor sensationalized as noteworthy by scholars in traditional disciplines, they remain critical intergenerational pedagogies.

Bridge Building as Liberation Pedagogy—Julissa

My relationship to Ethnic Studies began in the Borderlands, in my ninth-grade geography course with Mr. Ramirez in a room of Mexican, Filipinx, and Cambodian heritage students. Mr. Ramirez was one of few Mexican heritage, cisgender male teachers at our high school and like many of our teachers he was from our community. Well before the passage of AB 101, in which now all California high schools must offer Ethnic Studies courses, Mr. Ramirez brought an Ethnic Studies pedagogy, practice, and commitment to San Ysidro. It was in his class that I first learned about the genocides that occurred in Guatemala and El Salvador, and its anti-Indigenous, colonial roots. It was also in his class that I first learned to question what it meant for the U.S. to be a "world leader" and the blood that was ruthlessly shed for it to rise as an imperial power. Mr. Ramirez taught us that it was not enough to be well-versed in U.S. history and that it was our responsibility to always understand the interconnected struggles and histories of what we face on these lands and how it connects to struggles and resistance on other lands. Mr. Ramirez did not limit our learning to our state issued textbooks, he wove in the arts, music, documentaries, creative writing, fiction, and invited us to share our experiences along the way. As an educator, I can now fully receive the gift that was his teaching. Mr. Ramirez planted the first of many seeds that led to me becoming an educator, researcher, and abolitionist.

Years later, I was invited to teach Ethnic Studies for the Summer Bears Program, a TRIO sponsored program, for first-generation, low-income students of color from the Bay Area hosted at UC

Berkeley. Most of the students were from Oakland, Richmond, Pinole, and other East Bay cities, but most had never stepped foot onto UC Berkeley's campus. That summer, students read and learned alongside Gloria Anzaldúa, Ronald Takaki, James Baldwin, Tupac Shakur, bell hooks, and others. Few knew their names and far less had engaged their thinking and teachings. Yet, that summer they grappled with the material and the feelings that arose in the process. Many felt frustrated, angry, sad, but simultaneously energized, inspired, and uplifted by the material they were finally learning. Ethnic Studies can sometimes feel like the opening of a wound that is then tenderly attended to and healed by a *curandera*, but when healed can provide the clarity and strength needed to resist. I have always seen and understood Ethnic Studies as a lens by which you come to see and read the world (Casar & Noguera, 2025). A lens that helps you understand how systems and institutions work to systematically oppress nondominant groups—an ever-shifting group of people and communities. Ethnic Studies is also the purposeful reclaiming of our histories, recentering of our knowledge systems and ways of knowing, and collective commitment to coalition building. That summer, miles away from the Borderlands, I witnessed as my students came to see the world anew via an Ethnic Studies lens much like I had experienced in Mr. Ramirez's class.

Popular Education: Centering the Forgotten / Those at the Margins—Marlene

I'm embarrassed to admit that I didn't truly learn how to read until community college at 20. I could read words, but my comprehension was below average. I wasn't one of the Chicana "exceptionals." No adult saw me as destined for un futuro brillante. I was one of the students who quietly slipped through the cracks—one of the forgotten ones. Before I had language to name my critical consciousness, I had a gut feeling—an inner knowing I now recognize as mindbodyspirit (Anzaldúa, 2002). Growing up poor as a Chicana in the carceral borderlands of El Paso, I was living a political life, without the language to name it. Still, I consider myself lucky. I avoided situations that often trap border youth—teen pregnancy, gang involvement, incarceration, even death. But many of my friends, familia, and community members weren't as fortunate. Even though I dodged visible dangers, I felt disconnected—from myself, my culture, and any sense of belonging.

El Paso has a rich history of Pachuco and Chicano culture—rooted in pride and resistance but these spaces often felt out of reach. Dominant narratives demonize Chicano culture, pushing some to distance themselves from la cultura, while others get drawn into gang politics. For those of us who didn't fit either category, we were left in limbo, fading into the background. That liminal space is where many Borderland youth still find themselves today. What happens to the ones left out? How do we, as Ethnic Studies practitioners, engage youth beyond the academy? The answer lies in community-responsive pedagogy—grounded in relationships, relevance, and responsibility (Duncan-Andrade, 2022). My own pedagogy, rooted in Chicana Carework, emphasizes cultivating reciprocal relationships that meet young people where they are—mentally, emotionally, and physically.

Building confianza and critical consciousness must also address students' material realities (López, 2018). We cannot talk about Ethnic Studies while students face food or housing insecurity or experience criminalization in schools. A pedagogy that centers students' lived experiences, cultural capital, and histories (Yosso, 2005) is not just effective—it's necessary and it requires accountability. Too often, academia enters community spaces with short-term projects and stipends but lacks genuine palabra. Youth are trucha—they know when outsiders show up for their

own gain. I first practiced student-centered pedagogy as an undergraduate, working as a teacher at a county detention facility where I helped launch the first GED program in the women's unit. We began with reading, writing, and math, but quickly the classroom became a space to humanize, dignify, and spark critical consciousness. I didn't yet know the term "popular education," but I was already practicing it—supporting the building of collective knowledge from lived experience.

In my attempts to sustain this space, I had to shapeshift. I stayed polite with administrators and officers, but in the classroom my energy shifted. I refused to teach only the colonial curriculum. I remember one moment clearly: a Black student said enslaved folks in the house were there "by choice," and my white male colleague stayed silent. I couldn't. I made it clear—enslavement was never a choice, period. I also honored students' languages, speaking Spanish with bilingual and monolingual students, resisting English-only norms. Over time, these small acts of resistance built powerful bonds. Some students even wrote me letters from inside, disguising my name to bypass mail restrictions. These quiet rebellions were rooted in an abolitionist ethic and Chicana militant dignity work (Bermudez, 2020).

Now, as an Assistant Professor, I still identify with those outside the academy—because I was one of them. I remain in community with people navigating life beyond academic institutions. Ironically, so much of what the academy calls "expertise" comes from the lived experience of marginalized communities—yet that knowledge is rarely recognized. If we are serious about Ethnic Studies, we must honor community-situated knowledge, stay accountable, and imagine futures rooted in care and collective liberation that center those often forgotten.

Conclusion

As we navigate the ever-changing infrastructure of neoliberalism—same problems, just different packaging—we are reminded that the struggles we face today as oppressed people, and Ethnic Studies practitioners are not new. We must look back to the critical lessons that previous generations, both within and beyond the academy, have generously laid out; these lessons have meaningfully served oppressed communities. At the same time, we must look ahead to insurgent futurities: visions that stretch beyond the limitations of the present and toward liberatory possibilities we've yet to fully imagine.

This two-pronged approach—honoring the past while building toward expansive futures—allows us to remain grounded in our roots, our histories of resistance, and the community-based practices that have sustained us. Ethnic Studies has long done the important work of documenting historical memories of resilience across Black, Indigenous, Latina/o/x, Asian and Arab communities, tracing both the violent systems of oppression they've faced and the creative, courageous ways they've resisted. By centering the structural roots of poverty, racial capitalism, and settler colonialism/colonization, the field has sharpened our collective understanding of what we are up against, as well as what it takes to challenge these forces.

Crucially, Ethnic Studies has also worked to include youth by institutionalizing itself within K-12 public education, despite growing attempts to whitewash and suppress the field. This effort, though complicated, reflects an ongoing commitment to reach beyond the university and into communities. One of the most powerful legacies of Ethnic Studies remains its ability to engage those at the margins—young people and community members who exist outside the purview of

the academy—and to center them as knowledge producers, organizers, and visionaries. Yet, despite the field's intentions and ongoing efforts, there remains critical work to be done in engaging young people and community members who are either excluded from or disinterested in formal educational spaces. Their knowledge remains vital and worthy of recognition, and not necessarily by the institution but perhaps instead within communities.

Looking forward, we must remain committed to building insurgent futurities—visions of liberation that resist co-optation and push beyond the institutional confines of the academy. At the heart of this commitment are the practices we have named: accompaniment as radical solidarity, barrio mothering as mutual aid, bridge building as liberation pedagogy, and popular education with those often forgotten. Each offers a critical pathway for Ethnic Studies. Accompaniment as radical solidarity reminds us that scholarship must walk alongside communities, not stand apart or in front because we are all connected by El Hilo. Barrio Mothering as mutual aid insists that infrastructures of care outside of the state are essential for survival and resistance. Bridge building as liberation pedagogy demonstrates that Ethnic Studies is a collective project, linking classrooms, communities, and movements across so-called borders. Popular education and centering those at the margins ensure that our practices remain accountable to the most impacted and that knowledge is co-created rather than extracted.

To carry these lessons forward, we recommend that Ethnic Studies practitioners deepen our investment in activist scholarship that resists incorporation into the neoliberal university and instead centers the needs of our communities. We must reimagine mutual aid for the conditions of advanced racial capitalism, building sustainable infrastructures that both protect and expand Ethnic Studies in K-12 schools and beyond. We must also remain vigilant about who is missing—those excluded by respectability politics, whether Indigenous, Afro-Latina/o/x/e, incarcerated, undocumented, poor, queer or otherwise marginalized. If we do not, we risk reproducing the very harms we seek to dismantle. Insurgent futures demand that we hold space for those pushed to the margins and that we imagine new worlds where all of our people—not just the “respectable,” digestible few—can live full, joyful lives and thrive.

Identifying Accompaniment as Radical Solidarity, Barrio Mothering as Mutual Aid, Bridge Building as Liberation Pedagogy, Popular Education, and Centering Those Often Forgotten are not abstract concepts we randomly selected. They are practices that emerged from our everyday lives—long before we carried the title of “academic.” Shaped by our varied positionalities—across class, migration, race, and sexuality—and by the geopolitical contexts of our birth, these practices reflect the quotidian life of Ethnic Studies itself: how communities in their everyday lives have always resisted, survived and created knowledge in face of state repression and violence outside of the ivory tower walls.

While these themes arise from our lived experiences, they also reverberate within oppressed communities throughout Turtle Island and across the globe. This is the same spirit that animated the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) in 1968 and '69. While the strikes at San Francisco State and UC Berkeley are remembered as campus struggles, they were deeply tied to people's movements outside of the academy: Black freedom struggles, Chicana/o/x farmworker organizing, Asian and Pacific Islander anti-imperialist movements, Native resistance to land theft and genocide, and international liberation struggles from Vietnam to Palestine. Students carried the

voices of their families and communities into the university, demanding not just courses but a transformation of how knowledge itself was defined and who it served.

From this perspective, the TWLF was never only about winning departments or degrees; it was about honoring community struggles and making the university accountable to them. The themes we name—accompaniment, mutual aid, popular education, centering the forgotten—echo those same commitments. They are practices that come from the ground up, from the everyday lives of oppressed peoples who built networks of care, survival, and resistance long before the academy recognized them. Their significance lies in reminding us that Ethnic Studies must always remain tethered to the people: to those outside the institution, to those still fighting for, our work must continue to center the knowledge, struggles, and visions of our communities.



Figure 1. *Viet Nam / Aztlan*, Malaquias Montoya, 1973, offset lithograph on paper, sheet 26 × 19 in.; image 22 1/2 × 17 1/4 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, museum purchase through the Frank K. Ribelin Endowment (Accession No. 2015.29.3). © 1973 Malaquias Montoya.

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Mux Critical Praxis in Creative Writing and Literatures

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Abstract

The piece explains the coinage of “mux critical praxis” as an example of how critical ethnic studies approaches open possibilities of incorporating indigenous philosophical methodologies to our mentorships and within our classrooms, serving as an axis to teaching Latinx Literatures and Creative Writing. I suggest there is a pitfall in the idealized belief that the study of literature and the act of writing *per se* and in and for themselves, create forms of resistance to racial capitalist projects of erasure. Frequently, this idealization of literature and the practice of writing fail to interrogate how the effects of colonization and racism limit and erode creativity itself. The creative essay departs from a creative autoethnography where I explore my own growth and configuration as a Mexican writer and the ethnic reworking that transforms my own wiring. I posit the *mux* critical practice as a method of re-rooting and a pedagogical tool, I suggest that as we restore, re-root, and remember, we develop students’ creativity and allow them to liberate their capacity to imagine and transgress.

Keywords: Re-rooting, Creative Writing, pedagogical tools, indigenous philosophical methodologies

1. Mux

I walk to my classroom carrying my cup of green tea, my computer and the books I will teach. I feel an emptiness in my stomach, and I struggle to hold the marker because my hands are sweaty and cold. I feel insecure teaching literature because I generally get asked when my novels and fiction books will be translated to English.

In the anglosettler stolen land I am not yet a writer.
In anglosettler stolen land I am sometimes a ghost of myself.
If my book is not published in English, it’s “less of a book.”

Those who ask, never fail to make a gesture of disappointment when I say my books are published in Spanish and I don’t plan to write one in English. I wonder why it has never occurred to them that they could, in fact, learn Spanish. I pause. I imagine I am back in the river where I learned to swim. Tiny fish swim around me, silver threads floating in the water. The river holds me. I find my *mux*, my secret path, back to my center.

I didn’t always want to be a writer, but I always wanted to tell stories.

I was born in the late 1980s in Chiapas, southern Mexico, during a turbulent time of economic hardship and political conflict. As the daughter of a communist teacher and activist who was a member of the Chiapas teaching union CNTE, an organization that was in open confrontation with the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional), we lived like many other families from the union, surviving and navigating political persecution. During those years of hiding and forever moving, oral stories were my safe place.

Back then, I had no role models in female writers, but I did have role models in women telling vivid stories. Before bedtime, my grandmother would narrate stories from the Afro-Zapotec tradition that she would wrap up by saying “*Colorin, colorado el que no se duerma se queda pegado.*” My favorite story was *tío conejo y tío coyote*¹, where *tío conejo* constantly outsmarts *tío coyote* showing how wittiness and planning can outwit force. My first literature emerged from a plurality of cultures, in dialogue throughout centuries, it emerged from local knowledges alive in the south of Mexico that trained my awareness to the world in the plural, but I could not see it at the time, because I was trained not to see it, nor taught to evaluate it or name it.

I am a “Ladina” and was raised as a mestiza in a middle-class family in Tuxtla, Gutierrez, a modern capital city. I have campesino roots, ethnically Afro-Zapotec and Mam from Guatemala, but shaped by the privilege of not being racialized as indigenous in a hierarchical and often cruel society like the south of Mexico.

I do not officially belong to a contemporaneous indigenous nation or share their collective pains and straggles, and I do not intend to profit or benefit from naming myself as part of an indigenous group when my own upbringings as a mestiza is built over their othering and suffering. Yet I am a Ladina, *hija de la desindianización*, a daughter of the painful and violent process of erasure and des-indianization, and I walk as such, I name it, I sit with it. I stand on these muddy waters on the riverbank, my weight pushes my heels down, the warm water surrounds my ankles, subtly and possessively.

Historically, in Central America, “Ladinos” are the product of a colonial society in which west Africans and the heterogenous indigenous nations were brought into contact, and they integrated, loved and shared life, forming vibrant and thriving communities that later, under the homogenizing umbrella of mestizaje erased the multiplicity of their origins. Mestizaje in Chiapas is rooted in a desired and fictional Hispanization. Historically the Hispanic population in the region was minimal (Chiapas was geographically challenging and mostly inaccessible), but the emerging Mexican identity founded on the mythic union between Spain and the Mexica was imposed on local populations and bore few, if any, traces of African or local indigenous ancestry such as Zapotec, Mam or Zoque. This complex societal context shaped me and to be able to write I had to name and decipher this method of settler colonialist violence.

My journey as a racialized writer is what inspires me to theorize about the radical possibilities of ethnic studies approaches in the study and praxis of literature. However, this clarity did not come naturally, it was a journey, a challenging and sometimes painful search for meaning and belonging.

¹ This story was illustrated by Francisco Toledo and published by Fondo de Cultura Economica in 2016.

In my early beginnings as a storyteller, my love of stories led me to write my own, which people began to call “cuentos” or short fictions. I took these stories to literary workshops at the local public library. There, I was fortunate to study with renowned writers who came from Mexico City to Chiapas, as part of cultural campaigns that emerged from peace projects following the Zapatista uprising in 1994.

These writers from *Gran Tenochtitlan* not only guided me with expanding my reading portfolio but also trained me with social, cultural, and symbolic capital. For example, they taught me not to constantly apologize, they seemed annoyed by my overpoliteness. They would ask me not to say “*mande*” or to address them as “*usted*.” All these habits were considered “provincial.” During my female upbringing in Chiapas, I was inculcated with an extremely accommodating, even ceremonial manner of treating others, which I still retain by choice, but which I now understand were undesirable traits for what a writer is supposed to be: a mestizo intellectual, a *letrado*. Mestizo intellectuals don’t apologize or address their peers as “*usted*.”

Inspired by the male writers I admired and desired to emulate, I arrived at *La gran Tenochtitlan* in 2006, or as my writing mentor referred to the capital: “the inhabitable but inevitable Mexico City,” he said, while also adding that “studying literature would not make you a writer, Claudia, but living, *really living* will” he promised.

I thus arrived with the goal of studying Hispanic Language and Literature at UNAM and the desire of living, *really living*, and despite my own insecurities I thrived in that magnificent city, I became one with its chaos, the rainy days, the cold mornings. Yet in my own writing I often felt lost. Before, in the world of oral storytelling I never felt confused or frustrated, I knew the sounds and rhythms of my collective stories. But it was not only in my own writing that I felt confused; it was also in my understanding of literature as a scholar in training.

At UNAM, the literature curriculum is clearly organized in the milieu of *mestizo* founding myth. We began our studies with Pre-Hispanic Literature and its counterpart, Medieval Literature; during this period, we spend an insane amount of time studying the Cid Campeador (a favorite of Franco, the dictator who revitalized the study of the manuscript in Spain during his ruling).

Pre-Hispanic Mexican Literature was studied as equally important to Spanish literature, but there was a lack of curricula engaging with contemporary indigenous literature, despite its vitality and growth. After this initial stage of training, we moved on to 19th-century literature and concluded with Contemporary Mexican and Spanish literature. This cemented an overview of an official literary canon in Mexico, which is closely aligned to the *mestizo* founding myth.

During my first years I aimed to be a *letrado*, a mestizo writer and by the end of my life in Mexico City almost seven years later, I managed to blend in and in many ways thrived within the literary environment of young promising writers trained at UNAM and supported by highly selective institutional writing fellowships. I learned how to move, how to talk, how to laugh. Yet I could feel my writing suffering from it. I was aware that I needed to craft a language that would allow me to tell the stories within me, the real ones, the ones that mattered to me. Yet I could not find the language to do so. I was hurting, mentally and physically.

Literature has the power of revealing your most intimate personal shortcomings.

To be able to tell the stories I was craving to share, something had to change.

Following my inner voice, I decided to return to Chiapas to study Anthropology. It was during this time that I returned to my father's hometown in the highlands of Chiapas. My decision shocked city friends but not my family. My family explained it simply and clearly: "she is finding her *mux*, she is in search of her *mux*" and they supported me, they knew I was going back to our center/home because I needed to.

In Hoja Blanca, a small rural enclave in the Sierra Madre of the Soconusco, with no more than 300 inhabitants, most of them elders, I learned to listen with my whole body and flesh. I had no running water and spotty electricity, yet I had a waterfall in my grandfather's land next to *la milpa* that his own grandfather harvested when he came from Guatemala. I would follow the stream, and I would take long walks in the cafetales, alongside the workers. We would walk and talk for hours, harvesting *pacayas*, and *mazorcas*, we would then gather around the *fogón* to tell stories and drink *atole*. I learned to walk in the mountains bending the knees slightly but firmly and I also learned to sleep accompanied by the sounds of the mountain and the hauling of the spirits.

The *Mux* called me, and I responded to its calling.

In literature, the most important advice any writer would give you is to write with honesty and from a place of honesty, for racialized writers from Latin America that necessarily means to excavate how racisms and patriarchy impacted our bodies and our ways of perceiving the world and shaped our own stories and literary legacies.

In the search for my *mux*, I was confronted by the violence of forgetting. I was confronted by our family history of hiding and mutilating essential parts of our memory. I was also challenged by our own violence to others and to ourselves. In Hoja Blanca in communion with our stories of violence and survival, I was able to see past and present with clarity. I realized that without knowing it I had been running. We had been running, escaping, hiding, surviving, and in that running we forgot. But we always kept the key close to our hearts:

El Mux es el ombligo, el centro, el hogar

The *mux* is the center, what ties you to earth, home.
It pulls you back to your mother's womb.

One day after walking in the mountain, I came back to my grandfather's house and took a cold shower with the fresh water from *la pila* that contains the water from the waterfall. My body came to life as never before. I was back in the space of no time, the space of the stories from my childhood, from there I was able to see what I had never seen before, beyond my historical wounds, beyond the never-ending fear inoculated in my bones for centuries. For the first time, I was able to see beyond the fog, and I was able to write the stories I needed to tell.

In the historical clarity of my own being, I found my most honest writing. It was through an ethnic reckoning with my own history that I was able to locate myself within my literary legacies and was able to craft the language I needed to evoke to conjure the stories I wanted to tell. I had to

deconstruct who I was taught to be; I had to challenge what I was raised to aspire to, and I at last had an answer to the calling of my blood and spirit.

2. Mux Critical Praxis as a Methodology

This opening text of this essay in the form of an autoethnography, examines my literary process as shaped and transformed by the “mux critical praxis” with the aim of describing and highlighting the possibilities that critical ethnic studies approaches offer to the study and practice of literature. I propose an approach to writing as a way of being and knowing.

Mux in the mam/maya language means *ombligo* in Spanish or belly bottom in English. Across the cultures of Mexico, anthropologists and scholars (Gonzales, 2012; Rosales, 2007) have documented the importance of the umbilical cord and different rituals and ceremonies to connect the newborns to the land and the community. For the mam people of Guatemala and Chiapas in Mexico, the connection is conjured through the ceremony of *awal mux*, “siembra del ombligo” or “siembra del niño” meaning the ritual of “sowing of the child.”

In this ritual, the family and the community plant the child’s *ombligo* to the land; this could be to a specific tree or water stream with the guidance of the *chiman* or elder. My family’s sacred place was under a *ceiba* tree marked by crosses made of *ocote*. Growing up the concept of the *mux* was passed down to me in a casual yet persistent way: through memories of these rituals practiced by my grandparents. My parents did not perform the ritual for us; they were at the time young college graduates and felt alienated from these practices. But they talked about them and constantly referred to “finding your *mux*” as synonymous with finding yourselves or finding balance. Through my creative autoethnography, I attempt to center my experience as an author trained in Mexico, and the legacies of colonialism in my own body to show how the concept of “*mux*” allowed me to write from a place of equilibrium and connection with my own history.

3. Mux Critical Praxis: Tools for the Classroom

To ground Mux critical praxis in the classroom, I found it essential to embrace plurality and polyphony in all their forms. One of my first steps was to suggest a change of course title at the university where I taught the course: instead of *Latin American Literature*, we adopted *Latinx Literatures*. For this change to be possible, I must highlight the openness and willingness of the institution, they not only facilitated but encouraged any changes I believed necessary, trusting in my insight and expertise. This shift signaled to students from the outset that the course engages with a plurality of visions and voices. The syllabus incorporates film and scholarship alongside literary texts and traditional oral storytelling, and it requires students to take a hands-on approach to their learning. For example, I ask the students to document *leyendas* or *testimonios* from their relatives, and we engage with them as literary sources.

While teaching Latinx Literatures one of the biggest challenges is locating compelling translations and up-to-date reading materials, it is difficult to find translations of contemporary works written by authors who write in Spanish or Portuguese and are not in publishing conglomerates. This combines with the fact that bilingualism does not translate into biliteracy, thus, Hereditary Spanish speakers might struggle with reading in Spanish even if their speaking and listening skills are strong and fluid.

It is important to emphasize that the decline in bilingualism and literacy is not because of a lack of interest or individual responsibility, but the result of racism and racist policies. As the authors of *Language is Not the Problem, Racism is the Problem* eloquently state: “Bilingualism is perceived as a talent for white students and a deficit of students of color” (Flores et al., 2024). According to the authors, the classrooms become microcosmos where elitism and racism are enacted to privilege whiteness.

Racializing the use of Spanish is not arbitrary but a conscious choice aligned with settler colonial projects of “enclosure” to use Sanchez and Pita’s coinage (2021). This is not only an attempt to erase Spanish, but also an attack on the speaker’s identity, as well as a project against the polyphony and multiplicity of languages and worldviews spoken in the Americas, including *lenguas originarias* and Native American languages. Hence the plural becomes othered, and the plurality of ontologies as well as the historical exchange among cultures, which has been a natural part of the history of humanity, is reframed as a threat. The project of erasure is not new but a key element of colonialist ideology, that according to Berta Cáseres form the “triad of domination”: capitalism, patriarchy and racism. As teachers and scholars of Latinx literatures, it remains important to understand the importance of our work in nourishing a space where students engage with the plurality of their own worldviews, fostering a sense of belonging.

In practice, we must navigate these limitations with creativity, using films as a source. For instance, during the first two weeks of class, students read a range of texts, including selections from the *Chilam Balam* and the *Popol Vuh*, the introduction and first chapter of *Indigenous Intellectuals*, Eduardo Galeano’s *Open Veins of Lati*, *Lust for Gold*, *Lust for Silver*, and two poems by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. They also engage with two films: *I, the Worst of All* (a biographical film about Sor Juana) and *Embrace of the Serpent*. To conclude this unit, students collaborate in groups to write and perform a short play that incorporates one character from each text. For instance, the *tlamatini* from *Indigenous Intellectuals* alongside Sor Juana herself. Their performance must respond to the guiding question: What is Latin America?

By incorporating theater as a pedagogical tool, I draw on long-standing traditions of performance and corporeality in learning, rooted in Indigenous practices across the Hemisphere. This embodied, dialogic approach allows students not only to read and analyze the texts but also to inhabit them, embodying and grounding knowledge.

Finally, I use creative autoethnographies with ethnic reflections in the classroom, prompting them to examine their own histories through a critical approach to the study and practice of literature. The final essay consists of a 3-page creative autoethnography, which can be presented in either written form or performed, where students reflect on their own life journeys and approach Latinx literature as a way of being and remembering.

Patrisia Gonzales (2012) proposes the term “Post-Indian Stress Disorder” to describe the embodied experiences of historical trauma among mestizos and indigenous peoples who through the effects of racialization were willingly or unwillingly disconnected and alienated from their ancestral “cosmo-logic.” The trauma resulting from erasure is a shared experience among racialized writers who, like me, might struggle to find their most “honest” writing, simply because while excavating within ourselves, we are faced by voids in our sense of being and belonging.

In this context I posit the *mux* critical practice as a method of re-rooting and a pedagogical tool that confronts the pitfall of the idealized belief that the study of literature and the act of writing *per se* and in and for themselves, create forms of resistance to racial capitalist projects of erasure. Frequently, this idealization of literature and the practice of writing fail to interrogate how the effects of colonization and racism limit and erode creativity itself. As we restore, re-root, and remember, we develop students' creativity and allow them to liberate their capacity to imagine and transgress.

To finalize, I evoke the words of my writing mentor: "studying literature would not make you a writer, but living, *really* living will." To his words, I add that "really living" for racialized writers starts by naming the process of erasure as a mode of colonization.

What I call the "*mux* critical praxis" serves as an example of how critical ethnic studies approaches open possibilities of incorporating indigenous philosophical methodologies to our mentorships and within our classrooms, because, for literature to be a transformative praxis, it requires deep deconstruction, a becoming that ties writing to the collective and is rooted in the radical fire of honesty. Only then, the act of writing becomes a dialogue with the past and present and a path for liberation.

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Jorhenkuarheni: The Educador Comunitario and P'urhépecha-Based Pedagogies as Decolonial Praxis

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Abstract

In the P'urhépecha language, learning is expressed through the term *jorhenkuarheni*. In its morphological composition, *jorhenkuarheni* derives from the verbal root *jorhentani*; that is, to light the fire (*encender el fuego*). Learning is an inherently collective praxis embedded in the know-how of P'urhépecha culture and founded on our ethical values oriented towards our communal ways of being. In recent years, the P'urhépecha People have led a transformative self-government movement emphasizing demands favoring community-based educational practices. In this context, the Educador Comunitario was born in the P'urhépecha highlands in 2017. The Educador Comunitario constitutes an annual gathering that brings together P'urhépecha communities to engage in activities grounded in P'urhépecha education praxis and collective knowledge production. Drawing from an auto ethnographic reflection as a workshop facilitator in Comachuén and Huecorio (Michoacán), and as a P'urhépecha scholar navigating Western academia in the U.S., I offer a critical reflection on how community-based education through the Educador Comunitario constitutes a decolonial praxis grounded in P'urhépecha-based pedagogies and ways of knowing. I contend that the Educador Comunitario de-centers academia as the only site of knowledge production and stresses Indigenous community spaces as fundamental and legitimate sites for the reproduction of Indigenous knowledges.

Keywords: Indigenous pedagogies; Decolonial praxis; Indigenous education; P'urhépecha

Por la Resignificación de la Educación P'urhépecha
(Biblioteca Comunitaria Ambulante)

Introduction

For the P'urhépecha People of Central Western Michoacán, education does not only take place within the context of formal, or institutional, spaces found in settler-colonial States. Education is rooted in processes that center the community as a historical, traditional, and fundamental space for knowledge production and educational practices that have sustained us as P'urhépecha People. The Educador/a/x Comunitario, born in the community of Comachuén in the P'urhépecha Highlands in 2017, is a process organized and led by Daisy Azucena Magaña Mejía and her family,

community, and allies. The Educador/a/x Comunitario's communal library is modeled after a traditional P'urhépecha cargo system, a system of social posts where families or individuals take over a social position in the community and assume the responsibilities of that post for a specific amount of time; thus resulting in an intricate system of social relations that interweaves communal ties and belonging (Padilla, 2000).

In 2018, Uekorheni, a community-based collective located in Huecorio (Pátzcuaro, Michoacán, Mexico)—where I am also a member—became carguerxs of the communal library. That same year, our collective participated in the second edition of the Educador/a/x Comunitario, an event that takes place every summer in Comachuén, hosting a multitude of workshops aimed at the communities. Magaña Mejía notes that centering P'urhépecha-based pedagogical practices allows for the development and accompaniment of Indigenous autonomy processes in P'urhépecha communities (Biblioteca Comunitaria Ambulante, 2019). More specifically, the Educador/a Comunitario/a/x responds to holistic education systems already found in P'urhépecha territory, which are part of a more comprehensive epistemology that includes principles such as ánchekorheni (collective work/faena), marhoatspekua (communal/community service), jarhoajpekua (mutual aid), and kaxumpekua (honorability). All of these are part of the P'urhepecha jorhenpeni and jorhenkuarheni (aprender/enseñar, or teach and learn).

Inspired by and working in collaboration with the Educador/a Comunitario/a/x, Uekorheni also organized a series of workshops in Huecorio and eventually became an island of the Educador/a/x since 2018. In this text, I share this experience, both as a member of Uekorheni and as an P'urhépecha Ethnic Studies scholar who sees community-based educational practices as a central educational system to learn how to relate to the world. In the following pages, I reflect on the Educador/a Comunitario/a/x as a decolonizing praxis grounded in Indigenous-based (P'urhépecha, specifically) pedagogies and ways of knowing that acknowledges and roots communal relations in our territories while contesting the coloniality of power present in Western education institutions (Quijano, 2000). Aligned with Ethnic Studies frameworks and the hallmarks of Ethnic Studies teaching praxis (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020) that highlight community-engaged work and reclaiming cultural identities, for instance, the Educador Comunitario de-centers traditional Western academia as the only site of knowledge production and prioritizes Indigenous community spaces as fundamental and legitimate sites for the reproduction of Indigenous knowledges. The Educador/a Comunitario/a/x not only empowers P'urhépecha communities and brings them to the center of knowledge-making, not as “objects of study” or “human subjects” of academic research, but as knowledge creators and interlocutors of our own histories as P'urhépecha People. Indigenous pedagogies confront the coloniality of power present in institutionalized education in settler-colonial States. The hope of this article is to offer a reflection to share the experience of a community space that not only interrogates institutions of knowledge production, but that offers a seed of hope to transform educational praxis.

Indigenous Pedagogies as Decolonial and Liberatory Praxis

Community-based pedagogies are central to Ethnic Studies. In the history of Ethnic Studies, communities have been a site of knowledge production. From teach-ins to Escuelitas and community workshops, Ethnic Studies educators have facilitated spaces to share knowledge that seeks to contribute to the communities. In the case of Native and Indigenous Peoples, Sandy Grande (2015) states that Indigenous pedagogies are systems that focus on the collective while

having at the heart anti-colonial and anti-imperial forms of resistance. This collective emphasis offers a fundamental contribution to Critical Ethnic Studies to respond to the colonial attacks that we continue to experience by interrogating practices of oppression in education and engaging in Indigenous knowledges as pedagogies of resistance amid global crises.

Coloniality of Power and Decoloniality

Coloniality of Power, a term coined by Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano (2000), explains the interrelationship between knowledge production and colonialism. With the construction of Western universities as the *only* sites of *legitimate* knowledge production, other ways of existing, knowing, and relating to the world have been erased and excluded, particularly from school curricula. Current attacks on Ethnic Studies, for example, are founded on those same ideas that coloniality of power, as a concept and practice, discusses: European colonialism, the maintenance of racial hierarchies, the erasure of non-European and non-white systems of knowledge and existing. On the other hand, decoloniality, as discussed by authors such as Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh (2018), questions Eurocentric epistemic thought to prioritize alternative forms of knowledge that exist in the world. In other words, to understand life from the perspective of a pluriverse (Escobar, 2016). In that sense, Indigenous pedagogies, as the original instructions of these lands (Turtle Island and Abya Yala) debunk the logic of Western knowledge production as the only space where knowledge emerges. The Original Instructions of Indigenous Peoples are rooted in the land and have sustained Indigenous communities since time immemorial (Nelson, 2008). These Original Instructions are not standardized practices. Rather, they respond to the particularities of how Indigenous communities understand place and space. In the case of Mexico, for example, Indigenous scholars have theorized about *Comunalidad* as both a concept and praxis that explains what it means to live in community by highlighting ancestral systems of knowing and being (Martínez Luna, 2016). In the case of the P'urhépecha People, the network of principles and praxis that exemplifies the good living (*buen vivir*, *comunalidad*) and wellbeing can be understood as the *Sési Irékani* (Magaña Mejía, 2017).

Indigenous Pedagogies as Liberatory Praxis

In their article on the praxis of developing critical consciousness in Indigenous education, Pewewardy, Lees, and Clark-Shim (2018) note that Indigenous education practices existed prior to colonization and the establishment of settler-colonial states. Indigenous pedagogies stem from a millenarian relationship with the land (Nelson, 2008). Therefore, Indigenous systems of knowledge cannot be separated from what happens to the land, the people who inhabit the land, and the entire web of beings that coexists with us. Indigenous pedagogies encompass oral stories and histories, land-based teachings, cultural and spiritual practices, languages, and other central elements of Indigenous epistemologies. These systems of knowledge question but also decenter Western knowledge. In his seminal works on education as liberatory praxis and as a development of a critical consciousness, Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (2000) stated the importance of acknowledging systems of oppression to transform the world. Indigenous pedagogies constitute an example of a liberatory praxis, where a focus on collective wellbeing and land-based approach, allows for an understanding of our connection and accountability to the world we live in and to everyone and everything that inhabits these lands.

Walking the Path of Colectividad as a P'urhepecha Educadora Comunitaria

I have accompanied Uekorheni since 2017. In Uekorheni, we emphasize our voices, our bodies, our minds, and our spirits as P'urhepecha women living in Huecorio to address our positionality as part of a communal collective and our community. Throughout this text, I often use “us” and “I” to talk about P'urhépecha pedagogical praxes through the experience of the Educador/a Comunitario/a/x. While I utilize “I” to emphasize my voice, I also rely on “us” because I understand that the experience I share throughout this text is a collective one. Western academia individualizes the research process. Indigenous research methods, on the other hand, emphasizes the collective and the accountability that as Indigenous scholars we have to our communities (Wilson, 2008). I am P'urhépecha. I am from Huecorio. I am an educator, a woman, a migrant, and a community broadcaster. I am also a scholar. With the tensions, contradictions, and possibilities this profession brings, I am still learning to navigate Western academic settings. But I acknowledge that who I am today is also the product of collective knowledge coming from family, community, mentors, colleagues, and friends. I also bring my roots, my ancestral knowledge, and my voice to the spaces I inhabit and embody.

Centralizing our voices as Indigenous scholars is also an act of resistance. Following an Indigenous critical autoethnographic approach that centers Indigenous (in this case, P'urhépecha) voices and disrupts individualistic and traditional academic structures (Bishop, 2020), in this article I emphasize the importance of a multidirectional relationship between the personal/individual with the collective voice in an effort to elucidate on P'urhépecha pedagogical practices that incorporate all members of the community as the Educador/a Comunitaria/o/x does. Doing so allows the continuous reclamation of Indigenous knowledges in order to resist Western narratives of power and transform educational spaces (Smith, 2022).

P'urhépecha Ethics and Knowledge

In multiple public spaces, P'urhépecha historian Pavel Ulianov Guzmán Cruz has referred to the P'urhépecha People as *un pueblo combativo* (People that fight colonial injustice. As a historian, but also as the spokesperson of the Consejo Supremo Indígena de Michoacán, Guzmán Cruz has stated the ongoing struggles that P'urhépecha People face, from colonialism, territorial encroachment, violence, language loss, and education (Torres, 2022). In that sense, a P'urhépecha-based education cannot be alienated from the territory. The P'urhépecha region is divided into four sub-regions: japundarhu (Lake Pátzcuaro), juatarhu or p'ukumendio (the P'urhépecha Highlands), Eraxamani (Eleven Towns), and Tsakapendio (Zacapu marshlands). The ecosystems found in each one of the four sub-regions, everything and everyone that inhabits those territories, and the web of interrelations that connects everything and everyone that/who co-exists in these territories (including human, non-human, and other-than-human beings) make up the systems through which the P'urhépecha People learn to live and pass down this knowledge. The Educador/a Comunitaria/o/x and the teaching pedagogies that stem from this process are grounded in P'urhépecha cultural ethics and communal praxis built through a system of reciprocal responsibilities rooted in the land. These principles include:

- **Ánchekorheni:** collective work and faenas, or *tequios*. This implies working collectively in community and prioritizing collaborative knowledge making for communal wellbeing.

- **Jarhoajpekua:** reciprocity and mutual aid by building accountable relations with the community and the territory as a whole over extractive practices. In my research and teaching, I extend this value to institutionalized education, where academia has also extracted knowledge from Indigenous communities and has worked to reproduce colonial hierarchies of power (Smith, 2022).
- **Marhoatspeni:** communal service. This principle refers to serving the needs, goals, and aspirations of the entire community and culture. P'urhépecha scholars have also discussed marhoatspekua as a central value for the reproduction of communal life in P'urhépecha communities (Cortés Máximo, 2019).
- **Jánhaskakua:** wisdom and knowledge. In the context of knowledge production and education, this can also mean enacting community-engaged practices in teaching pedagogies that center P'urhépecha-based knowledges, stories, and collective histories.
- **Jurhimpikua:** honesty or rectitude. This means conducting ourselves as individuals and communities with ethics and respect, orienting our actions towards building trusting relationships.

Although I include some reference to Indigenous/P'urhépecha scholars who talk about Indigenous ethical principles in a broader sense, the translations that I share above are approximate. Instead of basing the knowledge of these principles in scholarly texts, I emphasized an approximate definition of these P'urhépecha language terms based on experiential knowledge learned through making comunidad. The experience of the Educador/a Comunitario/a/x stresses principles such as ánehkorheni, marhoatspekua, janhaskakua, and jarhoajpekua to reproduce our own pedagogical practices.

Educador/a Comunitario/a/x

The Educador/a Comunitaria/o/x is an extension of the Biblioteca Comunitaria Ambulante. The Biblioteca emerged in 2015 as a family exercise to share a passion for knowledge and reading in Comachuén, a community located at the highest peak of the mountains in the P'urhépecha Highlands. Daisy and her two sons took their books and toys to the community's main plaza and invited children and families to come together. That summer of 2015, Daisy and her family brought together more than 150 children, a high number for a small community (Magaña Mejía, 2019). This communal effort turned into an itinerary library that now hosts thousands of books and travels around communities in P'urhépecha territory every year. The intercommunal networks that the library created also became the catalyst of the first Educador/a Comunitaria/o/x in 2017. Since their inception, both the Biblioteca Comunitaria Ambulante and the Educador/a Comunitario/a/x have accompanied self-determination projects in P'urhépecha territory. Autonomy, in the words of Magaña Mejía, must include a critical implementation of P'urhépecha pedagogies that involves all sections of the community, from women to youth and children.

As guardians of the communal library when it first arrived in Huecorio, Uekorheni organized a series of workshops that centered two central elements of current P'urhépecha political demands: autonomy and education. Daisy Asucena Magaña Mejía, organizer and coordinator of both the

Educador/a Comunitario/a/x and Biblioteca Comunitaria Ambulante, states that the Biblioteca Comunitaria Ambulante, where the Educador/a Comunitario/a/x was born, emerged as:

[un] como recurso pedagógico alternativo de reorganización comunitaria transformadora, ajena a fines partidistas y/o de Estado; más bien como ejercicio autónomo y autogestivo que busca recuperar los procesos comunitarios que hacen frente a las crisis planetarias.

[an alternative pedagogical resource for transformative communal reorganization, apart from political parties and/or State institutions; but as an autonomous and self-sustained exercise that aims at safeguarding communal processes that confront planetary crises] (My translation)

(Magaña Mejía, 2019, p. 3)

As Magaña Mejía states, P'urhépecha education, envisioned within the Educador/a Comunitario/a/x provides hope amid global neocolonial crises and State projects that threaten the livelihood of Indigenous Peoples. P'urhépecha education through the Educador/a/x constitutes an example of action that is crucial to disrupt colonial projects by prioritizing a communal collective approach.

Uekorheni emerged in Huecorio as a response to socio-political struggles for Indigenous autonomy in 2017. One of the central purposes of Uekorheni was to lead a community media project (Uekorheni, 2017). Understanding community work in Indigenous communities as processes that respond directly to the community, Uekorheni focused on establishing a workshop program for, with and by the community. Stemming from the collaboration with the Educador/a Comunitario/a/x in Comachuen in the P'urhépecha Highlands, Uekorheni has worked with three axes to implement activities in Huecorio that follow the principles of the Educador/a/x: establishing a communal library, organizing workshops with children, coordinating talking circles with women. The guiding principles of Uekorheni focus on community-based education by working directly with the community, especially with children and women. The following sections touch on three examples through which Uekorheni has implemented community-based educational practices framed within the Educador/a Comunitario/a/x, thus centering P'urhépecha principles, such as jarhoajpekua (mutual aid), marhoatspekua (communal/community service), ánekorheni (collective work/faenas), and jorhenpeni/jorhenkuarheni (to teach/to learn), in these activities.



Figure 1.

Huecorio's Communal Library at Radio Uekorheni

Uekorheni became carguerx of the Biblioteca Comunitaria Ambulante in 2018 and 2019 (Figure 1). As a small team of women, we approached our community's local authorities to request a space for the library. Radio Uekorheni, the community media project at Uekorheni, became the site to safeguard the library in our community for a month. Inspired by the work of Daisy in Comachuén and the rest of the communities who had hosted the library, we started our own communal library. We started with a few books that each of the members of our collective donated. Eventually, the library grew, and we own hundreds of books that are currently located at Radio Uekorheni in Huecorio's communal building, a public space that hosts Radio Uekorheni, the Jefatura de Tenencia (civil authority office), the Comisariado de Bienes Comunales (communal land office), and the Secretariat of Education's public library. The communal library currently hosts a collection of P'urhépecha-language books, historical titles specific to the P'urhépecha territory, bilingual books, and formal education guides translated to the P'urhépecha language. Hosting the communal library has allowed us to coordinate multiple activities, from organizing reading sessions, reading P'urhépecha stories with the children and broadcasting them through the community radio, and utilizing the material in diverse workshops to map our territory from the vision of the children. Through the communal library, we are learning and revisiting our history as Huecorenses. For example, some of the information found in the library has led us to conduct interviews with the elders as living archives of our community. The communal library became our starting point in our collective, and this work stemmed from the relationships Huecorio established with the Educador/a Comunitario/a/x.

Acknowledging the Territory through Children's Workshops

Since the summer of 2018, Uekorheni has organized summer workshops primarily aimed at working with children. The workshops range from introducing the P'urhépecha language, acknowledging our communal territory from multiple perspectives, talking about Lake Pátzcuaro—our main water body in the region—and art activities that centralize what the community means to them. While the communal library opened a world of possibilities to coordinate our first workshops, incorporating the voices and visions of the children has been crucial to the Educador/a/x. The first workshops that Uekorheni organized took place in Comachuén in 2018. We organized a two-hour workshop focused



Figure 2.

on the acknowledgement of our territory through the medicinal plants. The target audience were children. Throughout that morning in August of 2018, we had around thirty children over the course of the morning. As time ran out, we had to leave the classroom so that the next workshop could start. However, we stayed one more hour since the children wanted to finish decorating their codices that featured medicinal plants found in their town. This was the first workshop that Uekorheni organized after our establishment as a community collective in September 2017 (Figures 2 and 3). The enthusiasm, knowledge, and joy of the children instilled in us a sense of hope to organize similar workshops in our community, Huecorio. Since 2018, after returning from our

first Educador/a/x, we established our summer workshops, which we have done in collaboration with children and women.

Embroidery Circles as Women's Spaces to Teach, Learn, and Share

Women are a central part of the P'urhépecha culture and territory. Self-determination and communal life do not exist without the women (Lemus Jiménez, 2022). Women have always been present in all aspects of the P'urhépecha culture and communal life. As a collective made up of women, Uekorheni acknowledges that women must be included in all spaces, including those that are publicly visible. Uekorheni/Radio Uekorheni is located within the communal building. The communal building is one of the most important spaces in the community. This is the space where political decisions are made, where communal assemblies take place, and where important cargos (social and political posts) are renewed every year. However, this has been a male-dominated space. In 2020, Uekorheni established an embroidery circle, a public space open to all people in the community. Although the circle focused on the sharing of traditional embroidery, it became much more than a space to embroider P'urhepecha traditional attire. It also became a space where women, especially during the peak of the pandemic, shared our knowledge, our fears, our dreams, our visions, our hope. It became a space for teaching, learning, and sharing, not only about embroidery as a system that encompasses cultural, social, historical, and economic knowledge, but also what goes behind the women who embroider (Figure 4). The embroidery system has allowed the women who know the art of embroidery to share their knowledge and those of us who are learners to acknowledge embroidery as a web of knowledge and relations.



Figure 3.



Figure 4.

Conclusion: From the Educador/a/x Comunitario/a/x to Ethnic Studies

Christine Sleeter and Miguel Zavala (2020) note Ethnic Studies as a decolonizing project and as a curriculum that contests and undoes the legacies of colonization. Furthermore, in discussing Native American and Indigenous scholars, Sleeter and Zavala point to the importance of not leaving "White settler colonialist and the logic of Native erasure untouched" (p. 4). In that sense, Ethnic Studies engages with a critique of settler colonialism in education that centers Native experiences and land-based pedagogies by recognizing that, as education institutions, we are on Native lands stolen. As seen from the Educador/a/x Comunitario/a/x workshops, they highlight

Indigenous voices and communities. In applying Ethnic Studies frameworks in my own community-engaged work, I also see the decolonizing process that authors such as Sleeter and Zavala mention as extending beyond colonial borders and acknowledging hemispheric connections. I see in the Educador/a/x a potential to continue to reconfigure our identities as Indigenous (P'urhépecha) people in education.

Sleeter and Zavala also highlight seven hallmarks that frame the teaching praxis found in Ethnic Studies classrooms: counter-narratives, criticality, intersectionality and multiplicity, reclaiming cultural identities, community engagement, pedagogy as culturally responsive and mediated, and students as intellectuals. In my own Ethnic Studies praxis, I have found that these hallmarks extend beyond traditional classrooms. The focus of Ethnic Studies as a decolonizing curriculum extends beyond colonial borders and rigid understandings of education found in mainstream curricula in Western institutions.

In my own teaching praxis, I centralize Ethnic Studies teaching praxes. But I also acknowledge that in doing so, I am bringing with me who I am as a P'urhepecha scholar, educator, and community member. My community knowledge not only comes with me into the classroom but also guides my teaching. In previous summer workshops with Uekorheni, we worked with children to create codices that would document medicinal plants. For instance, in my classroom I assign community-based discussions and write-ups, where students must attend a community event or workshop, discuss what they learned, and engage in critical writing from Ethnic Studies perspectives. From the Educador/a/x, I have learned the importance of centralizing community voices and deconstructing the idea of the traditional academic classroom. In the workshops, we inhabit public and community spaces. We learn from elders, from the youth, and from children. The community event in my Ethnic Studies courses offers a possibility such as this adapted to the university system in California. Furthermore, applying transnational Indigenous knowledge in education happens in various spaces in California. For example, the Oaxaqueño Youth Encuentro (OYE) engages with Indigenous youth (mainly Zapotec, Triqui, Mixtec, P'urhépecha, and others) in the K-12 system to offer mentorship and an extracurricular program that centralizes Indigenous land-based knowledges (oaxaquenoyouthencuentro.org). OYE brings together students in the Central Valley with mentors from California, Oaxaca, and other parts of Mexico to foster cultural connections, Indigenous resilience, and empower Indigenous youth, whose work is reminiscent of what happens in the Educador/a/x Comunitario/a/x every year.

The Educador/a/x takes place for an entire week at the end of July and early August every year. It is a self-sustained project, where *marhoatspekua* (communal service), *jarhoajpekua* (mutual aid), and *ánchezorheni* (collective work) make the event possible. While the children are at the workshops, families in town are hosting visitors, providing meals, and sharing stories. Despite being at a smaller scale, our summer workshops in Huecorio are an extension of the Educador/a/x, where P'urhépecha principles allow us to learn in community. The Educador/a/x speaks to collective resistance that centers education and Indigenous autonomy. In an exercise of collective writing by the Educador/a Comunitaria/o/x, various talleristas reflected on the role of community-based education. The Educador/a/x framed these reflections on the verb “abrazar” in Spanish. “Abrazar la libre determinación” (embracing self-determination), as the multiple voices of this collective text mentioned, allowed for a lens that highlighted not only accompaniment, but also with love and care in education (Biblioteca Comunitaria Ambulante, 2019).

For those who have participated at the Educador/a/x, this exercise of communal autonomy and decolonial praxis has left us with lessons learned that plants in every space of the Educador/a/x a seed of hope to envision a future full of possibilities in the midst of planetary crises. As a P'urhépecha educator, pedagogical praxis that stem from my community has allowed me to experience holistic and legitimate sites of collective knowledge production that sustain P'urhépecha People, from establishing a communal library, to learning from the children in the summer workshops, and seeing in P'urhépecha textiles an entire system of knowledge production. The Educador/a/x stresses the need to turn to other ways of knowledge, especially those coming from Indigenous communities, as fundamental lessons to exist. This is also a central principle of Ethnic Studies. Through their emphasis on collective action, community, and engagement with alternative forms of knowledge, the Educador/a/x exemplifies one tangible way in which we can resist ongoing colonial struggles while ensuring the continuation of our educational practices as P'urhépecha People.

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Andean Dance Cosmovision in the Classrooms: A Decoloniality Dance Approach toward Liberation for Elementary Students and Teachers

Alicia Moseley

Abstract

This reflexive ethnographic article offers an exploration of how the vibrancy of Andean dance cosmovision serves as a powerful decolonial process for both students and teachers in the classroom. It captures the essence of the Indigenous dance teachings of Don Juanito, an Indigenous dancer and elder from Cayambe, Ecuador, who passionately conveyed to his granddaughter the profound belief that all human beings are life dancers, interconnected in the rhythm of existence. The narrative delves into the transformative potential of dance as an alternative method of knowledge transmission, enriching the learning experience while simultaneously nurturing students' autonomy and creative expression. Through this lens, the article illuminates the significance of embracing Indigenous wisdom in educational settings, fostering a deeper appreciation for cultural heritage and the collective spirit of community.

Keywords: Andean Dance cosmovision, funds of knowledge, decoloniality, mind and body liberation

Introduction

Don Juanito used to say, "All humans are danzantes in the womb of Mother Nature." He was my grandfather, an Indigenous man who was my first dance teacher. He experienced the brutality of colonialism and racism in Ecuador, but he never stopped smiling at the world. His secret was his grounding in an Andean cosmovision expressed through dance. He learned this Andean knowledge from Michita, his mother. She used to communicate with Papa Viento (Father Wind), who guided my ancestors to dance. According to Don Juanito, "cada movimiento de la vida tiene un propósito y cada palabra hablada tiene que ser clara" (every movement in life has a purpose and every word must be spoken clearly).

His teachings on Andean dance and the cosmovision of which it was a part will always resonate with me in my ongoing journey of decoloniality. As a child, I did not realize it, but the dance teachings from my grandfather rooted me in an understanding of my Indigenous ancestors' origins. This understanding helped me cope with Ecuadorian patriarchal racism, legacies of colonialism-coloniality, racism from my mother's side of the family, and my feelings of abandonment by my father. With Don Juanito, I learned that I could create dance movements that connect with Pachamama (Mother Nature) and the universe. Every day, as human *danzantes*, we create our life's choreographies, he used to say. In the Andean dance cosmovision he shared with me, even the simple act of waking up becomes part of the human choreography. His teachings were rich with creative movement, allowing the body to express feelings through dance.

Don Juanito's teachings, though profound and insightful, could not shield me from the stark reality of societal expectations. Coloniality was also in dance. When my mother decided to enroll me in Western dance classes, I was taught that Don Juanito's Andean dance cosmovision did not fit in ballet. In the world of ballet, I was met with a torrent of contradictions: I was deemed too small, my body too square and curvy, my feet failed to point in the prescribed angles, and my turnout consistently fell short of the lofty standards. After each dance lesson, I returned home weighed down by an avalanche of insecurity about my body. A shadow swept over my spirit as I compared myself to the other dancers, who effortlessly embodied the ballet ideal. Yet, in those moments of doubt, Don Juanito would say, "Do not let anyone take away the rhythm of your heart and the colors of your dance."

Still, I allowed coloniality to strip away the rhythm of my heart and the colors of my dance. As a child, I was influenced by schools and their environments. At my school, I noticed that many teachers would often express their admiration for European culture, while at the same time, they seemed to overlook or even diminish the value of Indigenous culture. I found myself living in two worlds, just as Don Juanito did. In the Andean dance world, we had the ability to create art through movement. In the colonial world, we were bound by European ideals, which led us to question the validity of our own perceptions. He was also trying to navigate a society that minimized both his body and mind. To others, Don Juanito appeared to be an ordinary Indigenous man: short, with a sturdy build, dark skin, and features typical of Ruminahui or Atahualpa. In my child's eyes, he was the Aya Huma—an embodiment of guidance and a reminder of the unique beauty that my heritage and experiences infused into my dance.

The contradictions that shaped my understanding of decoloniality originate from my grandfather. He made a conscious effort to adapt to Ecuador's colonial culture while simultaneously wielding the Andean dance cosmovision as a powerful form of resistance against coloniality. Although Don Juanito was not familiar with the terms "coloniality" or "decoloniality," the Andean dance cosmovision unequivocally represented his decolonial praxis (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018), as it safeguarded his bodily and mental freedom. His influence is undeniable; I now assertively embrace the Andean dance cosmovision as my primary means of resisting colonialism and advancing my own decolonial journey.

In my decolonial journey, I have incorporated Don Juanito's Andean wisdom in my approach to teaching dance. This enables me to see how decolonial dance can empower students, foster their autonomy, and guide them towards mental clarity and physical freedom. This article is not merely a documentation of my reflexive ethnographic dance research, it also aims to highlight the

profound impact that dance can have on students and teachers. My intent is not to promote dance solely as a means for those aspiring to become professional dancers. Instead, I aim to elevate the importance of this expressive art form within an academic realm that often prioritizes sedentary intellectual pursuits over physical activity.

As an Indigenous danzante, scholar, and researcher, I feel a deep responsibility to convey the unique advantages that dance can bring to the educational environment. Through movement, we can unlock our creativity, cultivate a heightened sense of bodily awareness, and root a stronger connection to our individual identities. Each step taken is more than a physical act; it is an expressive journey that promotes collaboration, enhances a mental and bodily decolonial process, and fosters a sense of community. By incorporating dance into the schools, we create not only an artful practice but also a vital component of holistic education that enriches the lives of all involved.

Andean Dance Cosmovision as a Source of Knowledge

Andean dance cosmovision has shaped my approach to teaching dance. This rich cultural framework, rooted in the interconnectedness of body, mind, and community, has influenced my instructional methods. To introduce dance as part of a decoloniality process in education. I needed to create a framework for Don Juanito's Andean dance cosmovision that shows how dance helps students' bodies and minds in the process of liberation, decoloniality, and autonomy.

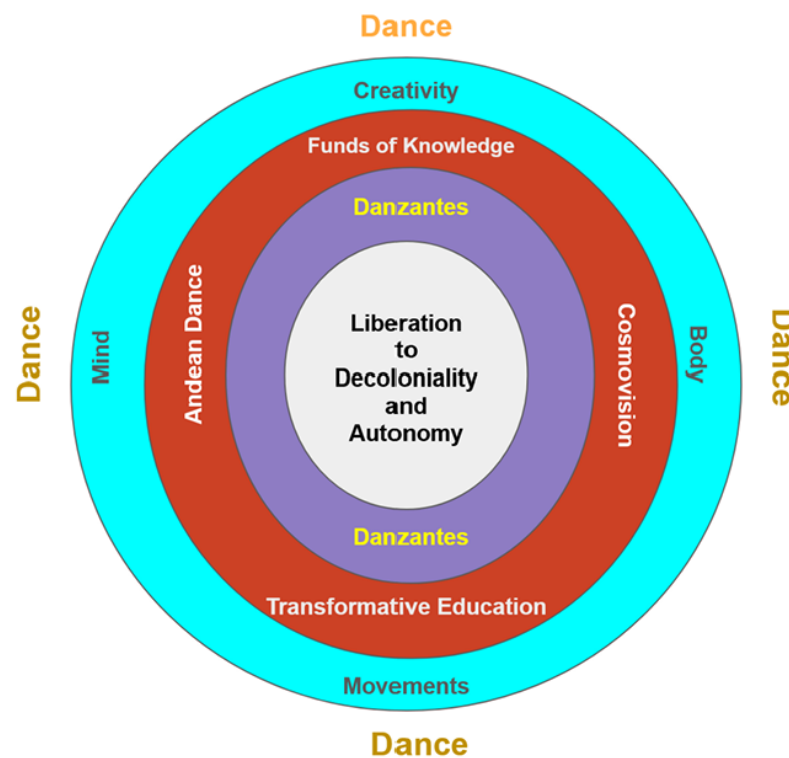


Figure 1. Integrating Dance and Andean Dance Cosmovision into Scholarly Concepts.

I developed Figure 1 in a circular form, inspired by Don Juanito's idea that all movements in life are interconnected. He often shared that his mother, Michita, used to say that when the wind moves the branches of trees, the leaves eventually fall to the ground. When these leaves touch the ground, they become fertilizer for the soil. Later, when the tree drops seeds onto this enriched soil, another tree begins its life, nourished by the rain and the sun. In a very simple way, Michita explained to Don Juanito the interconnectedness of life through this circular analogy.

Using her example of the tree, he would point out that the mind, body, and dance movements are all connected to shape our stories. In this metaphor, your body is the tree, your mind is the wind, the dance movements are the leaves falling to the ground, and the dance stories represent the seeds that intertwine with creativity, leading to new beginnings and starting a cycle of dance movements once again. With this concept of interconnection in a circular form, I created Figure 1 to link existing scholarly concepts to Andean dance cosmovision, forming a framework to validate Don Juanito's teachings in an educational context.

In Figure 1, dance exists outside the circle. It serves as a form of expression that connects with the movement and creativity of both the mind and body. This connection is intertwined with the funds of knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 2009) of the students and my own background in Andean dance cosmovision. This blend enhances the practice of dancing, fostering a relationship between dance knowledge and transformative education. As students create their narratives through movement, they "develop creative and critical thinking skills to continuously question their own learning" (Orelus, 2013, p. 10). This process allows students to connect with their inner *danzante*.

Escobar (2016) suggests that by observing the various relationships among the components that shape an individual's world, we can see how their ancestral stories contribute to their identity. When students' creative uniqueness is discovered, their dance knowledge begins to surface, allowing them to link "knowledge to everyday life" (Rendon, 2014, p. 89). This situates students' knowledge within a dance framework that is "dynamic, relational, and constructed," enabling them to create dance stories as "a form of cultural-historical identity" (Raj & Ulanoff, 2022, p. 4).

This understanding brings us to the essence of the final circle in Figure 1, captured in the concepts of Liberation, Decoloniality, and Autonomy, which is crucial as it encourages self-expression and creativity (Daly, 2022). It underscores the critical importance of fostering autonomy—not only of the body but also of the mind—as a rooting step towards achieving genuine liberation and effective decoloniality. This perspective highlights that freedom can only be attained when individuals and communities exercise their own agency and control over their lives, free from oppressive structures and colonial legacies. Advocating for autonomy creates the necessary conditions for transformative change, allowing for a reclamation of identity and agency that is essential for collective empowerment and self-determination. This framework guided my reflexive ethnographic dance research, enabling me to document the complex relationships among dance, decoloniality, body-mind liberation, and autonomy in TK to eighth-grade students.

The Research, The First Lesson, and Andean Dance Cosmovision

In the 2022–2023 school year, I created an after-school dance program. I approached the school where my son attended, and having that connection, the principal allowed me to initiate a dance program at the school. I recruited twenty-eight dance students and divided them into two groups.

The first group was TK to second-grade students, with fifteen *danzantes*, and the second group of thirteen *danzantes* was third to eighth-graders (Moseley, 2024). The dance classes were held 3 to 4 days each week.

To prepare to teach using the Andean dance cosmovision approach, I recognized that the students needed to engage deeply with their creativity by learning to transform into *danzantes*—dynamic participants who not only absorb knowledge but also actively contribute to the creation of their movement. This method emphasizes the integration of bodily knowledge, allowing students to draw from their physical experiences and cultural heritage. In the context of Andean dance cosmovision, this means fostering an environment where students can explore their interpretations while connecting with the collective spirit of the dance. Through this process, they become not merely students but creators of their own expression, weaving together tradition and personal artistry in each movement they make. At the same time, students allow their bodies to explore movement that comes from their everyday experiences.

One of the activities I used to stimulate students to move was the action of waking up in the morning. For me, it is essential to incorporate this stimulus lesson when I begin teaching students who have not been exposed to the art of dance. From Don Juanito, I learned that the action of waking up leads to the choreography of one's day. In the Andean dance cosmovision, waking up sets your day for a new beginning. In my childhood, thinking about the action of waking up as a daily choreography assisted in awakening my creativity. It was a ritual in creating dance movement in my child's imagination. I have come to understand that the act of waking up sets the stage for students to begin constructing their movement.

I began by asking three questions to the TK to eighth-grade students to initiate the movement in this lesson: How do you wake up in the morning? What is the first movement that you do when you wake up? When you get out of bed, are you slow, fast, or jumpy? The tricky part of this dance stimulus lesson was that students must show with movement the action of waking up. After I explained that the entire body has its own vocabulary that does not require spoken words, students looked at me with surprise, as if I had shared something that was an impossible task.

If the students are shy, it is the instructor's responsibility to foster an inviting atmosphere where students feel at ease exploring and refining their movement. According to Paulo Freire, educational practice involves the teacher's interpretation of humanity and the world (Finders & Thornton, 2017). To ignite their creativity, with each question, I introduced a collection of whimsical dance phrases, starting with a detailed interpretation of my morning routine. I exaggerated my stretches, twirled playfully, and infused energy into each gesture, capturing the essence of waking up with enthusiasm. After I shared my joyful waking-up dance, the students' eyes sparkled with inspiration, and they eagerly embarked on creating their own movement expressions. Each student crafted phrases that resonated with their experiences and emotions. As they danced, these lively phrases evolved into a rich tapestry of choreography, allowing their stories to unfold and shine brightly on the dance floor, transforming an everyday action into a celebration of self-expression, autonomy, and creativity.

While doing this lesson, I had a 4-year-old student who laid down on the floor and decided to practice opening and closing his eyes. I asked him, "Do you move other parts of your body when you wake up?" He responded, "Yes, but I am practicing how to open my eyes, and I do not

remember which side to get up from bed.” His response reminded me that my role was to motivate them to move, not to interfere with their decision-making. According to Don Juanito, we choose the steps that guide us on our daily dance path. The 4-year-old student was in his first dance class and needed time to recall his morning dance path. The next time we had class, he started to create movements that expressed not only his morning experience but also his family stories.

Building on Andean dance cosmovision as my foundation for teaching allowed me to be part of the students' creation process, and students embarked on a journey to bring their dance knowledge into a classroom environment that has often restricted them to being sedentary learners. In the coloniality setting, they are expected to adhere to the instructor's rules strictly. However, within the Andean dance cosmovision, students are encouraged to develop creative and critical thinking skills that empower them to cultivate problem-solving abilities (Orelus, 2013). Autonomy emerges as a means of reclaiming the liberation of both body and mind (Daly, 2022).

The Pathway of Dance Decoloniality to Decoloniality of Education

Using Andean dance cosmovision as my funds of knowledge not only allowed me to observe how the TK to eighth-grade students create their choreographies with their dance fund of knowledge to nourish their autonomy, liberation, and decoloniality, but it also enabled me to create an environment in which they used their math skills to memorize their dance steps. I was able to connect the different dance lessons to math reinforcement, in which TK to eighth-grade students needed to count their steps and multiply the steps by sections of four and three to determine how many repetitions of the dance phrases they had. The more dance steps they created, the more they had to use their math skills. The TK students used the numbers they knew, and they figured out how many dance repetitions they had with their fingers. The older students who had more knowledge of math used multiplication and division. The beauty of this experience is that they helped each other as a community. The older students helped the younger students count the steps and the repetitions. By creating and solving math problems in their choreographies, the students also decolonized the idea that math is only in math books, homework, or slides presented by the teachers.

By recognizing students' knowledge, we enable them to cultivate their autonomy through the liberation of their minds and bodies in the art of movement creation. This approach fosters an environment where students and instructors learn from one another. When I immigrated to the US and found a job as a dance instructor at a charter school, I observed that some students were struggling with vocabulary just as I was. To address this, I requested a list of vocabulary words from the English teacher. Together with the students, we created dance movements that represented the concepts behind each word.

Through this creative process, we expanded our English vocabulary through dance. It was a unique experience because we embodied words that were challenging to learn and pronounce. By developing movements that represented the meanings of these words, we memorized them more effectively. Each student interpreted the words through their distinct dance movements, which helped them understand the meanings. As An et al. (2019) states, "a proposed explanation for the relationship between physical movement and learning is that cell network binding processes within the students' brain can be accelerated through stimulation of body-based action" (p. 148). Don Juanito used to help me understand school material with the practice of movement. I do not think

he knew about the cell network, but he knew that it was easy for me to learn concepts while creating movement.

Once, I had to memorize a poem for school. I think it was in third grade. The poem was an homage to Quito, the capital of Ecuador. It was extremely long for my age, but Don Juanito, with the Andean dance cosmovision and respect for my learning process, helped me create dance movements for the poem. The movement was based on hand movements and some stomping. My body was not moving from my center. Everything was done in the same spot. I memorized the entire poem, I recited it in front of my class, and I was chosen to recite the poem in front of the school. However, in the process of practicing to perform the poem at school, the teacher who was in charge of the program minimized the way I was saying the poem. She wanted me to stay still, not to move my hands, not to stomp my feet. At the end, I got discouraged from reciting poems.

I call that experience a decolonial-colonial experience: my Indigenous grandfather's decolonial teachings assisted me in learning a poem that was difficult for me, but my school's colonial teachings discouraged me from wanting to say poems in front of people. Encouraging students to use dance as a form of self-discovery and incorporating it into educational subjects teaches both students and teachers that education extends beyond the traditional classroom (McCutchen, 2006). Learning beyond the desk as dance funds of knowledge is a form of decolonial practice to liberate the mind and body because it does not confine students to silence and passive listening. Instead, it encourages interaction, collaboration, and the creation of unique dance narratives that show the autonomy of the students.

From Chaos to Autonomy

It is essential for me that readers understand how much an act of repressing a child's voice can affect the child who one day will become an adult. Decoloniality is important in schools, and one way to initiate this decolonial process is by using dance. Decoloniality in dance can be expressed through individual embodiment, which actively "challenges and disrupts dominant societal structures" (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, pp. 29–30). The TK to eighth-graders were not accustomed to having the liberty of creating, and sometimes the dance classes looked chaotic to some of the school staff. Nevertheless, the TK to eighth-grade students needed this creative chaos to achieve liberation of mind and body, decoloniality, and autonomy.

What may seem chaotic to adults is actually a valuable learning experience for students. Disrupting established structures is a decolonial process (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). It can prompt the body to initiate movement, resulting in a range of emotions such as joy, pain, or a sense of freedom that emerges directly from those movements. This process fosters a deep feeling of embodiment (Sagasi, 2020). During our creative sessions, the TK to eighth-grade students often laughed; at times, their movements were so swift that it looked as if they were running. Other moments saw us rolling on the floor, connecting with Pachamama with our entire bodies. We would jump, and some students would even do cartwheels. Those who could do cartwheels took the opportunity to teach their classmates. The noise generated during our dance movement experimentation reflected their personal life experiences; it was a form of liberation and a way for them to express their autonomy.

The dance narratives created by the students exceeded my expectations. While each story was unique, they were also interwoven with one another. Students supported each other when needed, learning to function both as individuals and as part of a community. The sense of community that they developed inspired me to create a school art festival called *Free To Be Me!* When I asked the dance student if they would like to perform, the TK to second-graders opted for two collective choreographies. In contrast, six students from the third to eighth grades expressed their desire to develop their own individual choreographies for the festival. The students who did not desire to be choreographers played the role of dancers, and others who did not want to dance took the role of stage managers.

Free To Be Me!

There were no funds to create the festival, but the wonderful aspect of creating "Free To Be Me!" was the involvement of parents and teachers in coordinating various logistical parts of the festival. Mothers and grandmothers organized fundraisers, selling treats like raspados, pizza, mango with chile, aguas frescas, and other delicious foods to raise money for materials to create the costumes. Two days before the festival, fathers helped clean and prepare the stage, ensuring it was safe for the students. Teachers played a crucial role by encouraging both parents and students to participate in the festival. Everyone had a role to play in this collaborative choreographic experience. Don Juanito would describe this spirit of connection and cooperation as a good "minga." In Cayambe, where he was from, mingas are common within the Indigenous community, where community members come together to help one another achieve common goals and foster a sense of identity. This embodies the spirit of solidarity and mutual aid.

The enthusiasm of the dance students while creating their choreographies was contagious to the entire school body. The development of the eight choreographies for the *Free To Be Me!* Festival was full of family stories from the students. Taylor (2003) suggests that performance is an expressive behavior that transmits cultural memory and identity. Using this theory of performance as a means of transmitting cultural memory, perhaps dance can also reveal the story of lost memories. Memories, in which dance as a cultural narrative, "creates a continuum of the past to the present to the future" (Raj & Ulanoff, 2022, p. 6).

At the *Free To Be Me!* Festival, the dance "Arcoiris (Rainbow)" featured third- to eighth-grade students. The performance began with a solo dancer expressing loneliness after losing her parents, while also showing gratitude towards her grandparents. Her movements, a mix of smooth and sharp, signaled the arrival of brightly costumed group dancers, creating a rainbow effect. The performance shifted when they froze in poses, returning to the soloist, whose sad movements conveyed deeper emotions. The powerful conclusion showed the soloist executing a movement that caused the group to fall, symbolizing her desire to let go of the past and embrace the future.

The day the dance student finished choreographing Arcoiris, she told me it felt as though a ton of weight had been lifted off her mind and body. When she performed Arcoiris for her family, her grandmother was in tears. After the festival, I asked her grandmother if she understood the choreography, which could have passed for an abstract dance piece. The grandmother replied that she could see her granddaughter finally expressing her pain about losing both parents. This choreography was not only about telling a painful story; it was also about the student's liberation of mind and body, using movement as a form of expression. At the same time, it revealed a story

that had been repressed in her body. I viewed this as a decolonial process. Her autonomy was evident the moment she decided to create something that expressed a dance narrative that belonged to her.

While students were choreographing and dancing, I noticed that they grew in a way that their minds and bodies recognized a transformation. From not knowing how to tell a story with dance. The students found ways to express themselves creatively. And I found a way to give voice to Don Juanito Andean dance cosmovision while at the same time using his knowledge to open pathways for TK to eighth-grade students to find autonomy, begin a process of decoloniality, and liberation of mind and body. In addition, the TK to eighth-grade students in each dance class created a vibrant tapestry of dance movement that mirrors their unique life journeys. This was vital in observing how the children could use problem-solving and critical thinking. By using Andean cosmovision, the students and I were able to root our identities in this ongoing decolonial process.

Decoloniality, Dance, and Liberation

As McCarthy-Brown (2017) states, “Culturally [approach] teaching expands the possibilities for dance educators to reach all students and, in so doing, develop both the creativity and physical well-being of students” (p. 45). Throughout this journey, I was seeking the well-being of the students. I witnessed the transformative power of connecting students' identities to their everyday lives, using dance as a means for them to discover their true autonomy. The funds of knowledge that underpin dance practices are essential for understanding the complex contexts of individual experiences (Gonzalez et al., 2009, p. 5). In this exploration, I embraced the dual role of teacher and learner. I learned to approach artistic choreography with humility, moving beyond the role of Maestra who imposes her vision on the students. Instead, I became a seeker—an individual engaged in a dialogue with my ancestral Andean dance cosmovision, uncovering insights that transcended mere choreography and resonated with the essence of our collective heritage.

I cannot definitively determine whether decoloniality precedes liberation or if autonomy is a prerequisite for either. Alternatively, it is not clear if autonomy fuels decoloniality and liberation, or if liberation and decoloniality pave the way for autonomy. However, I am sure that engaging with Don Juanito's Andean dance cosmovision provides a profound way for students to connect with their identities. This cultural expression fosters a deep connection to their heritage and acts as a catalyst for initiating the journey toward decoloniality. By incorporating movement and rhythm, it encourages participants to experience liberation of both mind and body, ultimately guiding them toward a sense of personal and collective autonomy. This reciprocal relationship between dance and identity creates a powerful framework for understanding and challenging the legacies of colonialism while celebrating Indigenous wisdom and resilience.

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“Honoring Our Ancestors”: Language Reclamation in an Ethnic Studies Classroom

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Abstract

American Indian and Indigenous Studies is grounded in central tenets that strengthen tribal sovereignty and self-determination. These principles encompass relationality, storytelling and oral traditions, decolonization, and Indigenous languages. According to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, there are 6,700 languages spoken globally. Indigenous people speak around 4,000 of these languages. The United Nations (2018) estimates that more than 50% of the languages spoken today will be extinct by 2100. Considering this context, Ethnic Studies classrooms are pivotal spaces for student learning, where awareness, research, and connection with Indigenous languages can take place. This work examines language reclamation praxis in Ethnic Studies at Cal State LA. It analyzes an Indigenous language project conducted by students in two Chicana/o Latina/o Studies courses. Grounded in Ethnic Studies pedagogies as frameworks to enhance language reclamation among students of Latinx heritage, the paper problematizes settler colonialism and its effects on Indigenous languages. The paper emphasizes student reflections on Indigenous language loss and settler power, highlighting language reclamation praxis centered on the students' exploration of their family histories and cultural roots. The paper situates the language project as an Ethnic Studies pedagogical praxis that enhances language reclamation and challenges hegemonic narratives of Native erasure.

Keywords: Indigenous people; Indigenous languages; language reclamation; settler power.

Introduction

As an academic discipline, American Indian and Indigenous Studies is grounded in central tenets that strengthen tribal sovereignty and self-determination. Among these principles are relationality, storytelling and oral traditions, decolonization, and the preservation of Indigenous languages. In her groundbreaking work, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (2024), Māori scholar Linda T. Smith highlights the importance of revitalizing, restoring, and returning to Indigenous languages as decolonial projects. Today, Indigenous languages are at risk of extinction. According to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, there are 6,700 languages spoken globally. Although Indigenous people comprise approximately 6% of the worldwide population, they speak around 4,000 of these languages. The most recent estimates indicate that more than 50% of the languages spoken today will be extinct by 2100 (United Nations, 2018). Indigenous languages are more than a code of oral communication. They reflect the worldview of Indigenous peoples and encapsulate profound connections to their territories.

Santiago-Martínez (2024) notes that Indigenous languages embody cultural expressions deeply ingrained in philosophical thought and serve as symbolic expressions for naming the world. They also serve as a critical vehicle for transmitting knowledge, organizing, and fostering communal relations. Considering this context, the university classroom, particularly in Ethnic Studies, is a pivotal space for student learning, where awareness, research, and connection with Indigenous languages can take place. It is a transformational, resilient, and fierce space for reclaiming students' histories and creating meaningful community connections.

This work examines language reclamation praxis in Ethnic Studies. More specifically, it analyzes an Indigenous language project conducted by students at California State University, Los Angeles. This project was inspired by my role as a workshop facilitator for a community-based project with the Institute for the Teaching of Indigenous Languages (IELO) in Michoacán, Mexico. This article begins by exploring Ethnic Studies pedagogies as frameworks to enhance language reclamation among students of Latinx heritage. I also problematize settler power, its effects on Indigenous languages, and linguistic racism in academia. Next, I discuss the various components of the language project and engage with student reflections by highlighting two major themes: Indigenous language loss and endangerment, and their connection with settler power. Secondly, I emphasize language reclamation, which centered on the students' exploration of their family histories and cultural roots. I conclude with final remarks that situate the language project as an Ethnic Studies pedagogical praxis that enhances language reclamation and challenges hegemonic narratives of Native erasure.

Ethnic Studies Pedagogies: Community Empowerment for Social Transformation

Ethnic Studies emerged in the context of liberation and resistance of oppressed Peoples of Color in the United States in the second half of the 20th century. It is an anti-colonial project that recenters marginalized and racialized communities, their voices and lived experiences, and above all, their humanity (Dominguez et al., 2023; Escobar, 2014; Lugo-Ortiz, 2007; Sleeter, 2020). Urrieta and Machado Casas (2013) demonstrate that Ethnic Studies challenge coloniality of power over knowledge production by centering community experiences, traditional ways of knowing, and non-dominant voices whose presence is often erased from whitemainstream schooling. In this sense, Ethnic Studies thus entail a critique of settler colonialism and the emergence of new possibilities for marginalized communities of color to rewrite themselves into history relationally and humanely. As an anti-colonial discipline, Ethnic Studies integrates research and pedagogical frameworks that both amplify and elevate community voices, validating community members as knowledge holders and creators (Joulbert, 2023; Zavala, 2018). Among Ethnic Studies research and pedagogical approaches are community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), funds of knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 2005), pláticas (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016), community-based participatory research (Deeb-Sossa, 2019), community-engaged research (Manzo et al., 2020), and the pedagogies of the home (Garcia & Delgado Bernal, 2021), as well as Culturally Relevant, Sustaining, and Responsive Pedagogies (McCarty & Lee, 2014; Ragoonaden & Mueller, 2017; Shaw, 2022).

This paper employs Culturally Responsive Pedagogies (CRPs) to frame the Indigenous language documentation project developed in the Department of Chicana/o Latina/o Studies at California State University, Los Angeles (Cal State LA). Culturally Responsive Pedagogies center on student- and community-based knowledges, thereby integrating their lived experiences and culturally appropriate frameworks to make sense of the world and create inclusive, caring, community-

oriented, and empowering learning environments (Shaw, 2022; Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2015). CRPs in Ethnic Studies develop “students’ agency by engaging them directly in action that responds to their research on their community” (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2015, p. 47). Tintiangco-Cubales and colleagues (2015) argue that CRPs allow “students to see themselves, their families, their communities, and their histories in the curriculum and practices of the classroom, as multiple sources of knowledge and cultural experiences are validated and celebrated” (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2015, p. 117). In other words, CRPs advocate for the implementation of teaching pedagogies that support the ways of knowing of communities of color and respond to the many ways in which mainstream schooling continues to operate as a colonial and hegemonic space (Nasir et al., 2020).

Several studies have demonstrated the application of CRPs in Indigenous curriculum, primarily through the incorporation of Indigenous language learning (Garcia, 2025; Ragoonaden & Mueller, 2017; Stowe, 2017). These studies show the significance and positive outcomes of integrating Indigenous languages into university spaces, including the implementation of Indigenous language programs and language events. Garcia (2025) suggests that “by incorporating Indigenous languages into education systems, we not only support the revitalization of these languages, but also empower students to connect with their cultural heritage” (p. 19). In this way, Indigenous languages constitute a central tenet in American Indian and Indigenous Studies, as well as a pedagogical approach to reinforce student empowerment, cultural roots, and community connections.

Settler Colonialism, Indigenous Languages and Higher Education

Historically, Indigenous languages have been targets of colonial extermination due to various factors. Settler colonial violence through genocide, displacement, and dispossession has placed Indigenous languages and thus their speakers at a higher risk of vulnerability (Lam, 2020). The hegemonic position of English—or Spanish, in the case of many Latin American countries—constitutes a legacy of settler colonial power that has historically oppressed Indigenous languages and criminalized their speakers. For Meighan (2023), English is ingrained in a Eurocentric framework shaped by linguistic imperialism, cognitive imperialism, and white supremacy (p. 147). The author refers to this process as Coloniallingualism, defined as “the transmission of imperial mindsets, knowledges, and belief systems through the teaching and learning of languages” (Meighan, 2023, p. 149). For the settler colonial state, racial superiority was often proven through language (Bourdieu, 1991; Shakar, 2023). As a logic of elimination, settler colonialism maintains a hegemonic model of power that privileges Eurocentrism over Indigenous knowledges (Grant & Wong, 2008; Quijano, 2000; Wolfe, 2006). In the United States, for example, settler colonialism operated through the removal of Indigenous people and the establishment of policies that legalized land theft, but also through assimilationist policies that structured state-based education as a mechanism of Native extermination (Blackhawk, 2023). Settler colonialism has also instituted various forms of symbolic violence that delegitimize Indigenous ways of knowing. Therefore, the extermination of Indigenous languages and their speakers is deeply intertwined with the colonality of power that subordinates Indigenous people for the benefit of capitalism and its extractive logics (Quijano, 2000).

Bourdieu (1991) explains the power relations encapsulated in linguistic exchanges through the concept of “linguistic markets.” Linguistic Markets operate in all spaces of the social system, including the educational field. While colonial languages such as English are associated with

racial/cultural superiority, economic betterment, social prestige, and upward mobility, Indigenous languages are often perceived as obsolete and racially inferior. Bull (2013) notes that "all individual languages, varieties, utterances and texts unavoidably have a market value. They are hierarchically ordered. Thus, some linguistic tokens are valued more highly than others, which again means that different speakers possess differing amounts of linguistic capital" (p. 36). Just as Indigenous people are racialized, so are their languages. In this line, May (2023) speaks of linguistic racism and the ways colonial language ideologies construct hegemonic structures that oppress non-dominant languages and their speakers. Similarly, Dorais (2012) observes, "Because of their mere demographic weight, languages spoken by a lesser fraction of a Nation State seem doomed to occupy a subordinate position on the linguistic market, except, of course, in colonial or semi-colonial settings, where the language of the colonizers always predominates, whatever the numerical importance of its speakers" (p. 39).

In the United States, two linguistic markets are well-established, particularly in the social spaces that Indigenous people from Latin America navigate. First, a hegemony has been established around the use of the English language. Secondly, the hegemony established by the Spanish among the Latin American diaspora. Discourses constructed around *Latinidad* erase Indigenous people and their languages from the Latin American diaspora in the U.S., thus making them subject to multiple legal vulnerabilities (Catalano et al., 2022; Gomez Cervantes, 2023). Such discourses of Native erasure also impact educational spaces. Historical narratives associated with Manifest Destiny and the "vanishing Indian" have established an academic framework that consigns Indigenous people to a distant historical past, where stories of genocide, violence, and removal or displacement are often obscured.

Furthermore, Leonard (2023) argues that the representation of Indigenous languages in the field of linguistics is often rooted in colonialism, subject to linguistic racism skewed in favor of Eurocentric perspectives. Indigenous languages are pejoratively identified as "dialects," which subjects them to a status as "less than" languages, and Indigenous community knowledges have been marginalized and excluded from curriculum development. Considering the alarming rate of linguistic extermination, Pratt and Dantas-Whitney (2020) emphasize an urgency to decolonize educational spaces to recenter the lived experiences and ways of knowing of students of color, as well as their communities. In this way, the insertion of Indigenous languages in the academic classroom challenges the hegemony imposed by settler colonialism. It provides creative possibilities for those whose languages are at risk of extinction or are no longer spoken.

Language Reclamation as Ethnic Studies Praxis: An Indigenous Language Project at Cal State LA

Since 2020, I have co-facilitated community workshops for and with native speakers and learners of Indigenous languages, guided by the Institute for the Teaching of Indigenous Languages (IELO) in the state of Michoacán, Mexico. In the fall of 2023, IELO established an accredited program, for which I served as an instructor, that trains Indigenous language speakers as language educators, allowing them to teach their mother tongues as a second language. My positionality as a P'urhépecha educator, broadcaster, and community member allowed me to integrate a language documentation project as a signature component in the courses I teach.

Originally called Mesoamerican Civilizations, "Indigenous Peoples of Mexico and Central America—a course offering through American Indian and Indigenous Studies, as well as Chicana/o

Latina/o Studies at Cal State LA—explores the diverse experiences of Indigenous peoples in the Mesoamerican region, further examining the historical traditions of Indigenous peoples and their dynamic evolution, identity formation, environmental issues, food sovereignty, and linguistic revival. The course centers on Indigenous perspectives, voices, and knowledges, as well as their contemporary expressions of resistance. Student projects prioritize research that documents Indigenous knowledges, stories, and languages through various activities, including a Mesoamerican Foods project, a mapping of traditional healing practices, and P'urhépecha language lessons throughout the semester. However, the signature assignment consists of a language documentation project that entails the elaboration of digital materials in Indigenous languages.

The language documentation project compiled a report on the current state of Indigenous Mesoamerican languages. This first installment involved the elaboration of a socio-linguistic analysis of the students' chosen language, encompassing its primary characteristics, cultural context, linguistic vitality, factors contributing to language loss and endangerment, as well as current efforts in linguistic revitalization. Most students selected an Indigenous language connected to their cultural roots, family, or community, and homeland. For students who were not culturally or familiarly connected to Mesoamerica, I suggested choosing a language they were curious about. In the second installment, students constructed a semantic domain that they used to create a digital material. The project also integrated two workshops where linguistic databases and resources were introduced. These resources included Ethnologue, the Open Language Archives Community (OLAC), Linguapax, and Living Dictionaries, which students used as a primary reference point to identify linguistic vitality and locate existing language materials for their projects.

Students also learned about online platforms for creating digital materials, such as Bloom Library, Canva, and StoryWeaver. Free software to create learning materials constitutes a convenient strategy to increase the number of language materials and do it inexpensively. Drawing inspiration from contemporary Indigenous digital activism, students' projects were informed by a wide array of technological initiatives advanced by Indigenous people to enhance linguistic preservation, reclamation, and revitalization efforts across Abya Yala. Therefore, the class also hosted online sessions with Joaquin Marquez Trinidad, IELO's director, who shared the community workshops project and current efforts for language revival in Latin America.

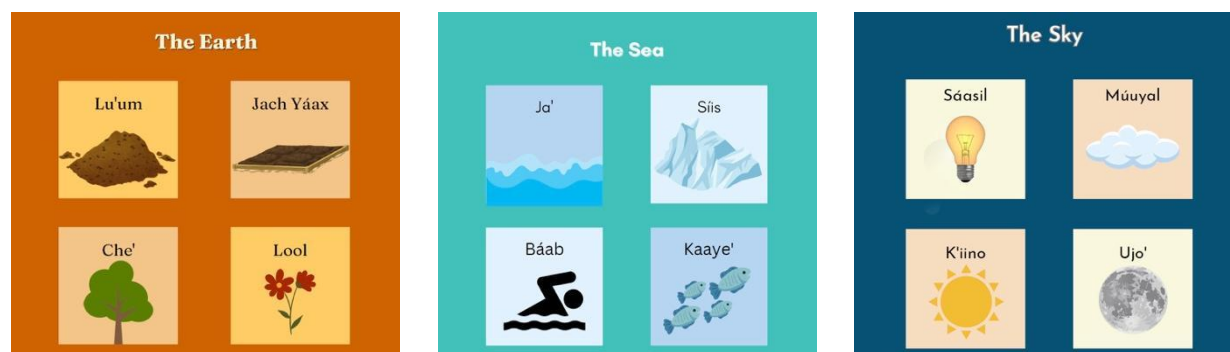


Figure 1. The Natural Elements in Yucatec Maya by Alyssa Abasto.

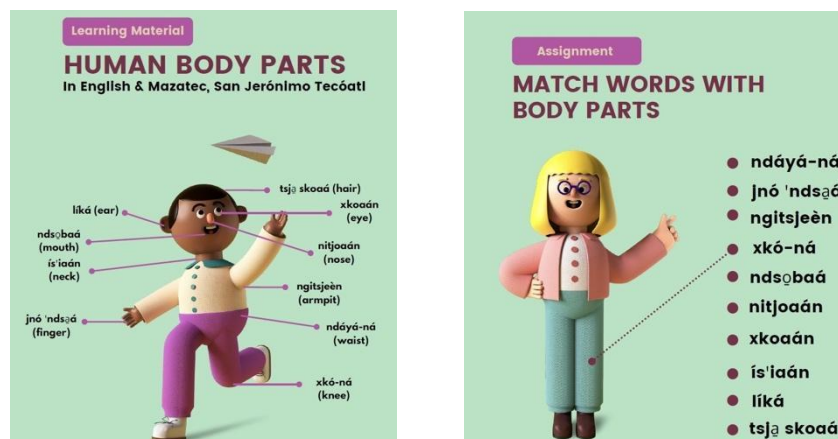


Figure 2. Human Body Parts in Mazatec by Antonio Ruiz.



Figure 3. Food Plants in Zapotec by Adela Elizarrez.

The language project resulted in the development of approximately 80 different digital language materials, combining the two courses in which this project was implemented. Students created digital materials in several Indigenous languages from Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua, including P'urhépecha, Zapotec, Mixtec, Nahuatl, Yucatec Maya, Mazatec, Wixarika, Yaqui, Popoluca, and Kaqchikel. Among the digital materials created are illustrated alphabets, bingo and memory games, word search and crossword puzzles, vocabulary flashcards, digital posters, and coloring books. The semantic domains include human body parts, animals, fruits, celestial objects, natural elements, and foods, as well as conversational phrases and vocabulary connected to specific territorial spaces, such as the cornfield.

The final part of the project consisted of a critical reflection, in which students responded to several questions: What motivated you to choose your language? What did you learn? If applicable, how does it connect with your family or community? Student responses varied, but their reflections illustrate their acquired understanding of Indigenous languages, their connection to their family, cultural roots, and community.

Heritage, Belonging and Language Reclamation: Student Reflections on Indigenous Languages

Incorporating Indigenous languages in university classrooms not only enhances the legitimacy of these languages within educational spaces but also in society as a whole. It fosters awareness of our plurilingual society and highlights the current challenges to language revival and preservation in Indigenous communities (McCarty & Lee, 2014). The language documentation project provided a platform that enabled students to critically engage with both historical and contemporary settler violence and ethnocidal actions that have contributed to language loss in Indigenous communities, and to reflect on their realities. While most students had limited knowledge about Mesoamerica's Indigenous communities, the language project allowed them to learn more about their heritage, where they come from, and their community's history. Despite their limitations, students entered the class with an open mind, eager to learn and be challenged. Student reflections encompass several themes, including the unique cultural and historical contexts of their chosen languages, characteristics of language revival efforts, current issues related to Indigenous languages, and connections to family and community.

Students' analysis of contemporary linguistic issues affecting Indigenous people brought to light the challenges hindering language revival and the impacts on their families and communities. A student's reflection echoed this sentiment of loss:

I can share that communities are constantly battling with politicians that continue to sell the lands, constantly displacing indigenous communities, which made it difficult to find a person near me to translate the dialect, as it was difficult asking my grandfather, he had health issues. Also, my grandfather was able to share with me that when the war happened, people from the United States taught him and others from his hometown English words with the purpose of replacing their proper dialect. My grandfather from my mother's side has had the opportunity to visit me in California, and I was amazed when he was able to read some words in English. (May 18, 2023)

Learning about Indigenous peoples and their languages provided new insights into their contemporary experiences. It allowed students to connect local linguistic struggles with broader structures of settler colonial power that have had important repercussions on Indigenous language loss. They questioned the colonial history that subordinated Indigenous languages by treating them as racially inferior. According to one of the students:

During the Spanish colonization of Mexico in the 16th century, indigenous languages, including Nahuatl was suppressed to impose the Spanish language and culture. . . . Most of "the Latinos," "Hispanos," only speak Spanish and identify with these terms that ultimately erase indigenous identity. Indigenous communities faced pressure to abandon their native languages and adopt Spanish. This historical trauma and power dynamics continue to impact language use today. Colonization also seeped its way into everything, including education policies, such as prioritizing the dominant language in its curricula. Indigenous languages have been marginalized in formal education, and it also limits the teachings of them. The lack of support from systems of power leads the younger generations to continue to assimilate to Spanish and not acquire our ancestral language. (May 18, 2023)

Considering the colonial background surrounding Indigenous languages, students were provided with insightful context regarding the importance of revitalizing these languages. Another student noted, "Political power and intervention play a massive role in the validity of a language, as it is this power that allows large funding protection for research of Indigenous languages/culture" (May 16, 2024).

In their analysis of current language issues, students also identified attitudinal factors that have impacted the transmission of Indigenous languages in their familial connections. For example, discourses about progress, where state-based schooling and Spanish language acquisition are viewed as a path to a better future, and discourses about identity and parenting, where Indigenous parents choose to teach their children Spanish to promote economic improvement and upward mobility, significantly impact language transmission. The following student reflection speaks to such discourses:

... My tío is a Nahuatl speaker, and he has never taught my cousins. I remember one time my cousin told me his dad told him about it years later, and he was upset that he did not teach it. My cousin wished to be connected to his roots. With my tío knowing Nahuatl and his sisters too, there seems to be a sense of shame in learning it, which is why my cousin does not speak it. I feel that with this shame of learning something culturally important, it contributes to the endangerment. (May 2, 2024)

Another student working on the K'iche' language of Guatemala explains a similar story:

I chose this language because it is mostly found in the midwestern part of Guatemala, particularly in Quetzaltenango. This is where my parents grew up, and my grandfather on my mother's side knows this dialect. I visited Guatemala last year and remember seeing my cousins learning about their language in their school. Not only are they learning Spanish, but they are also learning English and K'iche'. I also remember hearing the local people speak with their children, I think it is very important for this future generation to learn about their family's past. (May 16, 2024)

Listening to familial stories about Indigenous people and their culture, as well as visiting their parents' homelands, was fundamental for the elaboration of this project. Such experiences provided a framework for language reclamation.

While language revitalization focuses on creating new speakers, language reclamation constitutes a meaning-making process for heritage speakers (McCarty & Nicholas, 2014). That is, language reclamation "goes beyond direct actions to increase the number of speakers and seeks to understand how the community sees the language and what it means for them" (Gutiérrez de Jesús & Chávez Gonzalez, 2022, p. 497). Building on this idea, Huaman (2014) argues that "reclaiming language is not only speaking but also embracing an imperative that demands advocates of language, builders of language programs, financial managers of those programs and those who will exercise creativity in order to create and/or preserve sustainable spaces that are conducive to daily language practices" (p. 84). In this work, I use Indigenous language reclamation as an action to explore familial roots and reconnect with students' cultural and territorial origins, viewing language learning as an ongoing process of resistance and reconnection, rather than an end goal of language acquisition with achieved linguistic proficiency (Chew et al., 2024).

Many of the students in class chose a language closely connected to their familial roots and their parents' homeland territory. Learning about their chosen language not only evokes memories of childhood, land, and family, but also awakens new interests in researching more and sharing with the community. One of the students noted regarding her family's knowledge of the language:

I chose this language because my grandfather was the last in our family who spoke this dialect, and it inspired me to understand the significance of this language in my family and how it has failed to prevail in my generation. I long to understand the importance of this language that has lived through many generations but somehow died within my grandfather. This project has provided extensive information on how this language came to be and how there are different ways of pronouncing it in writing, which takes me to ancient times. I realized language is not just a way of expressing ourselves; our ancestry provides insight into our roots and significance here on earth. Language is part of our past, identity, and pride. (May 18, 2023)

Another student shared a similar experience:

What motivated me to talk about the Yucatec Maya language was my grandfather, because when he was alive, he would speak in Yucatec Maya to me and my younger siblings. We barely understood what he was saying because he would try to teach us every single day. He came to our house, but he died when I was just 8 years old, so we did not have much time together, and I wanted to honor him by looking into the language. I wanted to learn more about the indigenous communities who speak the language and how they are managing to keep the language alive despite all the outside factors that are trying to slowly get rid of indigenous communities. (May 18, 2023)

For some students, being in familial and community spaces that elevate and promote their cultural roots became an inspiration to learn more about Indigenous languages. A student shared the following reflection concerning her motivation for doing a project on the Miskito language of Nicaragua:

What motivated me to choose to research my project on the language Mískito is because I feel that I am lacking a part of my identity by not being fluent in the language. As a Nicaragüense Miskita, I feel almost ashamed to have lost that part of my identity. Although my family are native born speakers, I am the first generation where the language has been lost in the family line. Now that I have grown older over the years, I realized how important it is that I am educated in my culture so that in the future I can pass it on to my children. I am so blessed to still have connections to my roots through my family members, and I feel it is not too late for me to discover my identity through them. Also, by doing this project, I discovered there are more resources than I thought there were. (May 16, 2024)

Students also viewed this project as an opportunity to expand their knowledge of the language and share with their communal networks. For example, a student reflected on the importance of sharing the language with her sister and practicing so that it is preserved:

The motivation I got for this project was that I was going to be able to revive a little bit from my hometown, as I had the opportunity to listen to some dialect words, but I did not know how to write them. I was able to find a dictionary, which helped me a lot when it came to translating the words. I was expecting to learn to write and speak it correctly, yet I felt that time passed quickly. Yet, after this project, I will be able to practice it with my sister, with the hope that she will be able to learn K'iche and adapt it to her everyday language routine. (May 18, 2023)

As we may observe, the language project constituted a critical venue for students to investigate their family histories, interrogate the multiple ways settler colonialism disrupted Indigenous languages, primarily through displacement, ethnocide, and dispossession, and consider ways of learning more about their cultural heritage and territorial roots.

The language project explored in this paper thus relates with what Chew and colleagues (2015) underscore as a primary goal of language reclamation grounded in a decolonial approach; that is, "learners often have other aspirations such as healing from trauma, countering narratives of loss, and strengthening relationships" (p. 20). Student reflections on Indigenous issues, connected to language loss and revival efforts, both shaped and enhanced a critical analysis of their own experiences, cultural heritage, their families' territorial origins, and migration journeys. In this way, the language project served as a transformational platform to challenge students' views on Indigenous people and languages, and to guide new lines of work and community rebuilding in the context of ethnocide and linguistic resistance. As one of the students concluded, "The work I do, I do con *todo Corazón*, so it only made sense to put in my energy and research work to honor my ancestors" (May 18, 2023).

Ethnic Studies, Language Reclamation and Implications for K-12 Classrooms

Indigenous language learning in the higher education system challenges the existing narratives of erasure that remove Indigenous people from the historical narrative and reduce them to remnants of the past. While Indigenous pedagogical praxis is grounded in Indigenous traditional cultures, languages, territories, and ways of knowing, mainstream education sustains a colonial mindset that upholds Eurocentrism and westernized educational practices.

The engagement of pedagogical praxis that centers on Indigenous languages, has the potential to offer integral educational experiences that reinforce ancestral knowledge, reaffirm community ties, and provide a better understanding of minoritized languages and communities more broadly. In their study of the Abenaki language of the Northeastern United States and its integration into elementary education, Audley and D'Souza (2022) argue that Indigenous language education constitutes a decolonial praxis that enables both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students to challenge established settler narratives and appreciate Indigenous cultures. The authors observe, "learning the language of the Land on the Land might allow students to reposition their experiences, questions its knowledge structures, and gain insights into the culture of the language" (p. 95). In this way, the integration of non-dominant languages into the K-12 system generates interest, motivation, and learning opportunities for these languages, provides a more holistic understanding of the world offered through the languages taught, and reaffirms the validity and respect of languages other than English (Audley & D'Souza, 2022; Choi, 2016).

In the case of Native students specifically, studies have demonstrated that their exposure to Indigenous languages in the K-12 system has a greater impact on student success, closing achievement gaps. Not only does learning through their own Indigenous languages generate more trust and interest, but it also reinforces students' knowledge and cultural identities in academic settings (Kaomea, 2005). Indigenous languages play a crucial role in creating safe and supportive classroom environments.

Academic studies have also shown both the vulnerability and invisibility of Latin American Indigenous and migrant students in K-12 education (Crosnoe & Lopez Turley, 2011; Morrison, 2024). In the face of persistent challenges that Indigenous student populations encounter, the insertion of Indigenous languages challenges hegemonic notions of Latinidad. It transforms classrooms into safe spaces that protect Indigenous youth and their cultural identities. Training Ethnic Studies educators in Indigenous language pedagogies and the creation of digital teaching materials can encourage and promote the development of spaces for language learning, both in the classroom and within community settings. Furthermore, access to Indigenous language archives and technological tools allows students to engage directly in linguistic reclamation and revitalization efforts by creating and using their own language materials.

In our class, the sharing of experiences related to Indigenous histories, language loss, and linguistic revitalization has been facilitated through the development of digital materials in Indigenous languages. All combined, the language project fostered cultural awareness and generated important conversations on the students' territorial connections and family histories. In this process, students have reflected on the importance of Indigenous languages and the settler violence inflicted on their speakers. Furthermore, with cultural roots in the Mesoamerican region, students also engaged in a self-reflexive process that constituted initial steps towards language reclamation.

Final Remarks

Language reclamation praxis does not comprise a one-size-fits-all model. Instead, it involves a wide array of actions that diversify in various geographical, cultural, political, and even educational contexts. As this paper shows, Ethnic Studies constitutes both a potential and critical space for linguistic reclamation practices among Latinx youth, including those of Indigenous heritage, who have rebuilt new communities in the U.S. diaspora. The integration of Indigenous languages into K-12 curriculum is a pedagogical intervention that empowers Ethnic Studies educators to challenge and disrupt settler colonial narratives and spaces that have reinforced the “vanishing Indian” trope in the Euro-American imaginary. By representing a concrete pedagogical praxis, this intervention recenters the community-based knowledges and worldviews encapsulated through Indigenous languages.

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Mapping Black Histories: Blackdom, Maroon Pedagogy, and the Re-rooting of Ethnic Studies in the Borderlands

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Abstract

This article argues that Africana ways of knowing, Black Geographies, and fugitive pedagogies are vital for revitalizing Critical Ethnic Studies amid backlash, commodification, and historical erasure. Using oral histories, counter-archives, and place-based inquiry, we focus on Blackdom, a maroon settlement in New Mexico, as central to resistance and curricular transformation. We outline six pedagogical commitments—centering Africana epistemologies, integrating Black Geographies, designing curriculum as epistemic resistance, resisting institutional co-optation, linking individual transformation to collective liberation, and engaging communities as co-creators of knowledge—that guide the Mapping Black Histories model. This curricular framework positions students as active participants in historical recovery and community-based research, while framing the classroom itself as a maroon space rooted in memory, accountability, and liberation.

Keywords: Africana ways of knowing, Black geographies, Maroon pedagogy, Critical ethnic studies, Epistemic resistance, Blackdom, Borderlands

Introduction

In the dry expanse of the New Mexico Borderlands, the story of Blackdom, a maroon settlement established by Black homesteaders in the early twentieth century, endures through oral histories, scattered archives, and local memory. Though no physical structures remain, the town endures as a symbol of imagination, spatial resilience, and collective resistance. Created as a refuge from Jim Crow violence, Blackdom embodied a vision of Black life beyond the South and outside settler-colonial borders. Yet its legacy remains absent mainly from curricula and public history, reflecting what Masta (2019) identifies as the persistence of settler colonial ideology in education, where dominant knowledge systems erase or displace Indigenous and Black epistemologies. The weathered remains of the Blackdom schoolhouse displayed in Figure 1, evoke this tension between absence and endurance, reminding us that maroon spaces persist not only in memory but in the material traces of Black life.



Figure 1. Blackdom Church and Schoolhouse, ca. 1910. This one-room structure reflects Blackdom's community, faith, and educational vision, rooted in maroon life and Black Geographies. (Image courtesy of the New Mexico Historic Preservation Division).

This article emphasizes Africana ways of knowing, Black Geographies, and Maroon Pedagogies as essential frameworks for critical education. In an era of political repression and the co-optation of ethnic studies (Blume, 2025; Capitol Weekly, 2025; Sleeter, 2011), we advocate a return to insurgent traditions grounded in community accountability, spatial justice, and epistemic resistance. As Turner (1984) reminds us, Africana Studies itself emerged to contest epistemic exclusions, establishing a distinct disciplinary framework dedicated to interpreting the global Black experience in its totality.

We position the New Mexico Borderlands as fertile ground for reimagining curriculum through maroon geography, an approach rooted in recovery and refusal. Using oral history, counter-archival research, and community engagement, we examine how Black communities in the region resisted erasure and developed enduring practices of survival and self-determination.

Blackdom serves as our central case study, offering both a historical example of maroon practice and a curricular model for education as remembrance and refusal. At the same time, we recognize that the Borderlands are marked by Indigenous presence and histories of conquest, which must be acknowledged to avoid reproducing erasure (King, 2016; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Our analysis situates Blackdom within these layered geographies while maintaining it as the focal site of inquiry.

To guide this work, we present six pedagogical commitments for liberatory ethnic studies practice, visualized in Figure 2, which illustrates how *Maroon Pedagogy* integrates these commitments as interdependent dimensions of a transformative educational framework.

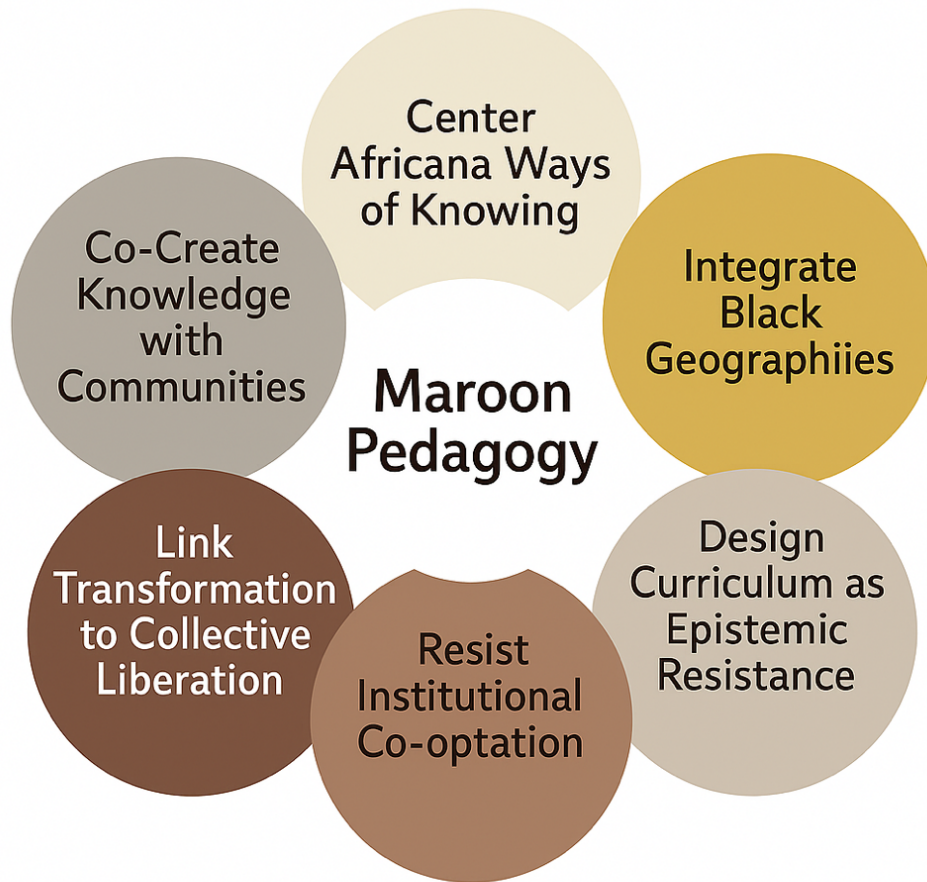


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework of Maroon Pedagogy. The six pedagogical commitments form interdependent dimensions of maroon praxis, embodying epistemic resistance, community accountability, and curricular transformation—the core of Maroon Pedagogy.

Each of these commitments extends the insurgent intellectual and pedagogical traditions that anchor Africana educational practice. Grounded in maroonage, freedom schooling, and diasporic knowledge-making, they challenge educational boundaries by centering lived experience, community accountability, and ancestral wisdom as foundations of theory. Through *Maroon Pedagogy*, these commitments enact a praxis of remembrance and resistance that refuses institutional containment and reclaims education as a collective project of liberation.

We begin by outlining the decolonial and dialogic methodologies that ground this project, drawing on Africana Studies, Black Geographies, and fugitive pedagogies. We then situate Blackdom within the broader history of Black presence and resistance in the New Mexico Borderlands. From this foundation, we articulate the six pedagogical commitments that structure the Mapping Black Histories framework. We conclude by reflecting on the implications of maroon pedagogy for Critical Ethnic Studies in the face of curricular repression and institutional co-optation.

Method and Theoretical Orientation

This study employs a decolonial, dialogic, and place-based approach, viewing Black communities as knowledge creators and spatial theorists. The New Mexico Borderlands are not neutral terrain but a living record of Black resilience and maroon epistemologies. Building on Hartman's (2019) concept of *critical fabulation* and Chilisa's (2012) relational Indigenous inquiry, we treat archival silences as opportunities for ethical storytelling and grounded speculation. These silences are not incidental but structurally produced through settler colonial ideology, which elevates Western epistemologies while dismissing others as mere myth or folklore (Masta, 2019).

Africana Studies

Africana Studies provides the foundation for this project by challenging Eurocentric assumptions and grounding knowledge in the lived experiences, historical struggles, and cultural memory of African-descended communities. Asante (1987) argues that Eurocentrism distorts knowledge by universalizing the European experience, while Turner (1984) identifies Africana Studies as a distinct epistemology tasked with interpreting the "total phenomenon called the Black experience." Wynter (2003) deepens this critique by showing how the modern world overrepresents "Man" as the universal human. This framing forecloses alternative ways of knowing and being. Quijano (2000) extends the argument through his concept of the coloniality of power. He demonstrates how race, labor, and knowledge are structured globally through Eurocentric logics.

Black Geographies

Black Geographies build on this foundation by showing how space itself is contested, racialized, and reimagined. McKittrick (2006) and McKittrick and Woods (2007) highlight how Black communities resist spatial erasure and create place through memory, movement, and cultural practice. Geography becomes not simply a backdrop to history but a site of struggle and meaning-making. In the Borderlands, Blackdom's irrigation systems, landholding practices, and ceremonial gatherings inscribed Black presence into the land, embodying this spatial resistance.

Fugitive Pedagogy

This framework is complemented by fugitive pedagogy, which Givens (2021) describes as the practices of Black educators who taught and learned under conditions of surveillance and restriction. Often informal, hidden, or unsanctioned, these pedagogies exemplify education as a form of resistance, refusal, and survival. Fugitive pedagogy insists that Black communities have long cultivated intellectual independence, even within hostile environments.

Maroon Geographies

Maroon geographies extend this insight by highlighting autonomous Black communities created through flight, refusal, and self-determination. Settlements like Blackdom serve not only as historical examples but also as curricular models for reimagining education as a maroon practice.

As Givens (2021) notes, these traditions of learning are maintained through kinship, oral history, and collective refusal—practices that sustain Black intellectual autonomy across generations.

Relational Learning

Our methodological stance also draws on relational and dialogic approaches to education. Freire (1970) emphasizes critical dialogue as a path to liberation, while hooks (1994) highlights engaged pedagogy as a practice of mutual vulnerability and transformation. These insights resonate with Indigenous and African research traditions (Chilisa, 2012; Kovach, 2009), which prioritize consent, reciprocity, and contextual accountability.

Together, these orientations shape *Mapping Black Histories*, a curricular model for high school and undergraduate college classrooms. Through counter-mapping, storytelling, and intergenerational engagement, this model invites students to participate in the work of historical recovery and spatial analysis. Methodology and theory converge here to position the classroom as a maroon space: a site of remembrance, refusal, and liberatory possibility.

Black Histories and Resistance in the New Mexico Borderlands

Dominant narratives of Black history in the United States often center on the plantation South or the urban North, leaving the complex experiences of African-descended communities in the Southwest largely erased. Yet New Mexico has a rich history of Black presence and resistance that disrupts these geographic assumptions. At the heart of this history is Blackdom, an early twentieth-century settlement founded by formerly enslaved and free African Americans who migrated westward in search of land, safety, and independence. While Blackdom anchors this study geographically, educators and students are encouraged to connect its lessons to Black communities in their own regions, treating the Mapping Black Histories framework as a model for local recovery and remembrance.

Established in 1901 near Roswell in Chaves County, Blackdom arose as a response to racial violence in Georgia and the failures of Reconstruction. It developed as a planned community rooted in collective labor and cooperative economics, mutual aid, and cultural self-determination. Although no physical structures remain today, its memory persists in family narratives, archives, and community storytelling, making it historically significant and pedagogically vital as an example of maroon geography and Black place-making.

Blackdom, however, did not exist in isolation. It interacted with surrounding Indigenous, Mexican, and Genízaro communities, each shaped by displacement, resistance, and negotiation. The Genízaro experience (descendants of detribalized Indigenous peoples enslaved and resettled by Spanish colonial authorities) reveals parallel struggles. As Gonzales (2014) and Trujillo (2009) note, Genízaro identity involved both disruption and adaptation, exposing the layered racial and territorial politics of the region. While our analysis keeps Blackdom at the center, acknowledging these entanglements resists reproducing erasure and situates the settlement within the broader grammar of conquest (King, 2016; Tuck & Yang, 2012).

The fragmented presence of Blackdom and Genízaro communities in official records exemplifies what Trouillot (1995) refers to as *archival silences*. Such omissions are not accidental but reflect

settler colonial logics that erase to replace (Masta, 2019). Quijano's (2000) analysis of coloniality further shows how these silences sustain Eurocentrism as a global order. Yet they can also be reimagined as openings. Hartman's (2019) concept of "critical fabulation" and McKittrick's (2006) theorization of "demonic grounds" both invite us to read against absence, recognizing that life and meaning persist in ways that diverge from dominant narratives.

Geography itself becomes a living archive in this process. The Pecos and Rio Grande rivers served as routes of migration, labor, and cultural exchange. Blackdom's irrigation systems, cooperative landholding, and ceremonial gatherings inscribed Black presence into the land, making geography a site of survival and cultural affirmation. For students, engaging these practices means learning to read landscapes as repositories of history, memory, and resistance.

Blackdom, then, is not merely a historical curiosity but a lens for understanding maroon educational practices, Afro-frontier migrations (Nelson, 2024), and the ongoing struggle for Black survival at the margins of official memory. These histories expand the archive, unsettle dominant narratives, and provide fertile ground for the six pedagogical commitments that follow, each designed to re-root Critical Ethnic Studies in practices of spatial justice, historical recovery, and community accountability.

Commitment 1: Centering Africana Ways of Knowing

The first commitment of *Mapping Black Histories* is to center Africana ways of knowing; epistemologies rooted in ancestral memory, embodied experience, and community practice. These knowledge traditions challenge Eurocentric models that privilege abstraction, linear time, and disembodied reason. Instead, they emphasize relational, situated, and historically grounded understandings that link knowledge to survival, ethical reflection, and collective flourishing.

Africana epistemologies are transmitted through storytelling, music, ritual, movement, and oral tradition, connecting generations across time and space. As Carr (2024) observes, Africana thought is structured around memory, meaning, and movement, practices that both preserve cultural continuity and orient communities toward the future. In this tradition, knowledge is neither neutral nor detached. Knowledge is lived, contextual, and ethically accountable.

In the New Mexico Borderlands, these ways of knowing took form in adaptation, land stewardship, and communal autonomy. The founders of Blackdom drew upon agrarian traditions of self-sufficiency, cooperative economics, and mutual care to establish sovereignty in a new and often hostile region. These practices represent both continuity with Southern Black life and transformation through diasporic mobility, underscoring Africana epistemology as dynamic and responsive to change.

Mapping Black Histories enacts this commitment by valuing oral history, memory mapping, and creative inquiry alongside written archives. Students are encouraged not only to analyze official documents but also to interpret speculative narratives, conduct intergenerational interviews, and engage with local knowledge keepers. Such practices align with Hartman's (2019) critical fabulation and Chilisa's (2012) decolonial methodologies, both of which expand the scope of what counts as evidence and who is recognized as a knower.

As Asante (1987) insists, liberatory education must position Black communities as the subjects of their own knowledge traditions rather than as objects of study. Turner (1984) similarly frames Africana Studies as a distinct epistemology charged with interpreting the totality of the Black experience. This aligns with culturally relevant pedagogy, which Ladson-Billings (1995) describes as affirming students' cultural traditions and lived realities as legitimate sources of knowledge.

Classroom Applications

For example, a high school history class might begin with a "Memory Map" project in which students trace the migration of Blackdom's founders from Georgia to New Mexico, or adapt the project to trace the journey of a Black community in their own region, connecting local narratives to broader diasporic movements. Rather than relying solely on census data, students would layer oral histories, family narratives, and speculative reconstructions of daily life to gain a more comprehensive understanding. In doing so, they learn to treat oral and embodied memory as authoritative, challenging the assumption that only written archives constitute valid evidence. This project illustrates how centering Africana ways of knowing reshapes not only what is taught but also how knowledge is valued.

Ultimately, centering Africana epistemologies requires education to reflect the priorities and intellectual traditions of African-descended communities. It asks: Who is recognized as an authority? What forms of knowledge are validated? How are histories remembered, honored, or erased? By posing these questions, the classroom becomes a site of recovery and possibility where students engage with knowledge as both intellectual inquiry and a practice of cultural survival.

Commitment 2: Integrating Black Geographies into Place-Based Pedagogy

The second commitment emphasizes the integration of Black Geographies into place-based teaching. While place-based education often highlights environmental ties or local history, it frequently overlooks how race, particularly the presence of Black people, shapes spatial meaning. Black Geographies fill this gap by revealing how Black communities actively navigate, contest, and reimagine space.

McKittrick (2006) and Woods (2007) argue that geography is never neutral; it is socially and politically produced through histories of displacement, refusal, and survival. Black Geographies uncover how Black communities reclaim and re-signify space through memory, mobility, and creative resistance. They prompt educators and students alike to ask: How is Black presence remembered or erased from landscapes? How do Black communities make meaning in spaces designed to exclude them?

In the New Mexico Borderlands, Blackdom embodied these questions. Through irrigation systems, collective landholding, and ceremonial gatherings, Black homesteaders transformed the land into a space of independence and cultural affirmation. These practices were more than strategies of survival; they unsettled what King (2016) calls the "grammar of conquest," disrupting the logics of colonial erasure and asserting Black presence in the Borderlands.

Mapping Black Histories incorporates these insights by inviting students to treat geography itself as an archive of Black history. Rather than relying solely on census data or textbooks, students

analyze waterways, map sites of cultural memory, interpret oral traditions, and explore how survival practices become inscribed in landscapes. In this way, space is reframed not as a passive backdrop but as a site of historical recovery and meaning-making.

Classroom Applications

For instance, in a university Ethnic Studies course, students might conduct a “Geography as Archive” field project. Working in groups, they would visit locations associated with Blackdom, or parallel sites of Black history documenting physical and cultural landmarks. Each group would then create a counter-map layering archival fragments with oral histories and speculative reconstructions of daily practices. This activity illustrates McKittrick’s (2006) insight that Black life reshapes geography, enabling students to see landscapes as living records of resistance and belonging.

By integrating Black Geographies into pedagogy, educators resist romanticized notions of the “local” that obscure racial exclusion and land dispossession. Place-based education thus becomes a critical practice of spatial justice, encouraging students to see themselves as geographers of memory and participants in ongoing struggles over land, belonging, and survival.

Commitment 3: Designing Curriculum as Epistemic Resistance

Curriculum is never neutral. It reflects choices about whose knowledge is valued, whose histories are told, and whose voices are silenced. This commitment frames curriculum design itself as a form of epistemic resistance; an intentional refusal of Eurocentric frameworks that marginalize or erase Africana and Indigenous ways of knowing.

Wynter (2003) reminds us that the modern world positions Eurocentric epistemologies as universal while foreclosing alternatives. Ladson-Billings (1995) likewise emphasizes that culturally relevant pedagogy must affirm students’ cultural knowledge while challenging systemic inequities. For both, the work of teaching is inseparable from the struggle against epistemic erasure.

Santos (2014) refers to this violence as *epistemicide*: the systematic silencing of knowledge systems. Asante (1987) similarly insists that liberatory education must resist assimilationist models, positioning Black communities as agents of knowledge rather than as passive subjects of study. Curriculum, therefore, must not simply add marginalized content to dominant frameworks but restructure the very terms of what counts as knowledge.

Mapping Black Histories takes up this challenge by organizing curriculum around themes such as memory, movement, refusal, and survival rather than adhering to rigid chronological or canonical models. Assignments are designed to expose and critique the power relations that shape official narratives. In this way, students engage not only with historical content but also with the politics of knowledge production itself. The outcome mirrors earlier commitments: just as Africana ways of knowing and Black Geographies reshape what counts as evidence and space, designing curriculum as resistance reshapes how knowledge circulates.

In all three cases, pedagogy becomes a deliberate act of refusal, structured to cultivate survival, imagination, and liberation.

Classroom Applications

In a high school Ethnic Studies course, students might complete a “Critical Counter-Archive” assignment. Each would select a textbook narrative about Black life in the early twentieth century and identify what is missing, such as the history of Blackdom or a Black community from their own locality that has been similarly erased. They would then construct a counter-narrative by drawing on oral histories, speculative reconstructions, or family memory, presenting their work through podcasts, zines, or digital storytelling. This project teaches students to treat archival silences as spaces of inquiry (Hartman, 2019) and models curriculum as a living practice of epistemic resistance.

By designing curriculum in this way, educators resist the reproduction of dominant epistemologies and affirm the authority of marginalized traditions. The curriculum becomes not a vehicle for assimilation, but a maroon practice of survival and liberation; an educational model where resistance is built into the very structure of teaching and learning.

Commitment 4: Resisting Institutional Co-optation

As Ethnic Studies gains visibility in schools and universities, it faces the persistent risk of co-optation. Institutions often adopt its language while stripping away its critical edge, reducing a liberatory framework to symbolic inclusion. This commitment emphasizes preserving the political integrity of Ethnic Studies by resisting such absorption and maintaining accountability to the communities from which it originates.

Co-optation frequently appears in subtle forms, such as diversity statements without accompanying structural change. These curricular add-ons highlight representation without addressing power, or policy mandates that recognize Ethnic Studies while withholding resources and community input. Tuck and Yang (2012) describe these dynamics as “settler moves to innocence,” wherein institutions claim the language of decolonization while evading its unsettling demands. Left unchecked, these moves render Ethnic Studies a depoliticized addition rather than a transformative practice.

Mapping Black Histories resists these tendencies by centering oral history, counter-archives, and community memory as epistemological foundations rather than supplemental materials. Rejecting textbook-driven approaches that flatten the Black experience, it foregrounds inquiry rooted in maroon traditions and spatial justice. Students are taught not only to recognize inequities but also to analyze their structural causes and imagine alternatives.

Classroom Applications

For example, in a university teacher-education course, students might conduct a “Critical Curriculum Audit” of their local school district. Working with community members, they would examine ethnic studies standards or district diversity statements, identifying where the language of equity masks erasure, for instance, whether local Black histories, such as Blackdom, are excluded. Students would then propose interventions rooted in community priorities, such as oral

history projects with Black elders, thereby resisting symbolic inclusion and pushing for substantive change.

Educator collectives, mutual aid networks, and student-led inquiry spaces also serve as counter-practices that disrupt institutional absorption. These practices foreground collaboration over competition and care over compliance, sustaining the insurgent roots of Ethnic Studies.

Resisting co-optation, then, is not about gatekeeping but about integrity. It asks: How are institutional logics shaping the goals and language we use? Which narratives are promoted, and which are silenced? How can we safeguard Ethnic Studies as a practice of transformation rather than adaptation? This commitment insists that Ethnic Studies remain a liberatory project, accountable to communities rather than institutions.

Commitment 5: Linking Individual Transformation to Collective Liberation

While Ethnic Studies often inspires personal insight, transformation is incomplete unless it connects to collective struggle. This commitment asserts that individual growth gains meaning only when situated within broader histories of resistance and liberation.

Students often enter Ethnic Studies classrooms with limited awareness of how their identities intersect with structural power. Through inquiry and dialogue, they begin to connect their lived experiences to legacies of resistance. Yet transformation deepens when personal reflection evolves into collective responsibility. Ladson-Billings (1995) emphasizes that culturally relevant pedagogy must affirm cultural identity while cultivating critical consciousness, linking student achievement to broader projects of justice.

Mapping Black Histories builds this shift into its design by moving students from self-reflection to community accountability. Early assignments may focus on identity mapping or personal narrative, but later projects require collective engagement, such as oral histories, solidarity letters, or collaborative research. The process is nonlinear: students encounter discomfort, contradiction, and complicity, which become opportunities for ethical imagination and deeper solidarity.

Educators share in this process by acknowledging positionality, practicing critical vulnerability, and engaging in knowledge-making as a collective endeavor. This disrupts hierarchical roles, fostering classrooms where students and teachers co-create knowledge together.

Classroom Applications

In an undergraduate Ethnic Studies seminar, students might complete a “Personal-to-Collective Liberation Project.” Each begins with a reflection on a personal insight. For example, recognizing Blackdom’s absence from mainstream history or tracing a silenced story from their own community. They then translate that reflection into public action, such as curating a community exhibit, writing a solidarity letter, or producing a podcast episode that links their story to collective histories of struggle, particularly those grounded in local Black communities or neighborhood histories. In this way, self-knowledge is not privatized but mobilized in the service of community memory and liberation.

By linking individual transformation to collective liberation, education is reframed as relational work. Knowledge circulates rather than accumulates, building communal capacity rather than isolated achievement. In this framework, the classroom mirrors the world we strive to create, where personal growth is inseparable from collective flourishing.

Commitment 6: Engaging Communities as Co-Creators of Knowledge

Communities are not objects of study but theorists, storytellers, and custodians of knowledge. *Mapping Black Histories* treats them as intellectual partners whose insights, experiences, and practices are central to pedagogy.

Too often, curriculum development occurs far from the communities it claims to represent, reinforcing academic hierarchies and positioning institutions as the sole producers of knowledge. In contrast, decolonizing methodologies demand reciprocity, relationship, and accountability. Quijano (2000) shows how Eurocentrism has long positioned Europe as the locus of rationality, dismissing other epistemologies. Treating communities as co-creators resists this coloniality of knowledge, affirming their authority in defining how histories are remembered and shared.

Practically, this means students engage in oral histories, site-based inquiry, and public-facing projects designed with, not for, communities. Such work does not simply supplement the curriculum but challenges dominant definitions of expertise, positioning community voices at the center of intellectual life. Tuck and Yang (2012) caution that decolonization cannot be reduced to metaphor; genuine collaboration requires material accountability and a refusal of extractive practices.

This approach also reshapes the role of the educator. Teachers facilitate relationship-building, link classrooms to communities, and ensure curricular outcomes align with community priorities. At the same time, ethical discernment is crucial: not all stories are ours to tell, and not all knowledge should circulate in institutional contexts. Smith (2012) underscores that decolonizing research must be guided by reciprocity, respect, and responsibility. Students are therefore asked: Who benefits from this story being told? What risks are involved? How will this knowledge return to the community?

Classroom Applications

In a high school setting, students might collaborate with a local Black cultural center to create a "Community Memory Exhibit" perhaps focused on Blackdom or on a Black community in their own region. Together with elders, they gather oral histories, photographs, and family narratives. Notably, the project culminates not only in a graded classroom presentation but also in a public exhibit curated with and for the community. In this way, students experience knowledge-making as reciprocal and accountable, while communities retain agency over how their histories are represented.

By engaging communities as co-creators, education becomes a shared practice rather than a transactional one. Knowledge extends beyond classroom walls, rooted in place, sustained through relationships, and guided by collective purpose.



Figure 3. Memory and Landscape—Blackdom as Living Archive. Community commemoration at the Blackdom Townsite marker in Chaves County. The site endures as a space of remembrance, testimony, and education (Photograph courtesy of the New Mexico Historic Preservation Division).

Conclusion: Toward a Liberatory Pedagogy of Refusal and Remembrance

The current climate of curricular repression and institutional co-optation calls for more than defensive strategies. It demands a re-rooting of Critical Ethnic Studies in Africana epistemologies, Black Geographies, and maroon pedagogies that refuse erasure and center community accountability. Blackdom illustrates what such a re-rooting makes possible: a space where Black communities cultivated survival, memory, and autonomy at the margins of conquest. Drawing on this history, the six commitments outlined here provide a framework for curriculum as resistance grounded in recovery, oriented toward justice, and accountable to community knowledge.

Looking forward, *Mapping Black Histories* invites educators, researchers, and policymakers to treat classrooms as maroon spaces: sites where refusal and imagination converge to disrupt dominant narratives and cultivate liberatory futures. Future research might extend this framework to other diasporic sites of maroon life, while collaborations with schools and cultural centers can ensure accountability to the communities whose knowledge sustains it.

Blackdom reminds us that education must not be reduced to symbolic inclusion but must be pursued as structural transformation. In an era of curricular repression, cultural erasure, and political hostility to Ethnic Studies, this reminder is urgent. Teaching and learning, then, become

more than academic exercises; they are acts of remembrance, resistance, and world-making. To take up this charge is to affirm that the classroom itself can be a maroon space—one that unsettles domination, reclaims silenced histories, and nurtures liberatory futures.

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When Parrots Fly: An Ethnic Studies Introspective

Seye Ytilaer

*"When I see Parrots fly
I feel free
When I hear Parrots sing
I feel free
A smile it brings
Knowing they are still here
Knowing they have not disappeared
When I see Parrots fly
I know we can too!
When I see Parrots fly
I feel free!"*

Ethnic Studies is a step in the journey for liberation. I feel that Liberation is the process of recognition of self, the knowing of agency. I feel that Liberation for students is the capacity to stand and fight for what they believe in regardless of the consequences. I feel that Liberation is students recognizing that they are Warriors and as Warriors they consciously create, shape and re-shape the world around them. Ethnic Studies was one of the other times I felt "Liberated," it was a fleeting feeling, a feeling that I can describe compared to the feeling when I see Parrots fly. I remember as a young child in the '80s growing up in Southern Cali, specifically in East Los and later in Bolen/SGV, I remember seeing these beautiful birds with their distinct songs fly and peaking my curiosity asked what they were. What was told to me made me feel sad, happy and hopeful. I was told that these birds were called "Parrots" and these Parrots were held captive either in a bird sanctuary or a pet shop, and that they had escaped, they broke free. It is still a mystery today where they escaped from or how they became "free" (Schlepp, 2025). I was told that Southern Cali was not their natural habitat and since this was not their natural environment, these Parrots will eventually die off. I was happy that at least they were free, sad that they will not survive, and hopeful thinking that if they could break free from being captive that I could, too if I was ever in the same situation. I thought at that moment "well at least they die free!" This was before I learned or took classes about my own cultura. When I did take those classes at CSULA I had flashbacks to that moment as a young child in the '80s. When I would learn about Zapata and the famous quote attributed to him, "Es mejor morir de pie que vivir arrodillado," I remembered that feeling when seeing Parrots fly. Although these Parrots from the '80s were forced into an

environment that they did not choose, an environment not “natural” to their existence, they were able to reshape and reimagine their existence within the environment in Southern Cali.

Today in 2025 I still see Parrots fly and when I do that feeling of “liberation” is felt. Today’s Parrots are descendents of the Parrots of the ’80s, these new generations of Parrots have never seen, felt or heard their original environment, their original way of Being, Doing, and Thinking. All they know is Southern Cali. I do not know what Liberation is, for I have not experienced it as my ancestors did. I am a descendant of the original people who experienced it, I am born into these established systems that are not our own, that are unnatural to my existence. I have a feeling of what Liberation is in these Colonial Spaces. I know that feeling, I know what it looks like when Parrots fly, and know what it sounds like when I hear Parrots sing.

Ethnic Studies was created within a system we did not choose, however in these Spaces Ethnic Studies can create those moments of feeling “Liberation.” I have felt students feeling Liberated, seen students feel Liberated and heard students feeling Liberated. Some of these moments are highlighted through student [exemplars](#). In this paper, I briefly reflect on my attempts to use Ethnic Studies to reshape and reimagine Colonial Spaces, specifically the classroom. I briefly reflect how students have taken what they learned in our Ethnic Studies spaces to create moments where I have seen, heard and felt these moments of Liberation. I have [linked](#) this paper to a more specific detailed reflection.

Ethnic Studies was created as a challenge to Coloniality. “Coloniality” is the ongoing outcomes of colonization; it is the ongoing mindsets, structures and systems that produce hierarchy, racism and violence. I often heard Ethnic Studies described as interdisciplinary; however, I am trying to be intentional in reimaging Ethnic Studies to be undisciplinary and Decolonial in its praxis. Since the Colonizer created the University/Educational systems, they created systems to maintain it through what they call “Disciplines.” These “Disciplines” disqualify anything that is outside of them. If one in the University level does not stay within a “Discipline” while writing a paper, then the knowledge on that paper becomes not “valid.” These “Disciplines” in the University/Educational systems like History, Psychology, Sociology, Political Science etc each believe their way is the way to really perceive this World. Ethnic Studies believes its being radical by incorporating multiple “Disciplines” to perceive the World calling it “interdisciplinary.” Although it’s important to include multiple “Disciplines” it must also make space to include other ways of perceiving this World. Other ways outside of the “Disciplines,” outside of Western Epistemologies. Undisciplinary is ways outside of Coloniality, outside of Capitalism, ways from pre-coloniality, from before the invasion of Western ways of Being, from inside from our authentic selves. Contemporary indigenous ways of being are pre-coloniality ways of being. Undisciplinary means not to be rooted in the colonial mindset; but rooted in the Warrior Mindset. I felt Ethnic Studies as a vehicle to spread Awareness, to plant the seeds of Decolonial Thinking.

We grow up and learn through these types of systems and our mindsets and thinking are directly influenced by their institutions. However, what the Colonizer failed to do is completely extract and erase our true memories and feelings because they are embedded in us. Those memories and feelings are there when we question this reality, this way of Being. Those memories and feelings creep up on us when we get that feeling that can only be described as ugly and unfair. These memories are that feeling that maybe, just maybe there is not only one way of Being on this planet.

In a webinar on “Decolonial Research Methods: A Planetary Conversation Beyond the North Atlantic (the Global East and the Global South)” Walter Dignolo tells us that, no matter the effort, control, and atrocities, the Colonizer could never colonize Indian memory (Dignolo, 2021). Western Epistemologies, the European colonizer, could not completely eradicate and erase what they themselves classify as the “other” because the “other” resisted and found ways to re-exist within and outside of their systems just like the Parrots from the '80s and its descendants. Those born within their systems have the memories of their ancestors written on their cells, the DNA of their bodies, and in these memories and feelings that are etched, are the memories and feelings of liberation. Although our Education system was designed and created to maintain White/Class Supremacy, keep the “Other” under control through physical and physiological erasure, it has not completely erased the memory of Non-Western Ways of Being. And in that space of feeling, that space of memory, that is the space where we begin to question that reality, that way of knowing, that is the space where our foundation of resistance and re-existence begins.

“Lo que te pido en la clase yo lo hago tambien!” To me, Ethnic Studies is a verb. It is a step towards liberation. It is a blueprint for that step. As a verb, we as Educators should not ask our students what we are willing not to do. So when my students engaged in civil disobedience and asked me to join them, I did. If I am teaching and advocating to my students that change is possible through civil disobedience non-violent direct action, then we as Educators should also engage in non-violent direct action. Ethnic Studies as a verb strives to liberate from colonial policies, ideas and laws. In doing so direct action is a given. A Warrior is about action not reaction. As Educators striving for Liberation through Education we will encounter policies, rules and laws that do not promote Liberation and maintain Colonization. And when we do encounter those policies what should we do? How should we respond? We must undermine, disrupt and challenge such colonial policies. A way to challenge is to be the example, to inform students that ways of Being, Doing and Thinking on this planet is not codified in the Eurocentric ways. A way to challenge is to Provide students with Space where these non-Eurocentric ways are accessed, practiced, and created. Students feel Liberated, sound Liberated, and look Liberated when they are able to reshape and reimagine that Space with those ways.

When my students walked out for Palestine, and they asked me to join them I was honored to walk with them. I had a “mutual separation” from the school. When my students walked out to bring attention to the kidnappings by ICE, and they asked me to join, I walked out with them and I was given probation for the rest of the school year. The “official” offense I committed was “doing personal business during contractual hours.” I interviewed students during the walkout and changed my lesson plans for the next month to include their experience into our content. Liliana Conlisk Gallegos, an Associate Professor, Communication Studies at CSUSB, utilizes classroom digital and analogue collections to expose Supremacist formats to focus on community healing, argues that, “Agents of supremacy bully others into abiding by the logic of Coloniality, so resistance must be ingenious” (Gallegos, 2021). I am still trying to figure out the “ingenious” part.



Figure 1. A student wrote "Slave Ship" and before breaking the pinata, the student informed others of the origins of police.



Figure 2. Student walkout for Palestine.



Figure 3. Students mobilizing knowledge and skills acquired in cheerleading to strategically raise awareness of ICE kidnappings and actions.



Figure 4. Student Walkout Against ICE.

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Loteria del Barrio Mural: A Funds of Knowledge Collaboration

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Abstract

This brief manuscript presents how the game of La Loteria is used as Creative resistance methodology in a professional development setting to create a Loteria themed mural that draws on the occupational knowledge of students in an elementary setting. Using a narrative approach, and through the documentation of how the mural developed, it contributes to the growing discourse and applications of Loteria methodologies in k-16 settings from professional development, classroom application, and the mural making process.

Keywords: La Loteria, Creative Resistance, Funds of Knowledge, Art Education.

As a community-based art educator that critically engages students through the art-making process, I use the popular game of La Loteria as a form of Creative Resistance to center students' funds of knowledge in k-16 classrooms.

In 2022, I reestablished a Barrio Art Program that was moribund for over twenty years at California State University Sacramento (CSUS). In the course, the students and I partnered with Washington Elementary School. Working with principal Dr. Gema Godina, we invited students and educators to analyze the game of la Loteria, which many Mexican American and Mexican families are familiar with, to welcome students' home-based knowledges into the classroom. While the cards have common images that are at times stereotypical, we engaged the students to critically analyze the centuries-old imagery. In the activity, students focus on the occupational and community knowledges of their family members to re-create cards that counter deficit-based and racist narratives of working-class communities of color. It was the student-created Loteria projects that inspired the mural, *La Loteria del Barrio*, which depicts students in a classroom playing a version of La Loteria focused on the occupational and cultural knowledge of the community (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Loteria del Barrio. Washington Elementary School, Sacramento, California.

In the mural that Barrio Art students and I created at Washington Elementary School, six larger loteria cards reflect the historical and home knowledge of students (Figure 1). The first card depicts the passing on of ancestral knowledge; originally painted by the late Juan Cervantes in 1977 at Southside Park, shows an Aztec knight passing on ancestral knowledge to the late Frank Godina Sr., professor of Chicano Studies at CSUS and a founding member of the Chicano art collective the Royal Chicano Air Force, who holds a UFW flag (Figure 2). The second image also in Figure 2, references local car culture through a 1959 Impala belonging to one of the parents. Its license plate "RCAF 59" suggests how the past continues to navigate the present environment.



Figure 2. Loteria card of Juan Cervantez mural at Southside Park and 1959 Impala Loteria Card.

A student image titled “La Estilista” shows a mothers hair stylist tools and is reflected through a set of clippers in the mural (Figure 3).



Figure 3. La Estilista. Student designed card and mural design.

Another student image (Figure 4) reflects a DJ turntable titled El Musico. This image reflected a parent's profession that connects communities through music and dance.

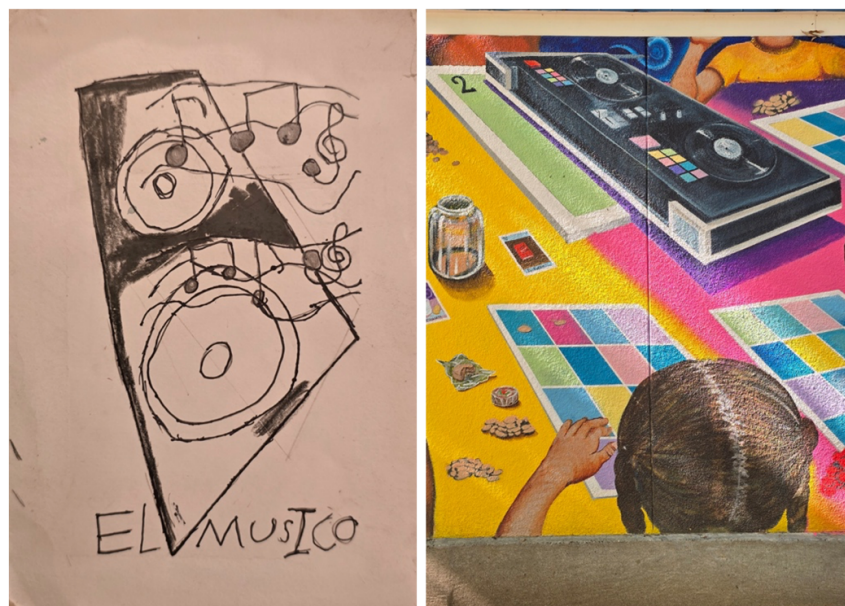


Figure 4. El Musico. Student card design and mural design.

In the next image, Figure 5 shows a mother pushing someone in a wheelchair. La Mano Amiga (the Helping Hand) shows the knowledge of a mother volunteering in a convalescent home.



Figure 5. La Mano Amiga. Student design and mural image.

Lastly, El Director (Figure 6) commemorates former principal, the late Ishmael Rasul (1924–1985). The title card below El Director shows the artists, which were offered employment by Dr. Godina. Today, those students are teaching in the local school district and continue to pursue their art professions.

This community-based engagement between CSUS students, elementary students, parents, and educators, affirms what welcoming students' home-based knowledge can look like. This project anchored a community by welcoming parents' occupational knowledge to challenge stereotypical and demeaning images of communities of color. It humanized education by acknowledging the expertise of student-parent occupational knowledge. Lastly, it brought a community together through a ceremonial blessing, it reconnected a generational resource through the Barrio Art class that has sustained the legacy of working in the Alkali Flats neighborhood with Dr. Godina, the daughter of the late Frank Godina Sr., a founding member of the RCAF.



Figure 6. El Director.

C/S. – Con Safos

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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 Acknowledgment: 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

	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?

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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.



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.



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.

This Ground is Not Neutral: Knowing Through Place and Introduction to Native American & Indigenous Studies²

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Abstract

This article proposes a place-based pedagogical approach which we call “knowing through place,” which guides our teaching in Introduction to Native American and Indigenous Studies. Through this approach, students unsettle previously learned histories of time and place, understand how Indigenous theories position people and place, and re-interpret the places they live and study through these frameworks. Ultimately, knowing through place scaffolds opportunities for students to develop an ongoing practice of challenging dominant settler epistemologies. Our goal is for our students to see that a world beyond the settler episteme is and has always been present, and that another is possible—one where Indigenous ways of knowing inspire personal and collective transformation. We conclude by calling for our institution, Ithaca College, to commit to centering Indigenous knowledge, lands, and peoples across the curricula and college structure as an act of decolonization.

Keywords: placed-based pedagogy, Native American and Indigenous Studies, decolonization, settler colonialism

For approximately four minutes in April 2024, a total solar eclipse drenched portions of Hodiñhsq̓:nih (Haudenosaunee) lands in darkness.³ These lands included the Cayuga/SHARE Farm,⁴ near the eastern shores of Cayuga Lake (central New York). There, behind a white farmhouse, we gathered with members of the Hodiñhsq̓:nih and others on lawn chairs and picnic blankets for a potluck and fellowship. Immersed in place, Elder Tom Porter (Kanien’kehá:ka)

² Mellifluous thanks to Alicia Swords, Enrique González-Conty, M. Nicole Horsley, and Sean Eversley Bradwell for their insights and support in writing this piece.

³ This paper follows orthographies used by the Gayogohó:nq̓’ Learning Project, except in cases of certain proper nouns, such as Cayuga Lake, or the Cayuga/SHARE Farm. “Cayuga” is an Anglicization of Gayogohó:nq̓’. See <https://gayogohono-learning-project.org/> for more information on the Gayogohó:nq̓’ Learning Project.

⁴ Maintained by Dan Hill (Gayogohó:nq̓’), the Cayuga/SHARE farm recovers traditional Hodiñhsq̓:nih foods and agricultural practices with the support of Gayogohó:nq̓’ people, the broader Hodiñhsq̓:nih Confederacy, and settler volunteers.

chronicled how the Hodiñhsq̓:nih Confederacy formed, under the auspices of another solar eclipse. In 2001, non-Indigenous settlers purchased this farm with the goal of land rematriation, an act we read not as saviorship or charity, but a calculated resistance against settler colonial institutions—in this case, loans and mortgages (LaDuke, 2005). Importantly, the late Heron Clan Mother Bernadette “Birdie” Hill (Gayogohó:nq̓) noted that returning the land offered a place and a way to practice traditional Gayogohó:nq̓ ceremonies and language learning (Olson et al., 2001). The Cayuga/SHARE farm serves as living testimony for the slow work of healing: for settlers in understanding what can be undone and given life, and for the Gayogohó:nq̓, returning to their land, language, and ceremonies in their original homelands.

Since 2022, we have taught Introduction to Native American and Indigenous Studies (NAIS) in the Center for the Study of Culture, Race, and Ethnicity (CSCRE) at Ithaca College.⁵ As non-Indigenous educators, it is our responsibility to learn in place on Native lands, and to create opportunities for relationships to land, place, and people. What if, instead of continuing the genocidal logics our students have been exposed to in this settler colonial, racial capitalist system, we challenge them to think critically through Indigenous ways of knowing? We follow Yellowknives Dene Glen Sean Coulthard’s notion of grounded normativity for our students, or the “modalities of Indigenous land-connected practices and longstanding experiential knowledge that inform and structure our ethical engagements with the world and our relationships with human and nonhuman others over time” (Coulthard, 2014, p. 13). Attentive to our context of racial capitalism and settler colonialism in mainstream U.S. educational spaces, we developed a pedagogical approach called “knowing through place.” Through this approach, students unsettle previously learned histories of time and place, understand how Indigenous theories position people and place, and re-interpret the places they live and study through these frameworks. Ultimately, knowing through place scaffolds opportunities for students to develop an ongoing practice of challenging dominant settler epistemologies.

First, we identify the two places our work directly concerns—Hodiñhsq̓:nih lands and Ithaca College, and demonstrate the ways knowing through place shapes the pedagogical imperatives that structure the Introduction to NAIS course. Then, we discuss how we scaffold knowing through place via place-based assignments in and out of the classroom. Finally, we address the limitations of supporting a NAIS minor through one course in our particular institutional context, and share our vision for NAIS beyond the classroom.

Knowing Through Place: Gayogohó:nq̓ Lands and Ithaca College

Since its founding, Ithaca College has occupied unceded Gayogohó:nq̓ land and benefitted from settler colonial and racial capitalist structures and policies (Grande, 2018). As Burrow, Brock, and Dove write, “settler colonialism operates through ontological foreclosures that obfuscate Indigenous ontologies of land” (Burrow et al., 2018, p. 58). To refuse these obfuscations, we proceed from an Indigenous understanding of place as two-fold, first “as a way of understanding, knowing and learning about the world; and second, as the embodied location of everyday struggle for meaning; political, cultural and economic” (Johnson, 2012, p. 830). Place is not just location, but a way of knowing. In our context, then, our foremost goal is to reorient students to Indigenous

⁵ Native American & Indigenous Studies is distinct from Ethnic Studies, because Indigeneity is not an ethnicity, and Indigenous Nations are sovereign bodies.

worlds that have and continue to make meaning in these lands and elsewhere. To this end, we begin our essay with a brief history of Gayogohó:nq' lands and NAIS at Ithaca College that privileges Indigenous ontologies and highlights struggles over meaning in these places.

When Sky Woman fell from the sky, she landed on a turtle's back. The animals realized she needed land to live on, so they dove to the bottom of the waters and brought mud back for her, which grew into the Earth. This Creation story, of which there are many versions, corresponds with the thousands of years of continuous Indigenous presence in the Finger Lakes region of New York, including the Onoñda'géga' (Onondaga), Onyota'a:ká (Oneida), Gayogohó:nq' (Cayuga), Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk), Onöndoa'ga:' (Seneca) and the Ska:rù:rë' (Tuscarora), all members of the Hodiñhsq':nih Confederacy. The archeological information indicates human presence here as early as 11,000 BCE, involving established patterns of yearly cyclical migration that covered hundreds of miles (Jordan, 2022). As archeologist Kurt Jordan (2022) has written, "mainstream settlers are rarely taught about the long-term residence of Indigenous people on these lands, or how Indigenous people transformed their ways of life during the millennia prior to contact" (p. 5). This idea parallels Roxane Dunbar-Ortiz's (2014) calls for a "new periodization of US history . . . that traces the Indigenous experience" (xiii). Much of the history Jordan provides serves to challenge ideas about Gayogohó:nq' people in these lands. He complicates narratives about how the Hodiñhsq':nih Confederacy formed, stating that ". . . [t]he late Gayogohó:nq' knowledge keeper Hadagigrëta' (Jacob Thomas) has asserted that the Confederacy is 2–3 thousand years old," surpassing previously suggested dates by thousands of years. He "notes that some of the standards used by non-Indigenous scholars are likely too strict: political arrangements could take different forms, and emerge in a different order, than the standard model" (Jordan, 2022, p. 31). In essence, he models how to think through a Gayogohó:nq' periodization of these lands, rather than from a settler epistemology.

A Gayogohó:nq' periodization asserts Indigenous survivance, rather than obliteration. Jordan highlights how General George Washington ordered U.S. troops to destroy Hodiñhsq':nih settlements, including homes, animals, and stored crops, during the Clinton-Sullivan Campaign of 1779. Because of these actions, to this day, the Hodiñhsq':nih refer to the President of the United States as Hanadagá:yas, or "He Who Destroys Villages." This scorched earth campaign led to genocide by exposure and starvation, as many Gayogohó:nq' were unable to stay on their lands. Clan mother Birdie Hill remembers, "There were thousands of us. Now there's around 500 of us in Western New York" (LaDuke, 2005, p. 155). The survivors sought refuge at the British Fort Niagara (Jordan, 2022). While settler history narrates the Campaign as a complete annihilation, Jordan reminds us that the Gayogohó:nq' returned to their lands at the northern part of Cayuga Lake as early as 1790 (Jordan, 2022). However, New York state later violated the 1794 Treaty of Canandaigua, which had allocated a reservation of 64,000 acres to the Gayogohó:nq'. This violation again dispersed the Nation's people. Today, apart from trying to regain treaty lands, the Gayogohó:nq' face internal tensions between traditionalists and non-traditionalists, which translate into ongoing land disputes. Despite attempts to erase Indigenous history and presence in these lands via genocidal dispossession, since 2014, Stephen Henhawk (Wolf Clan) has taught the Gayogohó:nq' language in this area, and in 2021 formalized the program through the Gayogohó:nq' Learning Project, which supports Gayogohó:nq' language and lifeways on this land.

The last two decades in Native American and Indigenous Studies at Ithaca College also reveal tensions, erasures, and survival strategies. In 2002, under public anthropologists Brooke Hansen

and Jack Rossen, the Native American Studies program began and operated through the Department of Anthropology.⁶ In Fall 2013, Native American Studies transferred to the CSCRE and faculty re-shaped the minor to match the Center's curricular structure, including a course titled Introduction to Native American Studies.⁷ During this time, there was no full-time faculty line dedicated to Native American Studies.

After four years, in Fall 2017, Iokepa Casumbal-Salazar joined the Center in a joint appointment with Anthropology as a full-time, tenure-track Indigenous faculty member, and the minor became Native American and Indigenous Studies. Casumbal-Salazar built a robust program in NAIS, which included courses such as Decolonial Intersections: Gender, Race, and Indigeneity; Indigenous Politics; and Popular Culture and Indigenous Futurities. He also co-organized the 2018-2019 CSCRE Discussion Series, "On Native Lands: Decolonization, Solidarity, & Resurgence." Attracted by these activities, at one point, 17 students were enrolled in the NAIS minor. In 2020, however, Casumbal-Salazar left the institution. COVID-19 budget constraints, the College's concern with an impending "demographic cliff," an Academic Program Prioritization process in 2021, and other institutional priorities suspended the search for his replacement.⁸

When we were hired in 2022, Introduction to NAIS had not been taught in two years. The job advertisement for the Latinx Studies position required that Pam teach Introduction to NAIS once a year. Currently, the Introduction remains the only NAIS-specific course taught through the CSCRE.⁹ At the college level, the overwhelming majority of students enroll because it fulfills a Diversity requirement for the Ithaca College Integrative Core Curriculum (ICC). It is their only exposure to NAIS. Yet, for us, the importance of NAIS is two-fold: first, it is essential to an academic center focused on the intersections of knowledge and struggle of people of the global majority; and second, beyond the academic curricula, it should serve as a pathway to build relationships with the Indigenous peoples of this land.

We applied for, and received, Ithaca College's Center for Faculty Excellence Instructional Development Award to support a course redesign that would include a culminating site visit, because we could not envision a NAIS course that never left the classroom. Drawing from our academic training, experiences, and position as non-Indigenous educators, we center relationship-building at every turn, to create space for the relationality critical to NAIS yet often absent from higher education's business-as-usual. For financial and curricular reasons, we co-developed the course, but alternate teaching it to balance the curricular demands within our department. Nevertheless, our partnership challenges institutional structures that silo educators and disciplinary fields--we support each other in the site visit and are in constant dialogue over course materials, students, and future ideas for the course. Our pedagogical approach reflects a core principle of knowing through place: It must be engaged in active practice, because NAIS is not a field dissecting an over there, or an Other, but one fundamental to understanding our home places and how we exist collectively as part of them.

⁶ See Hansen and Rossen (2007, 2017) and Rosen (2008).

⁷ Personal correspondence with Dr. Sean Eversley Bradwell.

⁸ For more on the APP process, see Ithaca College's "The Shape of the College: Report and Recommendations of the Academic Prioritization Implementation Committee" (February 17, 2021) at <http://tiny.cc/applthacaCollege>.

⁹ Other courses, such as "Subject to Paradise: Race, Place and Power in the Pacific Islands" and "Policing the Borderlands," incorporate NAIS topics and frameworks in the context of Asian American and Latinx Studies.

The constraints of budget, faculty lines, and institutional priorities over the past three years has shown us that, with just three faculty teaching full-time in the CSCRE, we are still operating on a survival strategy. Curricularly, there is no financial or faculty support to expand the coursework offered in the minor, which has remained stagnant over the last five years. We operate in a broader context of critical absence: Our status as non-Indigenous faculty of color; a vacant NAIS faculty line; the post-COVID-19 budget deficit that leaves it vacant; and a student body that in 2024 identified as 0.002% “American Indian or Alaska Native” or “Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander” (Ithaca College, 2024).

By contrast, the Gayogohó:nq’ people, on whose unceded lands the college stands, have never been absent. Hodiñqhsq’nih land right remains, as does the settler responsibility to act accordingly—to understand land and place so that these responsibilities are an active practice. Understanding settler colonial systems and how they have structured prior and ongoing knowledge/knowledge-production is a relational imperative we must meet in order to decolonize. The course and its syllabi prioritize Indigenous thinkers and cultural productions, in addition to settler colonial frameworks. However, the need to continue to create places of co-resistance—or rather, rework *all* places to become them—also emphasizes the limitations of a single course, and the urgency for commitments to NAIS that expand beyond their introduction.

Introduction to Native American & Indigenous Studies

Since 2022, thirty students have enrolled in Intro to NAIS every spring. We organize the course into five units, each shaped by the imperative to engage NAIS as an active practice:

1. “What is NAIS?” serves as an introduction to the field, as well as to settler and Indigenous epistemologies;
2. “Native Space” emphasizes Indigenous land relation and Hodiñqhsq’nih political sovereignty;
3. “Native Presence & Indigenous Presents” contextualizes contemporary Indigenous activism within histories of resistance and survivance;
4. “Museums & Memory” examines coloniality and Indigenous cultural sovereignty; and
5. “Indigenous Futures” focuses on decolonial theory and praxis.

Here, we highlight four manifestations of knowing through place: a semester-long project, Hometown History; an experiential Get Lost Day; course readings that synthesize our place-based approaches; and a site visit to the Skä-noñh Great Law of Peace Center. Our goal is for our students to see that a world beyond the settler episteme is and has always been present, and that another is possible—one where Indigenous ways of knowing inspire personal and collective transformation. Decolonization may be an “elsewhere” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 36), but the *work* is to bring this elsewhere home.

Bringing Elsewhere Home: Hometown History

In January, we begin by asking students to think through multiple places--Ithaca College, on uncended Gayogohó:nq’ lands; and their hometowns, which are also on Indigenous lands. In their Hometown History, they engage NAIS as an active practice in a place they “know,” to begin

discussions of settler and Indigenous epistemologies that they continue to build throughout the course.¹⁰ Inspired by Danika Medak-Saltzman's assignment in Women's and Gender Studies at Syracuse University, our Hometown History is a three-part, semester-long project.¹¹

Hometown History 1 asks students to choose a location of origin for themselves (town, state, or country) and discuss its history of colonization. In doing so, they consider their temporal relationship to place and colonialism and settler colonialism's legacy on multiple communities. It serves as a starting point for them to critique who writes histories, identify what gaps exist in those histories, and ask questions about their implications for decolonization in the present. For students, regardless of whether they are guests or people Indigenous to this land, this is one of the hardest parts of the course, because they re-examine their relationship to the settler state. For example, as we read Dunbar-Ortiz's work and her definition of genocide, students articulated how they thought the conflict in occupied Palestinian territories reflected the same framework. The framing, which was focused on Turtle Island, allowed them to see settler colonialism and Indigenous survival elsewhere.

These examinations lay the groundwork for Hometown History 2, where students hone in on a specific aspect of settler colonialism in their hometown to analyze. This second assignment leads into Hometown History 3, where they revise their essay into a visual, public-facing form, drawing on the "Museums & Memory" module and their visit to the Skä-noñh Great Law of Peace Center. "Hometown History" pushes students to think about NAIS not as something separate from their lives, but as an intertwined part of their existence and responsibility to place.

Embodying Place: Get Lost Day

In February's deep winter, we send our students on an embodied exploration of place—this time, on Gayogohó:nq' lands. The idea that Indigenous presence must be unearthed is a misnomer. It is part of a counter-reality that maintains the settler colonial state, a facade built into the environment so as to appear natural and quotidian.¹² "Get Lost Day" asks students to "lose" their normative navigational bearings. For Get Lost Day, our students independently locate local murals painted by Indigenous artists; street signs written in Gayogohó:nq'; or county historical markers, and unravel the primacy of Ithaca's settler colonial counter-reality. Drawing from Natchee Blu Barnd's *Native Space: Geographic Strategies to Unsettle Settler Colonialism* (2017), which analyzes of street symbols and their capacity (or lack thereof) to create Native Space, students consider: How does the symbol they've found create or refuse Native Space?

Knowing through place requires getting outside, and the answers are embodied as much as they are analytic. Winter weather comes up often in our students' writing—bracing winds, treacherous ice, and a below-freezing encounter with place. It's rarely their first time downtown, but often the first time they've stopped to look at a sign or mural. Finding them is harder than they expected.

¹⁰ The examples and stories shared in this essay amalgamate our Intro to NAIS courses from Spring 2023, 2024, and 2025. Direct quotes and images of student work have been used with permission.

¹¹ Pam was Medak-Saltzman's Teaching Assistant in 2019. While the original assignment is a one-time essay, we have expanded it into a semester-long project.

¹² In *Empire's Tracks: Indigenous Nations, Chinese Workers, and the Transcontinental Railroad* (2019), Manu Karuka defines settler power as "counter-sovereignty," which positions Indigenous sovereignty as the pre-existing norm. Our use of "counter-reality" derives from this logic.

Critically, it's strange to realize how different the world is when one goes looking for what's hidden in plain sight. Painted by Nani Chacon (Diné) as part of a program facilitated by CSCRE in 2019, one of the murals emblazons Ithaca College's Campus Center. Nevertheless, some students claimed they'd never seen it—rather, they'd seen, but not seen. This is often the first revelation.

The second is that seeing differently is not the end. New ways of knowing beget new ways of questioning. Delving into the history of the mural, one of our students found that the mural was created to celebrate student activism. Yet, they hesitate, "it is this emphasis on the local community that makes me question the work's success as a reclamation of Indigenous space." While the goal of the mural may not have been to create Native space to begin with, this student concedes, it feels like a missed opportunity. "As much as college officials like to say that the institution values a variety of disciplines, recent budget cuts show that the humanities are less valued by them than they claim," our student reflects. As their focus moves from the institution's willingness to display a mural but not to effect grander engagements with Indigenous presence alongside it, they identify a future that has failed to materialize. Students bridge the separation between object/observer: a desire to critique one's own realities, to locate one's position in place, and to understand our collective responsibility to Turtle Island.

Reading Across Place: *Northern Light* & *Braiding Sweetgrass*

March is a month of synthesis, where seeds sown at the start of the class grow together in multiple places. We incorporate "slow reads" of longer texts throughout the course, weaving their contents across units to emphasize settler colonial critique and active engagement with Indigenous ways of knowing.

In Mika's version of the course, Kazim Ali's memoir, *Northern Light: Power, Land, and the Memory of Water* (2021) offers a touchstone through which we trace the interconnectedness of key topics in NAIS, from the Red Power Movement to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives. Ali considers his "hometown history" in a hydroproject town on Pimicikamak Cree Nation lands (Manitoba), narrating his family's complicity in Indigenous dispossession; his belonging to and alienation from the land; the Indigenous peoples who were there before him, and never left. Ali's self-examinations inspire students to ask similar questions in their Hometown Histories. How does one occupy settler identity as an immigrant; a person of color; a queer person? One student highlighted the layered experiences of colonialism, as in Ali's "immigrant family facing the effects of colonialism back home [in India-Pakistan] while also benefiting from colonialism in Canada and the U.S." Another wrote, "I wouldn't expect to get so much out of a non-indigenous perspective, but I think that is part of what is so engaging, because he is expressing his inner conflict, asking honest questions, and taking responsibility." Navigating settler responsibility drives our students' Hometown History revisions, as they center Indigenous worlds and narrate their positions within them—positions from which they might continue to learn from and with, as opposed to learning about.

In Pam's version, students read and journaled about Citizen Potawatomi Nation Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass*, a memoir of using Indigenous knowledge from elders and community to shape her research in Western science. Kimmerer writes, works, and lives in Hodinöhsó:nih lands; her essays highlighted course themes related to ways of knowing via the environment, land, and language. An aspiring outdoor educator, who took the class on a whim,

reflected that Kimmerer fundamentally changed his whole approach to the outdoors and the kinds of knowledge and care he wanted to practice with his future students.

In critiques of racial capitalism and settler colonialism, *Braiding Sweetgrass* fell short. Kimmerer does not contextualize the sidelining of Indigenous knowledge within broader discussions on genocide, settler colonialism on Turtle Island, which we did collectively in the classroom. Moreover, when we read chapters from Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*, one student stated that Simpson's tone was much more direct than Kimmerer's—it was one that privileged Indigenous sovereignty, written for an Indigenous audience. By discussing the absence of anticolonial Indigenous thought in *Braiding Sweetgrass*, students engage NAIS frameworks as an active practice.

Knowing With: Visiting Skä-noñh and Hometown History 3

April in Ithaca heralds rain, and the damp of too many tall bodies crammed into minivans. Intro to NAIS heads north, following the rivers toward the Skä-noñh Great Law of Peace Center on the shores of Onondaga Lake.

“Did you see that road sign just now? For Tully?” Mika shouted from the driver's seat. They didn't, nor did they remember Tully's significance. Knowing through place also means acquiring fluency in particularity. Tully is home to the headwaters of Onondaga Creek, which flows into Onondaga Lake; they are sacred to the Onondaga Nation. In late 2024 these waters and 1000 acres of land were returned to the Nation (Onondaga Nation, 2024). I'd shown them the maps, and they'd dutifully taken notes, snapped photos of Google Slides. But it didn't truly translate into place until we shambled out of the vans and stood across from Onondaga Lake.

Nyawewñha skä-noñh, the phrase that welcomes every visitor to the Center means “I am thankful that you are well” (Skä-noñh Great Law of Peace Center, 2012). At Skä-noñh, Onondaga Nation members build relations with visitors through oral history, and this is an important component to NAIS as an active practice.¹³ By the time students arrive at Skä-noñh, they have identified the absences carved by settler structures. Our students' knowledge of the frameworks allows them to focus on the particular—the fine details of history and living culture, but also the ways these stories are told—by whose decisions, with whose knowledge, in what format, and to what ends?¹⁴ All these mechanisms are particularly salient in Skä-noñh's own history of place. For two years in the 17th century, the French claimed these Onondaga lands for a fort and mission. In the 20th century, Onondaga County Parks and Recreation used the location for many decades as an interpretive site called Saint Marie Among the Iroquois—a name that centers the French settler perspective even as it alleges relationship with the Hodiñqhsq:niñ. In 2015, the Onondaga Nation reclaimed this violent colonial artifact as the Skä-noñh Center. Settler society as-is is anything but a foregone conclusion.

¹³ The Onondaga Nation is the spiritual and political core of the Hodiñqhsq:niñ Confederacy (Skä-noñh Great Law of Peace Center, 2012).

¹⁴ Our discussions of these questions are in dialogue with work in NAIS and museum studies from Amanda J. Cobb (Chickasaw), Amy Lonetree (Ho-Chunk), and Monika Siebert.

History begins with the Creation Story, and this is where our tours of the Skä-noñh Center begin as well. Aspects of the story encircle the entryway on all sides, including a painting of Sky Woman, supported by a flock of geese as she falls toward Turtle Island. In our three trips to the Skä-noñh Center from 2023 to 2025, each of our three docents has conducted a different tour based on their own history and relationship to the story, whether they grew up in the Onondaga Nation, or returned to the Onondaga Nation and language later in life, after growing up outside the culture. In their reflections, our students highlight their collective experience of Indigenous cultural narratives as embodied and individual. “It was also good to hear the stories from someone who had been hearing them for their whole life,” recounted one. “Having the guided tour from Emerson [2025], and hearing the meaning behind each display in what felt like one connected story, was so immersive,” said another, of Emerson Shenandoah (Snipe Clan, Onondaga), the Director of the Skä-noñh Center.

The Skä-noñh Center does not supply our students with their only dose of local Indigenous knowledge, as though an inoculation against ignorance (Tuck & Yang, 2012). The core narratives presented at the Skä-noñh Center align with those we’ve explored in class. But as in the words of Hodiñhsq̓:nih Elders, repetition of story is not a waste, but a means of polishing (American Indian Law Alliance & Onondaga Nation, 2025). “Hearing our guide talk about his grandparents who were victims of residential schools and who, as a result, didn’t want to pass down their language was an important thing to come face-to-face with,” reflected one of our students. They connected this observation to a previous conversation with filmmaker Erica Tremblay (Seneca-Cayuga) about language revitalization and residential schools, honing in on the ways that attempted genocide continues to reverberate through generations, into the present. Another shared that Skä-noñh “emphasize[s] the ongoing presence of the Hodiñhsq̓:nih Confederacy. Throughout the class, we talk about the Hodiñhsq̓:nih Confederacy . . . but the Center really helps to synthesize all of that and connects so many things that we talked about in class.”

This is the vantage point from which students approach the final iteration of their Hometown History. For their final project, we invite them to re-envision their History in a new, multimodal form: Drawing on our readings and their analysis of Skä-noñh, how would you design a Hometown History museum?¹⁵ Answering this question requires imagining a different world—specifically, a desired future. We challenge students to re-narrate their relationship to their hometown, and their hometown’s relationship to its settler and Indigenous histories. The assignment asks them to position themselves within broader narratives while also decentering the self, and to think about what new forms and structures might actively support a decolonial “Hometown History.” The confluence of form and story is dramatic: One student wrote a whitepaper detailing the ways the objects would be cared for and rotated out (not as a static collection but as borrowed items that return to their communities and continue their active usage). Another developed a café menu that highlighted the native plants and traditional preparations, and outlined desired partnerships with local growers and food sovereignty projects. A third student made a museum that navigates the waterways of N’Dakinna by boat. Traveling the rivers, museumgoers make landfall in “classrooms” that focalize uneasy clashes in Indigenous-settler relations:

¹⁵ Skä-noñh is explicitly a Cultural Center, not a museum. This nomenclature emphasizes its exhibits as part of an ongoing culture, rather than prehistory caught in amber. In their Hometown Histories, our students consider their own uses of terminology, as well as the additional community functions they want their imagined “museums” to serve.

There are large whiteboards at the front of each classroom that echo these settler colonialist narratives and then the other walls in the classrooms are plastered with Indigenous history, artwork, writing . . . that counteract those narratives and tell a more complete story of this land and its people. As you progress through the rooms, they become more crowded . . . This will increase the feeling of overwhelm and invasion as visitors learn more about how settler colonialists have tried to overwrite and erase Indigenous presence. I hope that this will add a more urgent and visceral aspect to the physical experience of the space and that it will push people to do more than just “decolonize their mind.”

This student's desire to evoke embodied experiences through their imagined museum draws inspiration from their own experience of knowing through place. For them, cognitive revision exceeds the “mind”; it inculcates via the body, and the relationality of body and place.

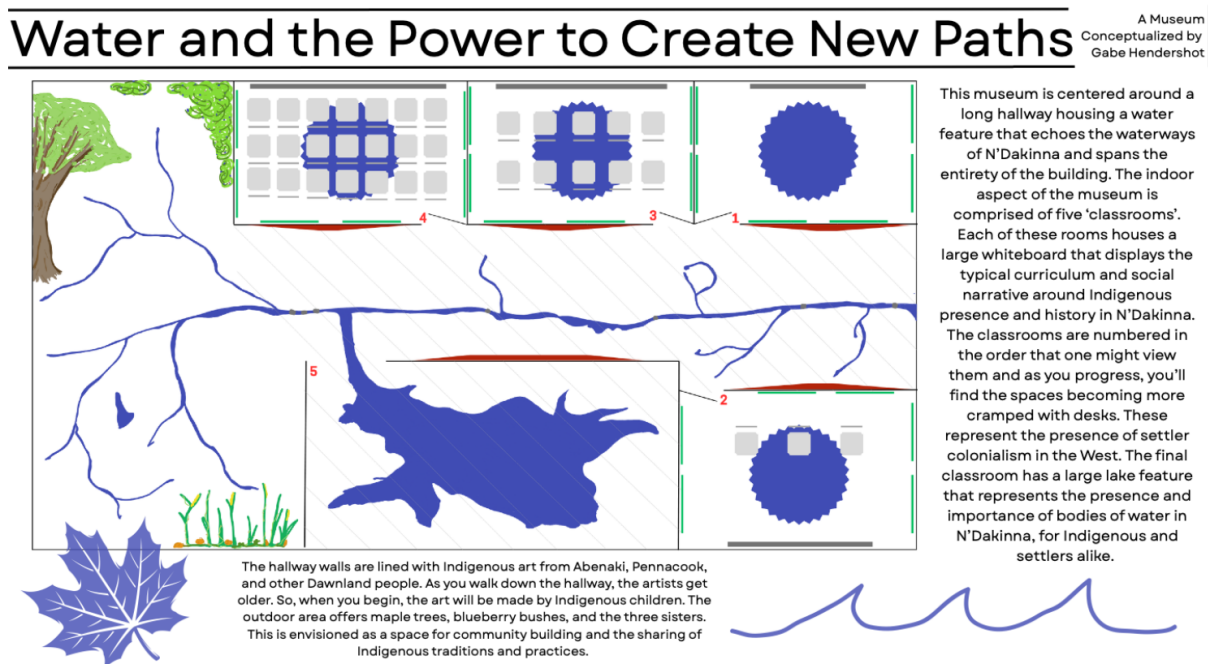


Figure 1. *Hometown History 3*. Waterways serve as both subject and storyteller in this student's Hometown History museum, emphasizing knowing through place as a practice of knowing *with*, rather than solely *about*.

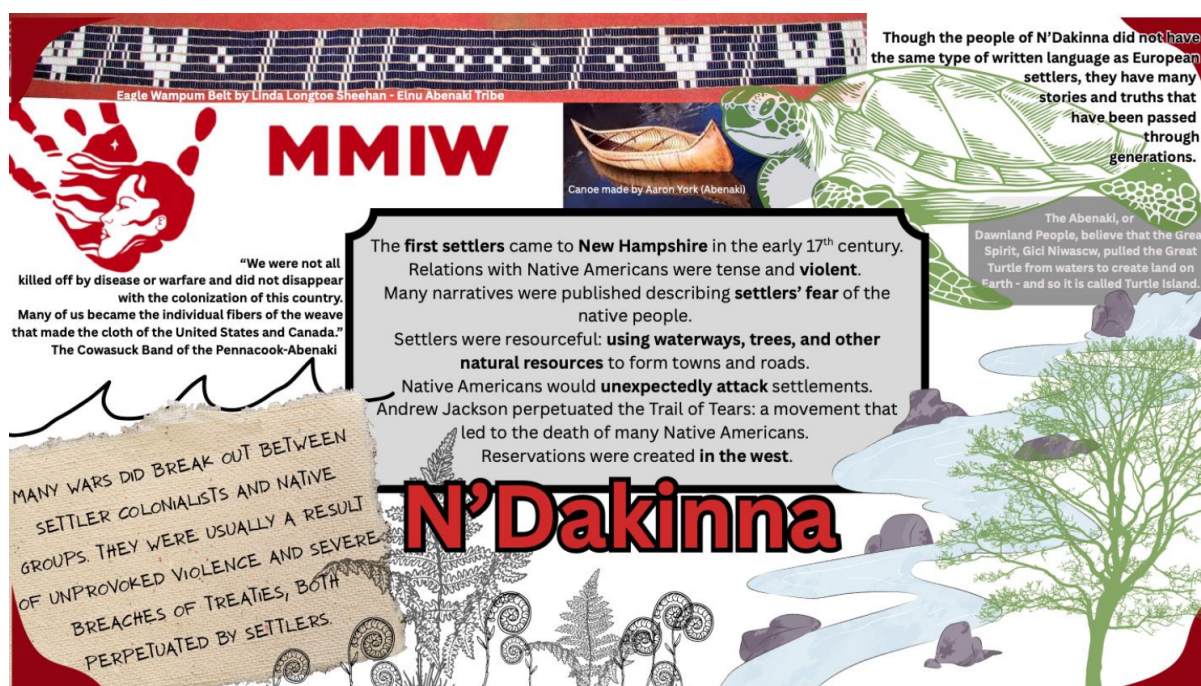


Figure 2. *Hometown History 3*. The center plaque of this “classroom” whiteboard displays a colonizer’s history of New Hampshire. They juxtapose this colonial counter-reality with Indigenous art and text that challenge settler epistemologies.

Desired Futures

Ultimately, one class does not unmake the College’s settler occupation of the College, nor does it constitute a whole Native American and Indigenous Studies program. Settler colonial power persists through its hegemonic insistence on itself, but we are also cognizant that overemphasizing critiques of settler colonial power risks suggesting it is the end-all of NAIS, or of Indigenous cultures entirely (Byrd, 2014). The potential to decolonize always exists. In our essay, we have emphasized how our placed-based approach allows students to focus on relations with land and people, and to push them toward thinking through decolonial futures. Students’ reflections capture why knowing through place as a pedagogical approach can serve as a springboard for personal and collective transformation: “I feel like the most important thing is that I’ve spent a lot of the semester trying to figure out how I can get involved with the Indigenous people from where I live,” shared one student. “I think the site visit [to Skä-noñh] gave me a direct link to this world. . . . It’s like a door being opened.” These transformations cannot be limited to the classroom, or to campus. As their understanding of place expands, so do their responsibilities. This is the ultimate goal of grounded normativity—that we should “be in respectful diplomatic relationships with other Indigenous and non-Indigenous nations with whom we might share territorial responsibilities or common political or economic interests” (Coulthard & Simpson, 2016, p. 254). As our students suggest, “Ithaca College is on Hodiñhsq:nih land, and as students of this institution, we should be made aware of and learn the history of the rightful inhabitants of this land.” They begin to see Ithaca College and their own lives as part of a settler structure as an ongoing process to be challenged. Their reflections demonstrate a personal transformation through the collective experience of the class, and a desire for more from the College.

As part of the institution, we are part of the settler colonial and racial capitalist apparatus that relies on dispossession for its continuance. At the beginning of this piece, we asked:

What if, instead of continuing the genocidal logics our students have been exposed to in this settler colonial, racial capitalist system, we challenge them to think critically through Indigenous ways of knowing?

We have thus approached this through the student experience, but our desired future is far more capacious. We call for Ithaca College to commit at the institutional level to integrate decolonial Indigenous ways of knowing into its every aspect.¹⁶ Having a program in NAIS requires that the settler colonial institution participate. The institution's values are only as meaningful as the actions that embody them, and these actions must be in relationship to Indigenous land. We must begin to seed and re-build a long-term relationship with Gayogohó:nq' through the Cayuga/SHARE Farm, and be in relation with Gayogohó:nq' and the Hodiñhsq:nih Elders. Finally, our goal is that through these seeds, alongside student and faculty shifts, the institution centers Indigenous lands and people; commitment to and support for full-time faculty in NAIS, as well as for Indigenous faculty, staff, and students; changes in the curriculum across all departments; and actions toward decolonization. We hope "knowing through place" can serve as a model for K-12 and university educators to approach Indigenous ways of knowing in settler colonial and racial capitalist institutions, as a method of challenging the structures in which we live.

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¹⁶ Following the release of the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2015, Canadian universities have been strongly encouraged to "Indigenize" their institutions (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). Many of the proposed Calls to Action—see McGill University's iteration documented at <https://www.mcgill.ca/indigenous/calls-action>—translate powerfully to a U.S. context. However, Canadian reconciliation approaches have also been met with resounding critique (Daigle, 2019). Although beyond the scope of this paper, envisioning what forms Indigenization might take in the context of the U.S. university (and in the continued absence of a formal Truth and Reconciliation process at the nation-to-nation level) is uncompromisingly a part of our call.

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Marathon for a Union

R. Joseph Rodríguez

“The revolution is here. [. . .] This is a marathon, not a sprint.”
—Christian Smalls, US labor organizer, *The Guardian*, April 10, 2022

In worn sneakers,
the workers gather
listen intently and pound the pavement
to protect themselves and their families
in this new gilded age upon the world.

The workers scurry across the acres of cement
warehouses and crowded assembly lines filled
with cardboard boxes and cartons and products.
(Somebody awaits this endless serpentine of stuff!)

Timed monitors on ankles and arms
with handheld devices timing the seconds
of worker-driven, ergonomic economics
and agile metrics, rates, and speeds for the corps.

Beneath the push and pound and aches of output,
the workers unite for the marathon of endurance
they know so well with many hurdles of tasks
and paramount operations and orders to fill
fast—day in, day out—of endless
laboring!

The dignity of the marathon runners reaches
the working masses, a swelling of the sweating and tears
of Chrises and Jasons and Xiomaras at MTA bus stops
with shared rides and tent gatherings for victories,
for a brave run, a necessary race, as one.

Reclaiming Comparative Ethnic Studies: A Collaborative Course in Asian American and Latinx Literature and Film

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Abstract

The field of ethnic studies grew from alliances of different minoritized groups working towards liberation. Despite this original emphasis on solidarity, today classes in ethnic literature and history are usually taught separately within their own programs in African American, Asian American, Latinx, and Native American studies. While it is crucial to recognize the incommensurability of these histories and experiences, the separation of fields risks losing opportunities for solidarity and a deeper understanding of how U.S. imperialism, militarism, and racial policies have shaped minoritized populations in relation to and with each other. This article describes a new, co-taught class for Duke University that bridged two fields: “Asian American and Latinx Literature and Film.” We designed the course to highlight significant connections and intersections in the histories and identities of these communities and to foster solidarity among students through collaborative assignments. We drew our pedagogical aims from Paulo Freire’s call for collaborative learning as a tool of resistance. Despite institutional barriers that often prevent collaboratively designed and co-taught classes, comments from our end-of-semester evaluations indicate that students see a need for courses that study and build solidarity, especially in an increasingly hostile political climate.

Keywords: Asian American, Latinx, Collaborative Learning, Solidarity

The ongoing project of ethnic studies constitutes a critical intervention into intellectual structures rooted in colonization, racism, empire, and state violence. Its pedagogical vision grew from the alliance of minoritized groups united as the Third World Liberation Front at San Francisco State College in 1968 and the following year at the University of California at Berkeley. During this movement, Black, Latin American, Filipino, Asian American, and Mexican American student groups demanded the formation of Ethnic Studies schools or “Third World Colleges,” recognizing that community empowerment relied on solidarity between groups experiencing oppression and marginalization worldwide. After the longest student strike in U.S. higher education, San Francisco State opened the first College of Ethnic Studies in 1969, which included provisions for each group with its own program (Okiihiro, 2016, pp. 29–30).

Despite this original emphasis on solidarity, today classes in African American, Asian American, Latinx, and Native American studies are usually taught separately. In fact, this separation constitutes an important acknowledgement of each group's unique histories and experiences within the United States. As Gary Y. Okihiro (2016) notes, self-determination was a "key demand" (p. 2) of the Third World Liberation Front from the start, meaning that every group reserved the right to speak for itself. Even as student groups formed strategic alliances, their solidarities relied on what Nadia Elia et al. (2016) call a "changing, often vexed set of rationalizations, arguments, and stories regarding the necessity and propriety of convening different epistemic-institutional formations within a political-intellectual housing" (p. 1). However, while it is crucial to organize knowledge in a way that acknowledges the incommensurability of these histories and experiences, the separation of fields risks losing new opportunities for solidarity, as well as a deeper understanding of how U.S. imperialism, militarism, and racial policies have shaped minoritized populations in relation to and with each other.

We posit that Asian American and Latinx Studies benefit from being explored together in the classroom, in addition to the in-depth exploration that occurs within each field. Relational, multiethnic, and intersectional approaches have found proponents in Afro-Latinx scholarship and studies of Latinx approaches to indigeneity (Torres-Saillant, 2012, 2018), comparative African American and Latinx histories (Ortiz, 2018), Asian American/Black studies (Kim, 2023), and studies of Asian American settler-colonialism (Fujikane & Okamura, 2008). They have also been foundational to women of color feminism, as in the groundbreaking *This Bridge Called My Back* (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983). However, examining Asian American and Latinx experiences together may seem counterintuitive to many students. In public discourse, Asian Americans are often racialized as "model minorities," in opposition to the racial branding of Latinxs as "illegal immigrants" (Le-Khac, 2020). These tropes seem to work against one another, casting groups into the familiar form of desirable/undesirable immigrants. Yet, as several scholars have observed, Asian and Latinxs have faced and continue to face structural similarities in their racialization as perpetual foreigners outside the Black/white binary of U.S. racial formations (De Genova, 2006; Ngai, 2004; O'Brien, 2008). The construction of the United States as a nation-state has relied historically on excluding both groups from full civic participation, both through legal exclusion and through targeted anti-immigration rhetoric. At the same time, US military interventions in Asia and Latin America have brought Asians and Latin Americans to the United States as refugees, (post)colonial subjects, and Cold War allies. Literary scholars have traced common threads in cultural productions by these groups, including tropes of betrayal (Parikh, 2009); negotiations of bilingualism (Lim, 2017); elided histories of U.S. imperialism, nativistic racism, and Cold War militarism (Thananopavarn, 2018); and the "transfictional" forms of multivocal texts (Le-Khac, 2020). All of these scholars draw attention to the intersections of these fields with the idea of coalition-building in mind.

Now more than ever, we see this coalition-building as urgent. As the fastest growing ethnoracial groups in the United States, Asian Americans and Latinxs have become targets of white supremacist backlash. Throughout the twenty-first century, we have seen a rise in anti-immigration sentiment, increased policing and deportation of Latinx and Asian Americans, and an increase in hate crimes and violence against these groups. The rising power of ICE (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement) during the second Trump administration affects both groups in ways that often violate civil and human rights. At the same time, fields within ethnic studies are being delegitimized and dismantled, at both the university and the K-12 level. At the

university level, the “academic containment” that Pia Chatterjee and Sunaina Maira (2014) identified has only accelerated, stifling academics who “cross the line” through cancelling programs, devaluing scholarship, and outsourcing teaching to adjunct labor. At the K-12 level, laws banning “DEI” and “critical race theory” have often meant banning ethnic studies entirely. Efforts by Florida legislators to mandate Asian American studies while rejecting the AP African American History curriculum show that fields may even be pitted against one another as part of this effort (Association for Asian American Studies, 2023). In this context, we see solidarity between groups as an urgent project to counter an ongoing hostile political climate.

With these issues in mind, we developed and co-taught “Asian American and Latinx Literature and Film,” a new class at Duke University in Spring 2025. This seminar course had seventeen students enrolled out of a cap of eighteen. It sought to answer the following questions: What is Asian American? What is Latinx? What can Asian American and Latinx perspectives show us about dominant constructions of “America” and its historical and contemporary power structures? Through it, we wanted to explore literary and film productions that express some of the fundamental issues affecting Asian American and Latinx communities, focusing on how they have been shaped in mutual relation with each other and with common histories of imperialism, militarism, labor, and immigration law. Duke University’s Asian American and Diaspora Studies program, established in 2018 after over twenty years of student activism, sponsored our class. It was cross-listed with Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, English, and Duke’s program in Latino/a Studies in the Global South. We also benefited from our participation in Duke’s Collaborative Project Courses Faculty Fellows Program, which allowed us space, time, and funding to develop the course during the summer of 2024.

Our goals for organizing class materials were threefold. First, we wanted to help students understand the histories of U.S. occupation and interventions in Asia and Latin America that are integral to Asian American and Latinx stories and experiences. Ethnic studies, as it has stemmed from Third World studies, has always been about “universal liberation (self-determination) against all forms of oppression, material and discursive” (Okihiro, 2016, p. 14). Understanding how Asian American and Latinx populations have been shaped by U.S. actions abroad is key to identifying these forms of oppression. Second, we aimed to uncover alliances between Asian American and Latinx groups that have formed historical bases for solidarity that we can learn from today. A key example of these alliances includes the formation of the United Farm Workers, a movement led by Mexican and Filipinx workers. Finally, we wanted to acknowledge and prioritize hybrid, multilayered, and intersectional identities. Woman of color feminism and queer activist texts help us understand that Asian Americans and Latinxs are negotiating multiple identities. Even ethnic identities may not always be mutually exclusive, as there is a long history of Asians throughout Latin America. Literature about and by Asian Latinxs can help us break down and interrogate our separation of fields that may not always grapple with identities beyond a single hyphen.

Our organization of assignments encouraged students to work together across differences. Students responded to class materials via an online discussion board that required them to compose their reactions and respond to other students’ ideas. Outside of this, we facilitated the formation of teams of 3 to 4 students, which were responsible for leading one class session and for conducting a semester-long research project into a topic involving the intersection of Asian American and Latinx studies. The research project culminated in the production of a 20-minute informative podcast for public consumption.

Inspired by Paulo Freire's pedagogy, we built this course with collaboration as a pillar of learning and as a way to encourage solidarity in our class space. In *Pedagogy of Solidarity*, Freire expands on what it means to work towards social justice in 21st-century education by highlighting the importance of hope and solidarity in teaching and learning. In his Forward to the book, Henry Giroux (2014) explains that ". . . (h)ope for Freire is a practice of witnessing, an act of moral imagination that encourages progressive educators and others to stand at the edge of society, to think beyond existing configurations of power in order to imagine the unthinkable in terms of how they might live with dignity, justice, and freedom." Most of the students in this class were Asian American and/or Latinx. In designing this class for them, we aimed to honor the experiences, voices, and beliefs that they brought to the classroom. By affirming their voices, helping them expand the knowledge they brought to the classroom, and broadening their sense of community and solidarity, we hoped to instill a broader sense of responsibility to others.

From U.S. Imperialism to Intersectional Identities: Shaping the Curriculum

In organizing the texts for the course, our first goal was to highlight the United States' imperialism, military interventions, and militarized capitalism in Asia and Latin America that have directly shaped Asian American and Latinx populations in the United States. This connection is important historically and as a corrective to dominant narratives that view both groups as immigrants outside the United States' history. The film *Harvest of Empire* (2012), which we assigned early in the semester, emphasizes the connections between the United States' imperialist actions in Latin America and the subsequent movement of Latin American refugees and migrants north. Meanwhile, Carlos Bulosan's memoir *America Is in the Heart* (1946) depicts the impoverishment and dispossession of Filipino farmers that occurred with the U.S. colonization of the Philippines, as well as the subsequent migration of tens of thousands of Filipinos to the colonial center as laborers during the early twentieth century. We began the class by placing these texts in conversation as part of our class's project to decolonize American history, breaking through narratives that reify national boundaries to show how so many Asian Americans and Latinx people have directly experienced the postcolonial slogan: "we are here because you were there." We continued exploring this theme throughout the class as we placed in conversation texts about U.S. covert operations in Guatemala and Laos, as well as texts about the effects of neoliberalist economic policies on Asian and Latinx labor.

Our course also explored the consequences of dominant constructions of Latinx and Asian Americans as outsiders. Both groups have faced nativistic racism based on this construction, which we studied through our unit on World War II in its extreme form of patriotic racism. The incarceration of over 120,000 Japanese Americans solely based on their race was documented in Mine Okubo's (1946) extraordinary eyewitness graphic novel, *Citizen 13660*. We assigned this text alongside Luis Valdez's film *Zoot Suit* (1981), a literary critique of the infamously racist 1942 Sleepy Lagoon murder trial and subsequent "zoot suit riots," which consisted of violence against Mexican Americans by white U.S. naval servicemen. In a class activity, we asked students to place these texts in creative conversation, with the result that they penned pitches for children's books, YA romance novels, and dramatic dialogues that realistically depicted Japanese American and Mexican American young people confronting nativistic racism in World War II.

In addition to highlighting historical similarities, our course aimed to uncover alliances and solidarities between Asian Americans and Latinxs, which, as one student noted, are often elided by “differing existing stereotypes today.” Particularly within elite institutions of higher education, Asian American and Latinx students have been positioned against each other by affirmative action debates; student affinity groups are also often isolated in different spaces on campus, taking on different social issues and celebrating different cultural events. However, this separation belies a long history of alliances, not only through student Third World activism but also in labor histories. To highlight these, we taught the film *César Chávez* (Luna, 2014) alongside *Delano Manongs: Forgotten Heroes of the United Farm Workers* (2016) as an introduction to the extraordinary alliance between Mexican American and Filipino American farmworkers that resulted in the formation of the UFW. We found that few students were aware of either Chávez’s or Larry Itliong’s leadership, let alone how the two groups joined forces to counter the strikebreaking tactics of white American growers. We also highlighted more intimate alliances, such as the early twentieth century marriages between Mexican and Punjabi farmworkers in the California Imperial Valley featured in Rishi Reddy’s novel *Passage West* (2020).

We brought the idea of solidarity to the present day through the issue of undocumented immigration. Jose Antonio Vargas’s activism and writing address the largely hidden presence of Asian undocumented migration to the United States. Vargas’s *Dear America* (2018) and the short film *Halmoni* (2017), featuring a Korean American DACA recipient, made the problem of undocumented status and deportation for Asian Americans visible to our students. Meanwhile, Karla Cornejo Villavicencio’s *The Undocumented Americans* (2020) shattered familiar narratives about everyday undocumented people, highlighting the hardship, uncertainty, and mental and physical duress of living in the shadows. During this unit, a student from the organization “Duke Beyond Borders” discussed organizing at Duke, including students from Latinx, Asian American, and other communities on campus fighting for immigration rights.

Finally, we wanted our curriculum to emphasize the hybrid, overlapping, and intersectional identities of Latinx and Asian Americans. As Erika Lee (2005) and others have noted, Asian American history is “hemispheric,” not simply U.S.-based; there have been people of Asian descent in Latin America for hundreds of years. Their presence means that Asian American and Latinx are not mutually exclusive identities. To explore the traces of empire that have created what Lisa Lowe (2015) calls the “intimacies of four continents,” we assigned Cristina García’s *Monkey Hunting* (2003), which follows a Chinese Afro-Cuban family through multiple generations. We also featured several Asian Latin American writers, including a story by Chinese Peruvian writer Siu Kam Wen, a literary blog post by Korean Chilean poet Moisés Park, and a short play by Korean Chilean playwright Kyoung H. Park. As one student noted, “a lot of the texts included both Asian Americans and Latinx individuals, people with multiple identities, or Asians living in Latin America/vice versa, which directly helped me make connections between the two studies.”

Asian American and Latinx individuals not only negotiate hybrid and multiple identities; they also deal with intersectional identities of race, gender, sexuality, class, religion, and disability. We introduced students to the idea of queer and intersectional identities through the foundational text *This Bridge Called My Back* (1983), where women of color address these issues in solidarity across differences. What does it mean, asks Cherríe Moraga, to be “brown,” a woman, queer, and “just plain poor”? Too often, diversity within groups means exclusion along one or more lines; instead, Moraga calls for developing an “authentic, non-hierarchical connection among oppressed

groups” and acknowledging intersecting oppressions (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983, p. 29). In our course, we continued this conversation with the film *Everything Everywhere All at Once* (2022), which addresses what it means to be Chinese American, a woman, and queer through the fantastical conceit of a metaverse of possibilities. Students responded enthusiastically to these texts, with several mentioning that they wished we had placed them earlier in the semester to better consider intersectionality in all our texts.

Overall, students felt that the curriculum opened their eyes to historical similarities, shared experiences, and possible solidarities. As one student wrote, “this helped me to see how Asian American and Latinx Studies are deeply interconnected via histories of immigration, labor, intersectional challenges, movements/organizing, etc. [while] also look[ing] at the distinct stories of people within each broad (and sometimes overlapping) label.” Another student wrote, “not only does it bring the communities together, but it allowed marginalized intersectional identities to be given a voice in public discourse where they are routinely undermined or masked.” We hope students can carry these ideas into their future solidarity to counter popular discourses of suppression, hostility, and political opposition.

Class Assignments: Students Working Together across Differences

When we planned this class, we knew that exploring the intersecting paths and histories between Asian American and Latinx communities would be powerful, and we designed our class assignments to put that power into practice through collaboration. We agree with Freire that, as long as we make sure to preserve their existing diversity when we study them, drawing lines and bridges of solidarity between minorities in the U.S. can “make a world of a difference” (Chapter 3). These bridges help us understand the complex and diverse ways in which different groups can connect and support each other. We wanted students to explore this theme a step further by challenging them to work together across differences and practice collaboration to produce two public facing assignments that put their knowledge to the test.

Duke’s Collaborative Project Courses Faculty Fellows Program gave us the time and space to craft a class centering projects where teams engaged in research to introduce and lead discussions on major texts we assigned, as well as create a podcast for public consumption. We wanted students to bring their interests, academic knowledge, and skills to bear on the broad and complex ways these two diasporic communities connected. We also wanted them to experiment with the difficulties and challenges of working together and the satisfaction that comes with achieving something as a team.

Through the fellowship, we discovered that in order to teach collaboration successfully we needed to dedicate time practicing these skills in class. We planned class sessions for groups to meet and formulate a Team Charter, where students established the norms and values they would abide by throughout the semester. They also sketched out a working calendar and established soft deadlines to work on various elements of the assignments. Midsemester, students checked-in to reflect on team functioning and individual contributions and created a plan to move forward to meet their goals. We also planned multiple workshops for students to learn about podcasting by bringing experts to speak to them about storytelling techniques or to learn and practice leading and recording interviews. Though we were hesitant to take away opportunities to discuss content,

we were certain that the skills, relationships, and final products they created would foster deep critical thinking, storytelling, and collaboration skills they could take with them beyond the class.

We take our pedagogical aims from Freire et al.'s (2014) vision, which counters the "divide and rule" ethos of dominant society through dialogic action in which "Subjects meet in cooperation in order to transform the world" (p. 148). We see collaboration as a tool of resistance against students' increasing pressure, especially at Duke, to compete and outperform each other. It goes against the individualism permeating much of their experience and that of academia in general. We see collaboration as a liberatory practice that emphasizes the importance of moving together, especially when making complex connections with others. To this end, the major assignments in the class highlighted collaboration and collective learning as a key pillar.

For the first collaborative assignment, the Context Report and Discussion, students presented background information and led the class discussion on one of the major texts we looked at in class (book or film). This assignment prompted students to plan a careful exploration of the text, focusing on the elements that stood out to them the most. We wanted the teams to feel ownership around what felt most relevant to discuss and how we explored those elements as a class. Though we had some basic parameters, students went further in creating activities they thought would help us reflect on the text more carefully. For example, during the discussion of the film *Everything Everywhere All at Once* (2022), the group in charge brought crafting materials for each of us to make an "everything bagel"-one of the most important symbols in the film- that we decorated with googly eyes, words, stickers, and jewels that represented how each individual connected to the film. Through this activity the team was able to highlight what made this film impactful. It opened a careful reflection on the theme of intersecting and clashing identities that can exist within one person which they then connected to the experiences Moraga and Anzaldúa explored in the essays they wrote in the 1980s for *This Bridge Called My Back*, centering their experiences as queer, Chicana, women.

Overall, our class benefited from having multiple perspectives guiding our conversations instead of only relying on our perspectives as the class instructors. Through this assignment, students became architects of their lesson, and also how to work together to decide on division of labor, what direction to take in the discussion, and brainstorm activities to enrich it. Because their work would directly impact our exploration of the text, they took this responsibility seriously and led us into revealing journeys into the films or books we discussed.

On the other hand, the semester-long Team Research and Podcast assignment meant to give students the opportunity to explore voices, themes, and perspectives that we could not include in our class because of time. As long as their project centered the intersection of Asian American and Latinx histories, communities, literature, and/or experiences, we invited them to explore what interested them the most. Working in the same groups, they conducted extensive research, including at least one interview with an expert in their topic. They also learned about the podcast genre and edited and produced a podcast episode for public consumption. In our first semester teaching the course, our students chose to present on issues including affirmative action in college admissions, political shifts during the 2024 election, racial misattribution of South Asian and Latinxs, depictions of Asian American and Latinx women in film and popular media, and Japanese communities in Brazil. These episodes showcased how we can bridge the fields of Asian American and Latinx studies while acknowledging the differences between them.

The public-facing nature of the project encouraged them to treat their work as meaningful, not just a class assignment, but something worthy of real attention and effort. Students were deeply aware of their responsibility in telling these stories. They thought carefully about conveying voices and perspectives with care, particularly when their audience might not be familiar with the histories and issues discussed. While some students expressed disappointment about things like sound quality or time constraints, many shared their pride in the episodes they produced. They understood the stakes of representing others' stories truthfully and contextually, and they rose to the challenge.

At the end of the semester, they were invited to release their episode for publication on Duke's Asian American and Diaspora Studies program website. Unfortunately, we only got permission to publish from three out of the five groups in our class. Of those three groups, one group requested to be published pseudonymously. This speaks to the fear and uncertainty that the current political climate has created for some interviewees and our students. All of the episodes were current, relevant, and fresh. It is a shame that they would shy away from claiming a project they worked so hard to make. It is also a loss for any listeners who could have connected to these stories. This signals a real feeling of danger, especially for our international student community. To us, it also reaffirms the importance and relevance of student work. These are topics and stories worth learning about and digging into. We plan to keep this podcast channel alive and growing in hopes that in future classes, the episodes reach all who want to hear these stories and join in, becoming bridges themselves.

Institutional Barriers and Future Considerations

Freire et al.'s (2014) emphasis on cooperation "as a characteristic of dialogic action" (p. 149) informed our decision to co-develop and co-teach this course. Working together enabled us to learn from each other and to model the kind of cooperation we hoped to encourage among our students. Sandra's expertise encompasses Latin American and Latinx studies, and she has been teaching courses in these areas for nine years through Duke's program in first-year writing. Susan has conducted comparative research in Asian American and Latinx studies and has been teaching Asian American and ethnic studies-related courses for ten years in Duke's writing program. She is a core faculty member in the Asian American and Diaspora Studies program at Duke, where she has taught Asian American literature courses. Teaching together enabled us to draw deeply from Latinx and Asian American studies and our experience in these communities. We consider teaching across disciplines an important aspect of solidarity in the classroom that builds on the strengths of each field.

Studies show that relational, thematic approaches to ethnic studies have benefits not only for higher education, but also in the K-12 classroom. A 2010–2014 study following the adoption of a comparative ethnic studies curriculum for the ninth grade in nineteen San Francisco schools found significant increases in student attendance, average grades, and credits earned, with the largest gains among males, Latinx students, and Asian Americans (Dee & Penner, 2017). The curriculum did not focus on one group but centered multiple racial and ethnic groups, emphasizing social justice, discrimination, and social movements. In some cases, ethnic studies classes have become mandated parts of the curriculum, although state laws often specify particular groups' histories that must be taught. Following a spate of anti-Asian violence in 2021, a number of states and

municipalities passed laws mandating Asian American studies as part of the K-12 curriculum. Other states have required African American, Native American, or Latinx histories to be taught; very few recommend this as part of a relational ethnic studies curriculum.

Unfortunately, institutional trends in K-12 and higher education work against both team-taught and comparative ethnic studies curricula. Massive defunding of public education, as well as the adjunctification of higher education, often prevent faculty or teacher collaborations in pedagogy. As unionized, non-regular rank faculty ourselves, we are part of the 67.7 percent of faculty in US higher education that now hold contingent or adjunct appointments (American Association of University Professors, 2024). Our faculty union won for us the three-year renewable contracts that enabled us to build a working relationship with each other and with programs like Duke's Asian American and Diaspora Studies program, which sponsored the development and teaching of this course. However, with many contingent faculty teaching on a year-to-year contract basis, there is little opportunity to develop the relationships needed to design a course collaboratively. The adjunctification of higher education may be understood as part of the academic containment increasingly experienced by all instructors, especially in the humanities and critical theoretical fields like ethnic studies and women's, gender, and sexuality studies (Chatterjee & Maira, 2014). Worse, in public institutions, including at the K-12 level, a majority of states now have laws banning so-called critical race theory, creating a culture of fear around discussions of race and racism, foundational concepts in critical ethnic studies.

These attacks on education, combined with increasing hostility and violence towards immigrants and racial and ethnic minorities, make comparative and relational ethnic studies classes more important than ever. As part of their own resistance to this climate, many students are hungry for classes that give them the theoretical, historical, and creative basis for forging solidarities between groups. In November, the *Duke Chronicle* named "Asian American and Latinx Literature and Film" one of the "5 Interesting Classes for Spring 2025," recommending it in a feature written by a sophomore highlighting a handful of exciting classes for which students could register for the spring semester (Qian, 2024). Comments from our end-of-semester evaluations indicate that students welcomed the class as a way of building solidarity in an ongoing and increasingly hostile political climate. As one student wrote: "Inter-minority solidarity is super important, especially at this moment of American politics and placing these works in conversation with each other was really helpful to expanding empathy in this way." This student's comments speak to the urgency of relational, intersectional ethnic studies courses as a mode of resistance in a divisive and hostile political climate. By fostering cross-cultural connections and critical thinking around minority experiences, we expand our understanding of the American experience as a whole.

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Leveraging Ethnic Studies to Inspire Resistance in the Electoral Arena: Lessons from California's Conservative Central Valley

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Abstract

During the first Trump administration, young members of nonprofit youth organizing groups helped increase midterm turnout among young voters in California's historically conservative, largely agricultural Central Valley. In this article, we draw on survey, interview, and other data from this region to demonstrate the importance of ethnic studies curricula for young people in youth organizing groups seeking to get out the vote among a primarily non-white, young electorate. We also feature the work of Loud For Tomorrow in Delano, California, to illustrate how one specific youth organizing group is leveraging such curricula to prepare members to get out the vote in advance of the 2026 midterm elections during the second Trump presidency. We argue that exposure to ethnic studies can fuel electoral engagement and political resistance by deepening young people's understanding of local racial dynamics and encouraging solidarity. Ethnic studies curricula—when coupled with intensive training to get out the vote and other youth development programming—can enhance non-partisan, youth-led voter outreach efforts and help restructure power relations in the pursuit of a more just, multiracial democracy.

Between the 2014 and 2018 midterm elections, voter turnout among 18- to 24-year-olds in California's Central Valley increased by 262% (Terriquez et al., 2019). This dramatic surge in youth electoral participation occurred in a historically conservative, largely agricultural region where racial justice and immigrant rights efforts have long faced opposition. Nonprofit youth organizing groups were crucial to this increase. Integrating ethnic studies curricula into their regular programming, these groups prepared their young members to register and effectively mobilize voters for the midterm elections during the first Trump presidency.

In this article, we draw on data from Central Valley youth organizing groups to show how nonpartisan organizations incorporate ethnic studies into their work and why this matters for their adolescent and young adult members. We spotlight one organization, Loud for Tomorrow, to provide an illustrative example of how youth organizing groups are building on the experience gained since the first Trump administration to sustain young voters' engagement. We contend that

exposure to ethnic studies enables young people to understand racial histories and dynamics while priming them to forge solidarity across differences. Ethnic studies curricula—alongside other forms of training and support—can bolster youth’s capacities to restructure power dynamics through democratic processes.

This article contributes to existing scholarship by demonstrating the connection between ethnic studies curricula and voter mobilization efforts. Focusing on youth organizing in California’s Central Valley, we show how community-based ethnic studies programming addresses critical knowledge gaps often found in conventional K–12 schooling. Through interactive workshops and other activities, youth organizing groups foster ethnic pride and cultivate multiracial solidarity as members engage in voter education and grassroots campaigns. In this way, community-based ethnic studies programs can equip young people to challenge white supremacist and right-wing political agendas.

Ethnic Studies and Political Resistance

Ethnic studies introduces young people to the histories and experiences of historically marginalized racial groups, providing them with tools to critically examine how white supremacy contributes to persistent social inequalities (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). Curricula not only help students understand the contemporary forces that sustain racial hierarchies, but also highlight histories of resistance and strategies for social change. By countering negative stereotypes and erasure, ethnic studies can foster students’ pride in their identities and deepen their connection to their communities’ histories (de los Ríos, 2017; Lee et al., 2020; Nojan, 2020).

Ethnic studies curricula can thus also cultivate a racial consciousness—the awareness of shared cultural characteristics and political and economic interests with members of one’s racial or ethnic group (de los Ríos et al., 2015). This racial consciousness, in turn, can motivate collective political action (Frasure-Yokley, 2016; Junn & Masuoka, 2008). Importantly, approaches to ethnic studies that are inclusive of multiple communities can help individuals recognize both similarities and differences across racialized groups (Freer & Lopez, 2011). Such recognition has been shown to facilitate cross-racial solidarity, particularly when young people identify common challenges and struggles (Hope, 2019; Lee et al., 2020; Terriquez & Milkman, 2021).

Because such curricula can instill pride and solidarity in young people, scholars have suggested that ethnic studies could motivate them to engage in civic and political activities (Camarrota, 2016; de los Ríos, 2017; Flanagan et al., 2009; Ginwright, 2009). Indeed, ethnic studies has previously been shown to spur political resistance, specifically participation in social movements and protests (Bañales & Lee-Oliver, 2019; Cabrera et al., 2013; Flores, 2001). This article extends



Bivanna Camacho has been active in getting out the vote since she was a high school participant in the 2018 Central Valley Freedom Summer Participatory Action Research Project. Photo credit: Loud for Tomorrow, Delano

the literature by demonstrating the link between ethnic studies and voter mobilization campaigns. While often considered a “mainstream” political activity, non-partisan voter education can also be understood as a form of resistance, especially in regions where marginalized groups have historically been disenfranchised. Accordingly, increases in turnout among well-informed young people of color can change the political landscape and weaken white supremacist policies and practices. In these contexts, non-profit youth organizing groups are important civic sites, as their ethnic studies programming helps fuel voter engagement efforts that seek to restructure unequal power relationships.

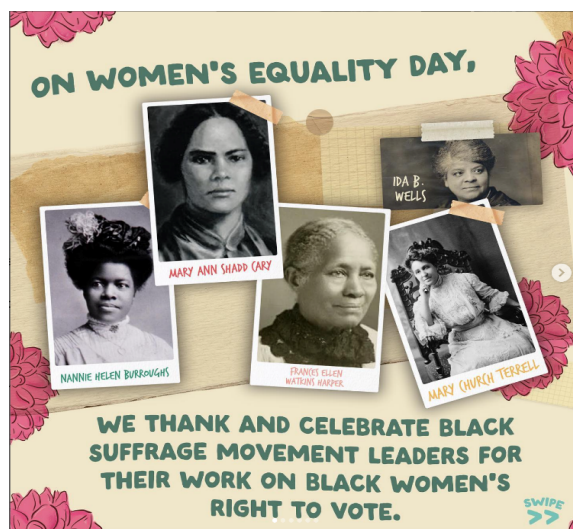
Non-profit Youth Organizing

In the 1980s and 1990s, growing concerns over gang violence, racial conflict, and the crack epidemic spurred civil rights and youth leaders to establish a growing number of non-profit youth organizing groups. Combining the strategies of grassroots community organizing groups with those of youth leadership and service programs, these nonpartisan organizations engaged their members in campaigns to address the everyday challenges members experience in their schools and communities (Braxton, 2016; Hosang, 2006).

Typically staffed by young organizers, these nonprofits have served as spaces for young people to collectively pressure government agencies to enact policy reforms. In the 1990s and 2000s, youth organizing groups often tackled K-12 education, higher education access, policing, environmental and climate justice, immigrant rights, and other issues (Braxton et al., 2013). As they grew in political power and sophistication throughout the 2010s, they increasingly engaged their members in non-partisan voter education and outreach campaigns. In 2019, when the last national census of these groups occurred, youth organizing numbered over 310 across the United States. In this census, 37% of groups reported taking the lead on engaging young people in voter outreach, and another 38% said that they worked with other organizations to connect their young members to voter outreach efforts (Valladares et al., 2021).

Youth organizing groups tend to be located in low-income, non-white, and immigrant communities. Initially, these groups emerged in large urban areas (Braxton et al., 2013). However, throughout the 2010s, their presence expanded outside of central cities and into more conservative rural and semi-rural regions. High school educators in these areas may disproportionately avoid discussing racial issues for fear of backlash from parents or other community members (Pollock et al., 2022). This is where youth organizing groups in California’s Central Valley and other similar regions step in to fill gaps in youth’s understanding of historical and contemporary racial dynamics.

The Central Valley Context



Source: Loud for Tomorrow

California's Central Valley region is the ancestral home of the Maidu, Miwok, and Yokuts tribes. These Indigenous communities endured genocide and displacement, first at the hands of Spanish colonizers and later Mexican authorities and American settlers. In the late 19th century, the Valley became a destination for white Southerners, Midwesterners, and European immigrants—including those from Portugal, Sweden, Armenia, and the Basque Country—who arrived in growing numbers and played a key role in transforming the region into a hub for agriculture and related industries (Parsons, 1986).

The Central Valley is known for its deeply entrenched racial and political conservatism (Essinger, 2011; Monreal et al., 2023; Pastor, 2018). Transplants from the South and Midwest brought with them deeply rooted racist ideologies that shaped local politics and social hierarchies. During the 1920s and 1930s, the Ku Klux Klan established a foothold in several counties, influencing both law enforcement practices and local governance (Humes, 1999). The influx of poor white Dust Bowl migrants in the 1930s reinforced a racial labor hierarchy that placed whites above nonwhites, even as the white migrants themselves faced economic hardship. Many white migrants and their descendants eventually aligned politically with the region's growers, strengthening the Central Valley's conservative culture (Weber, 1994). In the years after World War II, segregation and redlining policies systematically excluded people of color from housing and employment opportunities (Walker, 2004). Over time, white-led conservative agribusiness and oil interests came to dominate the region's political discourse. Furthermore, the state constructed 10 local prisons since the 1980s, earning the region the nickname "Prison Alley" and reflecting a carceral surge that reinforced racial and economic hierarchies while fueling conservative, law-and-order politics (Gilmore, 2007).

Although conservative whites have historically dominated the region's political trajectory, the Central Valley has also long been home to a sizeable non-white population. African Americans began settling in the area in the 1860s, with greater numbers arriving during the Southern Exodus (Gregory, 2005; Kirby, 1983). Asian-American communities also took root after Chinese laborers settled in the region after working on railroad construction (Chan, 1986). Japanese, Sikh, and Filipinx migrants soon followed (Gonzales, 1986; Mabalon, 2013; Matsumoto, 1993). Meanwhile, Mexican-origin communities expanded during the 20th century, including through the Bracero Program (1942–1965), which recruited Mexican men to the region for agricultural labor. These non-white populations have settled in towns and cities across the Valley (Walker, 2004).

Today, Mexican-origin people compose the largest national-origin group in the region, including ethnically and linguistically diverse Indigenous residents. Mexican Indigenous residents include Mixtec, Zapotec, and Triqui from Oaxaca, Purépecha from Michoacán, and other Indigenous groups. More recent arrivals also included refugees from U.S.-backed conflicts, such as Hmong, Vietnamese, and Central Americans escaping war, violence, or poverty. In 2020, roughly 3 out of 4 Central Valley residents under the age of 30 were people of color, according to data from the American Community Survey (author calculations).

The Central Valley's diverse residents have a long history of local resistance against white supremacy and labor exploitation. Farmworkers fought against unjust conditions throughout the first several decades of the 20th century, with a major breakthrough occurring in 1965 when Filipino American labor leaders Larry Itliong and Philip Vera Cruz launched the Delano Grape Strike to secure higher wages for grape pickers and packers (Cruz, 2016). They were soon joined by César

Chávez and Dolores Huerta, and together they helped form the United Farm Workers (UFW), which would bring national attention to the plight of farm laborers (Ganz, 2009). Although the UFW's influence declined in the 1980s, grassroots activism in the region expanded beyond labor rights to confront interconnected issues, including environmental justice, poverty, and mass incarceration. By the mid-2000s, youth-led efforts emerged to challenge the school-to-prison pipeline and advocate for educational justice in Central Valley schools (Wright, 2007). These local efforts paved the way for more widespread youth organizing and civic engagement in the 2010s.

Data Sources

Drawing on multiple data sources, we demonstrate the link between ethnic studies curricula and voter outreach efforts. We utilize data from a national youth organizing survey, focusing on a subsample of 20 groups from the Central Valley (for more information on the national survey, see Valladares et al., 2021). We also draw on 70 semi-structured interviews from members of 12 youth organizing groups that contributed to voter outreach efforts in 2018. The ethnically diverse respondents were aged 14 to 25, with the majority identifying as female. Interviews included data on respondents' experiences in their youth organizing groups. The first author and her research team coded and analyzed fully transcribed transcripts. Additionally, she drew on 1,600 hours of participant observations and related fieldnotes from the Central Valley Freedom Summer Participatory Action Research Project to triangulate and elaborate on survey and semi-structured interview findings (Terriquez et al., 2019). Finally, as co-founder of Loud for Tomorrow, the second author drew on his own reflections and program documentation to illustrate how youth organizing groups incorporate ethnic studies into activities aimed at building youth power at the ballot box and in the community more broadly.



Youth-led workshops and cultural activities uplift Filipino-American resistance and strengthen multiracial solidarity. Source: Loud for Tomorrow

Youth Organizing Groups in the Central Valley

Overview

As with many other youth organizing groups across the nation, most of the Central Valley's 20 groups offered their members comprehensive programming to support their academic success and healthy transition to adulthood. Survey results indicate that the majority of these youth organizing groups (55%) regularly provided members with academic guidance and college counseling. Meanwhile, 65% engaged their members in healing and well-being activities to cope with

significant stresses connected to challenges related to poverty, their own or their family members' precarious legal status, and risks associated with political organizing in a conservative context. Such activities generally included healing circles, mindfulness exercises, and individual and group check-ins that allowed members to process their emotions. These groups involved their members in campaigns focused on issues like education, health, immigration, and/or municipal investments in young people.

In addition to issue-focused campaigns, 65% of youth organizing groups (13 out of 20) led voter outreach campaigns, and another 20% (4) created opportunities for their young members to support other groups' voter outreach efforts (see Figure 1). To varying degrees, members received training on how to register voters, canvass door-to-door, conduct rigorous phone-banking, promote voting through social media, and communicate with voters via text. Part of the training included educational workshops that linked non-partisan social issues and the voting process.

Most groups maintained ties to allied organizations, creating valuable networking and training opportunities; 17 out of the 20 were part of either statewide or regional organizing networks. These connections enabled youth to participate in regional and statewide conferences, enhancing their leadership development. For instance, the 2018 Central Valley Participatory Action Research Project collaborated with local groups to host seven youth conferences featuring workshops on ethnic studies, health and well-being, voter education, and other topics (Terriquez et al., 2019). Held across the region, these gatherings brought together UC Santa Cruz and UC Merced research team members, organizing group members, and other youth.

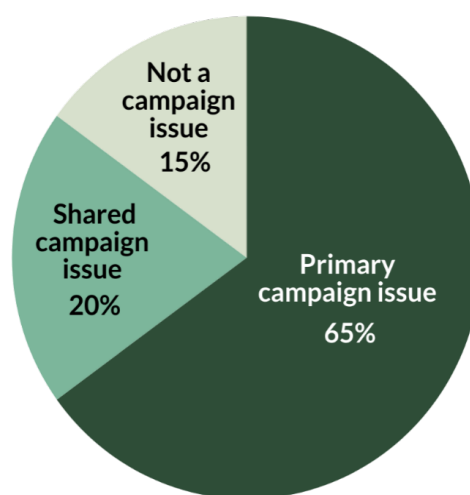


Figure 1. Non-Partisan Voter Outreach Campaigns
California Central Valley Youth Organizing Groups
Source: FCYO Field Scan Survey, 2019 (N=20)

Ethnic Studies Programming

Almost all youth organizing groups in the Central Valley offer their members some degree of exposure to ethnic studies curricula. As shown in Figure 2, 65% of these groups hosted ethnic studies workshops regularly (meaning one or more times a month), while 30% did so less frequently. Only one group did not report incorporating ethnic studies into its programming. As gleaned from participant observations, this programming was presented by youth organizers, experienced peer-leaders, and/or adult community leaders using interactive popular education techniques.

Youth organizing groups typically offered workshops that introduced members to the local histories of well-represented ethnic/racial groups in their memberships; workshops also imparted information about how these groups have resisted oppression. In addition, most groups explicitly

discussed how non-white and other historically marginalized groups have disproportionately experienced injustices addressed through local campaigns (e.g., educational inequalities, environmental injustice, poor access to health care, criminalization). Regional or statewide youth organizing conferences reinforced or further elaborated on the interactive ethnic studies curricula members accessed through their groups. Whether held within their organizations or at larger convenings, these workshops provided participants with the analytical tools to interrogate power relations that have long-defined racial inequalities in the Central Valley.

Youth Perspectives

Filling Knowledge Gaps, Inspiring Pride, and Broadening Awareness

In interviews, youth organizing group members spoke in varying degrees of detail about the ethnic studies material they encountered through their youth organizing group. However, no matter how intensive the programming, it was clear that these curricula filled (sometimes significant) gaps in youth knowledge. For example, Laura, who had attended public high schools in Fresno, and was the daughter of Mexican immigrants, shared how her youth organizing group, Fresno Barrios Unidos, provided her with essential information about her own ethnic background. When asked about the most important thing she learned, Laura responded:

[R]ealizing colonization [in Mexico] did happen. Our traditions are a result of the mixture of Spanish and Indigenous teachings to produce what is now known as a Mexican tradition. I think that was the biggest thing—and also realizing that Spanish isn't the native tongue of my people. It is obviously something that we had to learn and start utilizing after [the] Spanish invasion.

Laura's quote is striking in that it suggests that schools might not be introducing foundational knowledge about Mexico and the roots of Mexican American identity to their student populations. Parents, possibly with limited education themselves, might also be unable to pass on such information, leaving youth organizing groups to fill important knowledge gaps.

Whether or not the history of Mexican-origin residents is explicitly taught in schools, it is impossible to ignore the presence of Mexican culture in the region, given the population's large size. But this does not hold true for other, smaller ethnic groups in the Central Valley like Lao refugees of Hmong descent. On a number of occasions, Hmong youth expressed frustration that people assumed they were Chinese or part of another Asian group and that schools offered no curricular acknowledgement of their refugee and ethnic backgrounds. Moreover, Hmong refugee parents or grandparents tend to be reticent about discussing their migration experiences due to the severe trauma they endured, as recounting memories of war, loss, and hardship can be deeply

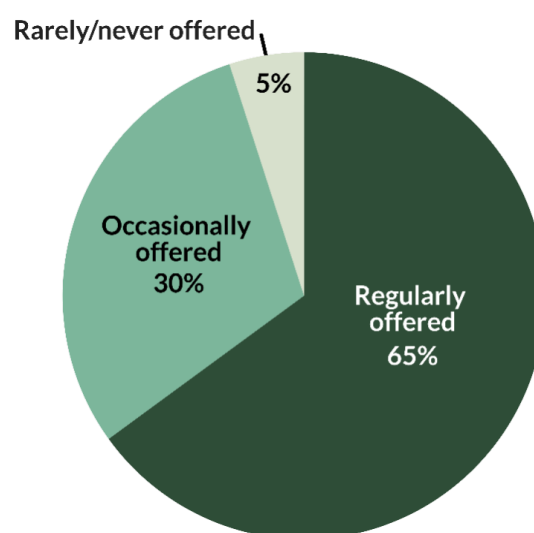


Figure 2. Frequency of Ethnic Studies Programming
California Central Valley Youth Organizing

painful and difficult (Kelly, 1986). To counteract this lack of information, youth organizing groups with Hmong members celebrated their cultural background and educated them on the “Secret War” covertly carried out by U.S. forces in Laos that resulted in families fleeing to the United States. For example, 14-year-old Eve shared how group activities transformed her sense of ethnic identity: “Before I joined, I just really hated being Hmong because it wasn’t cool.” But after learning how her family members had survived war, fled Laos, and rebuilt their community in the Central Valley, Eve became eager to learn more and took the initiative to educate her peers about Hmong history and culture. “How we came here as Hmong Americans isn’t well known. I really just want my history known here,” Eve explained. Her majority-Latinx youth organizing group offered her the platform to do so.

For many youth, learning about their ethnic/racial group through their youth organizing group enabled them to develop a sense of pride in their ethnic/racial identity. Carmen, a 19-year-old Mexican American who attended a majority-white high school, explained that before joining ACT for Women and Girls in Visalia, she “was always really shy about my culture. I wanted to fit in. But ... coming to ACT, I started learning more and seeing that there are so many beautiful things about my culture.”

Moreover, this ethnic studies curricula focused on civic action, with many youth organizing groups highlighting how marginalized groups have effected social change. This aspect of the programming showed young members how others before them worked to make a difference in their communities. Elizabeth, a 16-year-old Mexican American from Bakersfield, said that she used to think that “Latinos weren’t really involved in social or political issues.” However, through her youth organizing group, Laura learned about Latinx leaders past and present and “how hard they work to help everyone out.” Her exposure to this history of activism shifted her perceptions of her own community and its civic commitment. Meanwhile, Sade, a young African American woman from Fresno, appreciated that her group devoted time to the African American experience, discussing “what they’re still experiencing, what they’ve accomplished, what they’ve brought to the table, what they’ve made possible for society and the nation.” Sade was especially proud to learn that some of the legal rights people of color now enjoy came from “what African Americans did in the past.”

Thanks to ethnic studies curricula, youth members gained an understanding of not only the local histories and political struggles of their own ethnic/racial groups but also those of other groups. For example, Adolfo, a young Mexican American man, was moved by a presentation on the history of Filipino labor exploitation in Stockton and the community’s subsequent organizing efforts. “It is crazy to think that people who lived not too far away from here went through all these things,” he said, adding that it was “mind-blowing” he had never heard about this history until then. For Adolfo, the workshop “showed me that despite Stockton once being an oppressive place for the Filipino community, its individuals aren’t tied down by what happened in the past.” In another example, a Mexican American youth voiced his appreciation for a workshop on Salvadoran and Punjabi migration entitled “Not all Brown People are Mexican,” noting that it was “eye-opening” to learn about the migration histories of these groups into the Central Valley. While ethnic studies lessons can often be limited to occasional workshops, they nonetheless make a lasting impression on participants and lay the groundwork for multiracial solidarity.

Motivating Solidarity

Ethnic studies curricula set the stage for members of youth organizing groups to work on voter education and other grassroots campaigns across ethnic and racial lines. As members became better versed in the histories of struggles of their own ethnic or racial groups, they also learned to sympathize with other groups. Workshops and activities counteracted negative stereotypes and encouraged dialogue around shared issues and struggles.

In this way, ethnic studies deepened young people's understanding of the deep roots of the contemporary challenges facing various ethnic groups. Darryl, a member of Youth Leadership Institute in Merced, clearly articulated the important parallels between the colonial history of his own Filipino community and that of his Latino peers: "I learned that Spain colonized most of Mexico and Latin America, and they also colonized the Philippines for a long time. We have a shared heritage—obviously very different—but we were under these colonizers for such a long time." This knowledge that Spain had imposed its culture, religion, language, and worldviews on its Filipino and Latin American subjects as it dispossessed them of their land and exploited their labor convinced Darryl that these groups must work together: "The issues and the pain and the trauma that happened then still reverberate now. We need to be able to come together. These are problems that we still need to fix."

Ethnic studies curricula also exposed youth to the interconnected systems of oppression affecting multiple racial and ethnic groups. For example, Kathy, a youth of Mexican descent, said that before joining her group, she focused more on immigration and LGBT rights "because I had a lot of close friends that were LGBT and my family is undocumented." She added, "Police brutality was not something that really concerned me. But now I see how so many families are affected by it, and how it impacts so many people of color." As a member of the Dolores Huerta Foundation's youth program, which allied itself with the Black Lives Matter movement, she noted that her organization "makes you open your eyes and notice things." Meanwhile, Eve, introduced earlier, began noticing connections between her own Hmong parents' experiences and those of migrants from other countries, fostering a newfound sense of empathy. "Before I joined 99Rootz, I was honestly perfectly fine with ICE [Immigration and Customs Enforcement]," she admitted, until the youth organization helped her understand the disparate impacts of immigration policies. Consequently, Eve joined her Latino peers in the group to support immigrant rights causes such as the extension of DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), which was threatened during the first Trump administration.

Ethnic studies curricula can thus encourage solidarity across ethnic groups. Derrick, a member of Hmong Innovating Politics, was profoundly influenced by the ethnic studies curriculum co-developed with partner organizations CAIR (Counsel on American-Islamic Relations) and the Jakara Movement, whose membership is mostly Punjabi. Though this programming, he developed an understanding of and commitment to aiding his Muslim and Punjabi peers. "I'll be comfortable if these communities ... need our help. I'm not just supporting our own Hmong community, but also other communities." Carlos, a Mexican American from Merced, echoed this sentiment: "Just because we're Latinx, [it] doesn't mean we only stand up for ourselves." Tracing his commitment to working in multiracial coalitions to his Fresno County-based youth organizing group, Carlos said that he "learned that every group of people have gone through their sets of trials" and faced discriminatory laws that curtailed their employment opportunities and freedom. Consequently,

Carlos believed that it was important to help youth from diverse racial groups to have their voices heard.

Interviews and field notes gathered during the summer and fall of 2018 evidence this commitment to multiracial solidarity. We observed Latinx, Filipinx, Hmong, Punjabi, Black, and white youth collaboratively register, canvass, and phone-bank young voters in low-income, predominantly non-white communities. Their energy and excitement were palpable, and their commitment was captured by Eugene from Merced:

I think it's really important for Latinx and Hmong folks and other groups to work together, because here in the Central Valley, our struggles are tied. We're organizing because many of our elders, even many of our friends, our peers, are not showing up. And honestly, our people devote so much time and energy in working to survive, so they really are not able to show up and speak up for what they want all the time. And so to bring change, we need to educate each other, educate our white peers, and we have to register voters and mobilize our community because we know damn well that no one else is going to do it but us.

The collaborative efforts of Eugene and many youth like him paid off. Youth-led efforts increased 2018 young voter turnout in the region, according to experimental research published elsewhere (Terriquez et al., 2020). In the years since, youth organizing groups have continued to refine their curricula and build on this successful mobilization of young voters.

Loud for Tomorrow's Ethnic Studies and Voter Education Curriculum

Loud For Tomorrow (LOUD) offers one concrete example of how youth organizing groups have incorporated ethnic studies into broader programming that prepares high-school-aged and young adult members to lead disciplined voter education and other policy change campaigns. Based in Delano—the historic epicenter of Filipino and Mexican-led farmworker organizing and the birthplace of the United Farm Workers—the group adapts its curriculum to members' interests and current political debates. Founded by UC Santa Cruz students Jose Orellana (second author) and Rosanai Paniagua following the 2018 Central Valley Freedom Summer, LOUD typically comprises over 50 core leaders and a base of over 1,100 students from Delano and neighboring low-income farmworker communities in Kern and Tulare Counties.



Jose Orellana and Rosanai Paniagua founded Loud for Tomorrow in Delano in 2018. Photo credit: Loud for Tomorrow

From the outset, LOUD's leaders rooted the organization's programming in ethnic studies. Members identified the need for a robust curriculum that would reflect the Central Valley's legacy of cross-racial solidarity and grassroots resistance, topics often absent in local school instruction.

To address this gap, LOUD began regularly hosting workshops that highlighted the local and global histories of Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, and queer communities. Centering the experiences of people of color, their current programming helps adolescent and other young members understand concepts such as U.S. imperialism, settler colonialism, environmental racism, the school-to-prison pipeline, gender, and sexuality. Moreover, the curriculum connects past movements to present conditions, reinforcing the notion that youth are not only impacted by injustice but are essential to devising and carrying out solutions. Their rich curriculum seeks to deepen members' understandings of their own ethnic/racial group while broadening knowledge of their peers' cultures and experiences.

LOUD links ethnic studies directly to nonpartisan voter engagement. Members learn about historic struggles to secure voting rights for women, people of color, youth, and non-English speakers, grounding civic participation in broader movements for justice. They explore how elections influence issues they care about, including education, health equity, LGBTQ+ rights, immigration, and environmental justice. They also receive training in canvassing, phone- and text- banking, social media outreach, and organizing voter registration drives at schools and community events.

Utilizing a range of interactive pedagogical approaches, LOUD infuses ethnic studies into year-round programming through training initiatives such as the three-week Liberation Academy and the six-month People Power Internship. Facilitators—staff, experienced youth leaders, alumni, adult allies, and community elders—use storytelling, art-making, theater, and peer dialogue as teaching tools. Sessions are healing-centered, often beginning with check-ins or creative prompts. For example, youth might study the labor activism of Larry Itliong and Dolores Huerta before discussing the labor conditions endured by their own family members, or learn about redlining in Delano before photographing and analyzing local neighborhood land use. While the curriculum highlights Chicano and Filipinx histories, reflecting members' demographics, the multilingual “From Roots to Resistance” series also explores Black, Salvadoran, Hmong, Punjabi, and Indigenous Oaxacan experiences.

LOUD continuously adapts its content to contemporary debates. In early 2025, as Trump began second presidential term, it began emphasizing the links among racial justice, immigrant rights, and voting rights. To help members develop a sense of agency amid the powerlessness they felt under the federal government's authoritarian direction, workshops highlighted the importance of participation in congressional, state, and local elections as one key strategy to protect the well-being of immigrants and other people of color. On the whole, LOUD applies an ethnic studies approach that centers communities of color and rural residents, framing voter education as nonviolent resistance against white supremacy and systemic injustice.

Promoting an Active and Informed Electorate

Prior research suggests that ethnic studies can inspire political action, particularly social movement activism and protest (Bañales & Lee-Oliver, 2019; Cabrera et al., 2013; Flores, 2001). The empirical findings presented in this article suggest that ethnic studies can bolster voter education and mobilization efforts. We contend that exposure to ethnic studies can deepen young people's understanding of racial dynamics, foster solidarity, and anchor voter education campaigns in a commitment to addressing racial and other injustices. In contrast to mainstream political messaging—often ahistorical and soundbite-driven—ethnic studies-related programming can

enhance critical thinking and encourage students to consider the broader stakes of government elections.

Educators and practitioners can learn from Loud for Tomorrow and similar youth organizing groups. By developing curricular content that centers communities of color, they can help students understand past and present struggles for voting rights while preparing them to analyze how contemporary election debates impact racial justice. By implementing interactive and regularly updated ethnic studies programming, educators can equip young people to promote elections as one means of safeguarding their communities and asserting their self-determination. Ultimately, ethnic studies can be leveraged both in and out of schools to promote an active electorate and strengthen collective resistance to white supremacy and right-wing authoritarianism.



Pedro Torres and Alisha Ramos, young leaders from Loud for Tomorrow.
Photo credit: Loud for Tomorrow

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cristobal colón (cristoforo colombo) aka christopher columbus

R. Joseph Rodríguez

drowns by the pier
after being toppled
from his pedestal
where he stood
with a swollen foot
like an oedipus
down down he went
by organized groups

cc knew early on
he had it coming
oh he had it coming
he read the news
that warned him
of his removal

¡ten piedad!
¡ten piedad!
the elders cry

he's gotta go!
he's gotta go!
the young cry
who read
and speak
so deeply
and know
and know

once cc ruled
sailed and faced
mutiny favored
gold and greed
after that
reconquista

somebody saw cc
coming in waves
a tidal surge of them
coming to shore

not for taking
not for empire
not for flags
rejoice rejoice

the people rose
the people rise
rise like the tide
the tide is here

About the Authors

Edmundo M. Aguilar, an assistant teaching professor at the University of Washington Seattle, is a dedicated educator and scholar whose work embodies a commitment to social justice, equity, and transformative education. Professor Aguilar's approach is deeply community-oriented, emphasizing the importance of grassroots collaboration and the power of storytelling through digital media, including documentary filmmaking.

Tianna Mae G. Andresen (she/they) is a queer Filipinx American liberatory educator, documentarian, fashion designer, and lifelong student. Originally from Duwamish land (Central District Seattle), Tianna is a current graduate student at San Francisco State University working on their Masters in Ethnic Studies thesis documentary on multigenerational movement building in Seattle's Filipinx American activist and community organizer families.

Charles E. Becknell, Jr. is an assistant professor of Africana Studies at New Mexico State University whose work integrates Africana thought, Black theology, and critical pedagogy to examine liberation and educational transformation in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. As a scholar-pastor, he draws on community-rooted research and contemplative practice to illuminate Black life and advance justice-centered approaches to learning and social change.

Charlia Boyer, Ph.D., is a graduate of National University's Sanford College of Education whose work centers on culturally responsive teaching and learning in elementary schools. She applies this work by blending her performing arts background and the experiences of Black womanhood into storytelling-based pedagogy that empowers young learners and advances culturally sustaining justice.

Dr. Luis-Genaro Garcia is an artist, associate professor of art education, and former LAUSD high school art-educator guided by Critical Education methodologies. His critical art-based practices on Creative Resistance have been presented as professional development for k-16 educators at the local, state, and national institutions as collaborative community-engaged practices that welcome the home-based and communal knowledge of communities.

Timothy Green, IV is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Studies at the University of New Mexico whose work focuses on decolonial approaches to teaching and learning. He examines how critical, community-rooted practices can reshape schooling, affirm marginalized identities, and advance more just educational futures.

Maria Gutierrez de Jesus earned her Ph.D. in Native American Studies from UC Davis. She is an assistant professor of Ethnic Studies in the concentration of Native American and Indigenous Studies at California State University, Bakersfield and a community broadcaster at Radio Uekorheni in Michoacán, Mexico.

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Andrea N. Juárez Mendoza is a doctoral candidate in Urban Education at CUNY whose scholarship investigates radical accompaniment as a method of relational praxis in immigrant worldmaking ecosystems. Grounded in decolonial, feminist, and participatory research traditions, her work analyzes how migrating people, youth communities, and movement actors enact collective care, counter-carceral strategies, and knowledge production across legal, mutual aid, and organizing spaces. Her scholarship traces the subtle architectures of worldmaking and radical accompaniment that unfold within immigrant communities as they navigate displacement, enclosure, and the pursuit of collective freedom.

Mika Kennedy is an assistant professor of Asian American Studies at the Center for the Study of Culture, Race, and Ethnicity at Ithaca College, where she teaches courses that focus on Asian American and Pacific Islander histories, activisms, and cultural productions. Her current book project examines narratives of Japanese American incarceration, and the ways these narratives are in conversation with questions about the environment, the seductions of the “frontier,” and Indigenous sovereignty. She and collaborator Pamela K. Sertzen currently co-coordinate the Native American & Indigenous Studies Minor together.

The Localized History Project@AAARI-CUNY is a Youth Driven Participatory History Collective based in New York City, made up of Asian American youth ages 16 to 22. Our collective is committed to the uplifting of working class, solidarity-oriented, and movements histories of the Asian American community, and to classrooms that are youth driven and community led. You can follow our work at www.localizedhistoryproject.org.

Marlene Mercado is an assistant professor at California State University, San Marcos where she teaches in the Sociology, Criminology & Justice Studies Department. She is originally from the El Paso, Texas // Ciudad Juárez borderlands and this has informed her collaborative approach in working with formerly incarcerated and systems impacted Xicanas/Chicanas from the Southwest carceral borderlands.

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COVER IMAGE by Enrique C. Ochoa

Firmly rooted on the land of the Tongva-Gabrielino people, this tree stands in the courtyard of Martin Luther King Hall at California State University, Los Angeles. Enrique took this photo during an April 2025 Building Bridges, Not Walls encuentro we helped organize with community members, faculty, and students from Juntos Podemos/Together We Can, the Claremont Colleges, Cal State Fullerton, Cal State Los Angeles, and Nikkei Progressives. The gathering focused on building community, sharing knowledge, and imagining other possibilities across-generations, campuses, and communities



ABOUT THE JOURNAL

Ethnic Studies Pedagogies is an open access online journal committed to critical race, decolonial, and ethnic studies movements, bridging public pedagogies with PK-12 contexts. We invite submissions using critical frameworks and methodologies that theorize, investigate, and reflect upon the ecologies of power and resistance both inside and outside the PK-12 classroom.

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