

Class Notes - November 14

Small Discussion Groups

- [Luper, C. \(1979\). Behold the Walls. Jim Wire. \(Reprinted in *An Oklahoma I had never seen before*, 1994, pp 229-242, first 2 chapters\).](#)
 - NAACP Youth Council in Oklahoma, assisted by a teacher. 18-month curriculum on activism, non-violent protest
 - Protesting to integrate public spaces in 1958 in Oklahoma City
 - Had been seen as a fringe group within NAACP, but preceded other efforts to desegregate public spaces
- [Brodkin, K. \(2001\). "Introduction." *Power Politics: Environmental Activism in South Los Angeles*. Rutgers University Press.](#)
 - 2001 in South Gate, CA - predom latinx and working class, site of environmental racism
 - Community protested a power plant being built. Youth mobilized to protest.
 - Potentially conflicting interests, community found common ground
 - Not much of a legacy that we could find
- What is the lasting impact of these movements? How has each movement been remembered?
 - Legacy and history of student activism seems to be less visible. Why has student activism been de-legitimized? Age and not being taken as seriously? Do we not learn about student activism because schools don't want us to participate in student activism?
 - Media representations of student activism.
 - Seem to not take seriously student activism
 - Tends not to focus on the substance of activism
 - Tends not to represent students as political thinkers, imagining/enacting a different future
 - Intersections with assumptions about "deserving-ness"

Panel:

Ishmael Jiminez, Teacher, Facilitator for Youths United for Change, & involving students in ITAGS
Chris Rogers, Board Member of Philadelphia Student Union, Curriculum Chair for BLM Week of Action, & Cultural Organizer

VanJessica Gladney, Co-Founder of Penn Slavery Project

- Why did you get involved in student activism?
 - Chris: Started as a student, realizing things didn't have to be this way. Now interested in supporting institutions and organizations.
 - VanJessica: In 2006 and 2016, Penn said they had nothing to do with the institution of slavery. Totally untrue. As an undergraduate student, worked with professor of history and uncovered Penn's connections to slavery. Evolution from an academic project into something bigger. We have a responsibility to transform this institution.
 - Ishmael: Started getting involved at Temple as an undergrad, in protests against the Iraq War. As an education major, felt a responsibility to speak truth to power. As a teacher, trying to involve students in larger conversation.
- What movements have you been involved in and what has the impact in?
 - VanJessica:

- Penn and Slavery started small - 5 undergraduates. Wrote an article with 34th Street. Met with the Provost. Now it's a funded project.
- Became public historian, presenting the project around the city. Has had to have conversations with Philadelphia community about how to present this project.
- Sharing with students ways of doing research, finding information in the archives
- Chris
 - ICA, *Coloured People Time*, *Black Spatial Relics* - Penn's complicity in experimenting on black people in prisons in the 1960's, Penn's complicity in the afterlife of slavery
 - Caucus of Working Educators - 69% of Philadelphia public school teachers are white women. How can Philadelphia educators earn the trust of black communities?
 - BLM in Schools - Day of Action in Seattle with 5,000 educators. Rally addressing white supremacist trolling of black students. Curating resources.
 - Taking work nationally - working with teacher unions and organizations, Free Minds, Free Peoples (educational justice conference)
 - Ethnic studies and Black history as graduation requirement
 - Ending zero tolerance policies, establishing restorative justice
 - Recruiting and retaining Black educators
 - Counselors, not cops
 - Related Report: "We came to learn" on removing police from schools.
 - Ohio: Dignity in Schools movement. Looking toward public health interventions, rather than punitive/law enforcement
 - Teacher unions taking up the mantle of racial justice, taking up the mantle of bargaining for the public good. Teaching conditions are learning conditions. Arguing on behalf of black families and black communities.
- Ishmael
 - Work isn't confined to one organization. Work connects to multiple areas - BLM at School, Paul Roberson House, book clubs, dialogue
 - Must speak to the conditions people exist in.
 - Wants to equip students with critical thinking skills. Activism needs to engage deeper than commodification of protest/activism (shallow mobilizing, nonprofit industrial complex). What are the underlying structures? Trying to get HS students to have the a-ha moment understanding the underlying structures - an understanding many get in college, when many PSD students don't attend college.
 - James Cohen, "It's not difficult for the oppressed to understand the nature of freedom..."
- Larger legacies : What does it mean for institutions and for members of those communities?
 - Politics around Penn Slavery Project
 - Symposium on the project last year
 - Abul-Aliy Mohammed asked about contemporary ramifications of Penn's participation in slavery

- Augmented reality app - way to remember legacies, honor painful history, potential for reparative justice
- VanJessica:
 - Not from Philadelphia, learning about the relationship between Penn and Philadelphia as a Penn student
 - Grappling with institutional privilege - frustrating that not all recognize the responsibility to grapple with privilege
 - Located in a middle ground - what action can we take institutionally? Neither education nor activism are being done right, and feeling like have to choose one to participate in and becoming part of the machine.
 - Hopes that the augmented reality app activates somebody!
- Chris
 - Mari Matsuda, “Webs of Causation” - Questioning the way that laws make someone seem guilty of a crime. In the case of Penn, built on indigenous land theft and profits of slavery, when does the money become clean?
 - Penn got a lot of government money for urban renewal (=black removal).
 - Ruth Wilson Gilmore - trying to solve the crisis of legitimacy, using corporate social responsibility to acknowledge historical injustice, but stops short of redistributive justice and reparations or attaches conditions of deserving-ness
 - How do we locate ourselves in the complicity and in relation to these crimes?
- VanJessica
 - One path of reparative justice that universities have taken is creating scholarships to the school. But why not ask communities what universities can really do?
- Ishmael
 - Sanitization of activism, e.g. history of MLK trimmed to fit into particular mythology. Mythology becomes guiding lens for how people understand the world around them. Removes the underlying structure undergirding “historical” injustice. Risk of Penn Slavery Project following that path.
 - Are we trying to reconcile something that our society isn’t fully willing to reconcile?
 - James Baldwin - we live in a fantasy world. (Here, it’s the Penn Bubble)
- Chris
 - The academy loves critique.
 - How do you tie these critiques to on-the-ground organizing and building out alternatives, institutions, and platforms that continue this work and don’t rely on the master’s tools?
- Ishmael
 - We struggle too with being elevated, sometimes by problematic people and funding sources. How do we stay close to the ground and authentic and pay the bills?
- VanJessica
 - How do I get the resources to do what I’m doing? The thing I’m doing gets compromised by the people giving me the resources paying for me to do it (i.e. Penn). But what can I do?!
- Ishmael

- Activism can have real-life, material consequences on your personal/professional life.
 - Need to recognize the spaces you're in and your friends/allies in those spaces
 - Transferral between intellectualization into lived reality - It gets lost, and there's a class dynamic to that.
 - VanJessica
 - People ask us to make our work more public-facing, but sometimes people need to recalibrate their "woke rubric"
 - Chris
 - Paul Roberson House museum - remembering communities building anti-imperial, anti-racism approaches
 - West Philadelphia Cultural Alliance - base is mostly black women elders. Creating spaces for communal joy and creativity and deepening political engagement.
 - Activism can bring pain. What does it mean to open up that pain?
 - How do we create entry points for activism? How do we work in with activism and organizing that is already happening?
- How do we remember student activism? (Romanticization/Sanitized vs. Erased)
 - Ishmael
 - Currently, we can control the narrative more around our social movements.
 - Will later historians look at Twitter?
 - There is always a push to control narratives and fit them into the mythology.
 - We need to get away from these narratives of perfect men and perfect nations.
 - Chris
 - Archiving is important
 - We must recover the stories of those who were erased or excluded
 - Make connections back to the everydayness. Movements have been based on the everyday commitment of people. Led to transformative outcomes.
 - VanJessica
 - I want the Penn Slavery Project to be archived and communicated as an act of resistance, because Penn lied about being involved in slavery.
 - It's not just about Penn. It's about the famous white men who started Penn. Ben Franklin owned slaves.