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UCSD Art Collective:  
Articulating Identity Through Art and Activism

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements  
for the degree Master of Arts

in

Master of Arts in Music

by

Justin Zullo

Committee in charge:

Professor Nancy Guy, Chair  
Professor Anthony Burr  
Professor Anthony Davis

2011



The Thesis of Justin Zullo is approved and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2011

## DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my grandfather, Jerry Zullo Senior.

Pa, I promise to carry your memory and struggle with me forever through my work. Rest in Peace, I love you.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Signature Page.....	iii
Dedication.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
List of Figures.....	vi
Acknowledgements.....	vii
Abstract of the Thesis.....	viii
Introduction.....	1
Part I: The Movement and Art Collective's Praxis.....	18
Part II: Space, Place and Appropriation.....	40
Closing Thoughts.....	73
Appendix A: Timeline of the Movement.....	79
Appendix B: Do UC Us Report.....	82
Appendix C: BSU Updated Demands.....	97
References.....	103

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1: Noose hanging from a bookshelf..... 21

Figure 1.2: Students inside the chancellor's office chant..... 23

Figure 1.3: Art Collective member, Jennifer Maldonado..... 23

Figure 1.4: March 4<sup>th</sup> stage plot..... 34

Figure 1.5: Stage view of Art Collective..... 34

Figure 2.1: Chevy dancing at a jam session..... 54

Figure 2.2: Triton Steps open jam session..... 54

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

UCSD Art Collective:  
Articulating Identity Through Art and Activism

by

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Master of Arts in Music

University of California, San Diego, 2011

Professor Nancy Guy, Chair

In this thesis I examine the multiplex correlations between art, activism, and identity using data collected from my Participatory Action Research in Art Collective, a group of socially conscious UCSD student-artists. I draw from my experiences dating from January of 2010 to the present. I begin by mapping out the student mobilizations that occurred between February 15<sup>th</sup> and March 4<sup>th</sup> of 2010 at UCSD in response to the UC budget crisis and the underrepresentation and under-servicing of black students on campus. This context provides a deeper understanding of the conflicts that Art Collective grappled with in our

performances and activism. Next, I uncover some of the historical issues of racial and economic elitism that underscore UCSD's history and how this context informs the current power dynamics in the university's spaces. Using spatial and postcolonial theory, in addition to my personal reflections as a member of Art Collective, I assert that our public music making is a means through which we bodily reclaim institutional space and rearticulate our voices and identities on our own terms. Finally, after outlining some of our key performances, I situate Art Collective within a realm of processes: reflection, coalition building, and sharing subjectivities and experiences. These processes make the collective's performance style distinct, as it cultivates common bonds that strengthen community and foster personal growth. In essence, this thesis is a representation and an extension of my praxis as an artist-activist engaging in reflexive community work.

## INTRODUCTION

This thesis focuses on a community-based project that I was privileged to partake of and help develop since the fall of 2009. Through this thesis, I am able to critically reflect on my experiences, order my thoughts, and grapple with theory. In doing so, I hope to illuminate the potential of this type of project to contribute to art-based social justice initiatives. While contributing to bodies of literature and extending theories are an aim of my research, my hands-on community work and engagement with reflexive ethnography is of equal or greater significance. Throughout the last two years, I have had the pleasure of creating and imagining with a group of talented, impassioned UCSD student-activist-artists. Our bonds have strengthened through making music, performing, learning, protesting, laughing, and crying together. I feel a deep connection to not just the group's purpose—a revolutionary creativity-based praxis—but also to the members with whom I've built fruitful, personal relationships.

Throughout this thesis I switch between the first person descriptors of "us" and "we" when talking about myself within the movement and as a member of Art Collective. However, when I write about issues surrounding "students of color," I switch to the third person. I use this system of reference because, while I identify as a strong ally to students of color and am in solidarity with their collective struggle, I am read as a white, hetero-normative male in certain spaces and feel the need to acknowledge the privileges that I am afforded by those identifiers. However, through this project I engage this privilege in order to dismantle the power structures that are buttressed by racial categories.

In the fall of 2009, I was introduced to three undergraduate students, Diana Cervera, Leslie Quintanilla and Bryant Pena, at UCSD's Cross Cultural Center (CCC). I had been going to the CCC fairly consistently after meeting various staff and community members at a few open houses and student mixers. Upon our meeting we began to share our common interests and fervor for music and social justice—topics that have, since, sparked long lasting bonds. A few weeks earlier, Diana and Bryant had begun to coordinate meetings, in which they invited artists of all varieties, from spoken word to visual art. This weekly meeting was initially envisioned as a way to cultivate a community space centered on art and activism. Soon after hearing about the group, I started to attend weekly. Mainly I played percussion, beatboxed, rapped, and produced hip hop beats. As time progressed, I began to work closely with the creators of the collective to help develop, expand and organize it. This small collective of artists marked the beginning of the development of the UCSD Art Collective, the focus of this thesis.

The story of this collective is complex and has a range of social implications and political dimensions. It is a story that I feel is void of any conclusions because the power of this project lies in the ongoing process to cultivate community, more so than in an artistic product. Much of my analysis grows out of dialogues that have taken place amongst Art Collective members. I theorize through our processes of articulating ourselves through music and activism as opposed to synthesizing quantitative “findings” to draw conclusions. My “data,” if one can call it that, comes from our collective experiences of

creativity and oppression and my reflections and introspective processing of these experiences.

In order to understand Art Collective's purpose and significance more comprehensively, it is necessary to map out some of the contextual elements that underlie it. A good place to begin is with the CCC. The CCC has been integral to my research, but also to my personal development and transition process into a new environment and challenging graduate program. As I will describe in more detail later, the CCC served as a headquarters for student activist movements and musical and communal activities. Upon walking into the CCC, you may hear the sound of friends chatting in the lounge area and student-interns playing music off the front desk computer. In the library you may hear various weekly a dialogue series, student-led coalitions organizing, or the silence of Muslim students praying. The Art Gallery may be filled with people eating lunch and laughing or student organizations meeting and coalition building. In the Comunidad Room, you may hear passionate debates about the UC budget crisis or the dense strumming of the *jarana* and syncopated foot stomping of a son jarocho performance troupe. The CCC is a space with multiple layers of purpose that operate under the umbrella of communal learning and development.

During the early 1970s the creation of multicultural centers began to popularize within the UC system. Due to the underdevelopment of relationships with surrounding communities (especially African American and Chicano/Latino), UCSD did not recognize the importance of such a center's

retention and community-cohesion functions (CCC Website). In the mid-1990s, in light of increasing racial tensions and incidents on and off campus,<sup>1</sup> a coalition of UCSD students of color and other concerned students, staff, and faculty engaged in demonstrations and town meeting discussions to stress the need for a cross-cultural center (Interview with Edwina Welsh, San Diego, CA, June 4, 2010). The process of initiating the creation of the CCC was a student-community movement rooted in passions for social justice. In 1995, the CCC was established at UCSD and has since worked towards its vision “to empower UCSD to recognize, challenge, and take proactive approaches to diversity for the campus and the San Diego community” (CCC Website). In addition to this function, its purpose is also to cultivate and support students’ activism, expressive art and creativity. Naturally, the CCC was the primary venue that housed Art Collective practices and meetings during the course of my research. It provided rooms for our weekly meetings and, sometimes, impromptu rehearsals and, given the rooms’ availability.

The CCC helped to facilitate the formation of Art Collective for a few reasons. One is that two of the main organizers and creators of the group, Diana and Leslie, were both CCC interns during the 2009-2010 academic year. These student-interns developed the inner workings of Art Collective’s objective and premise alongside the CCC staff and insider community. Another reason is that Art Collective’s work was often incepted in tandem with student-facilitated

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<sup>1</sup> During the 1990s, national and local incidents such as the Rodney King beating, the UCLA hunger strikes to develop their Chicano program into a funded department, and a swastika painted on UCSD’s Ché Café, became a momentous forces behind the mobilizations to construct a Cross Cultural Center (see also Mariscal, 2005, 245-246).

social justice movements and protests, which is often organized and prepared for at the CCC and supported by its staff members. For instance, on September 24, 2009, the first day the academic year, CCC staff and interns organized a campus wide walkout in response to budget cuts and tuition fee hikes. During the demonstration for this walkout on UCSD's library walk, one of my collaborators, Grant, performed a spoken word piece. After his performance, Diana immediately approached him and invited him to participate in Art Collective. This example calls to attention the ways in which the CCC community, arts and activism are interconnected at UCSD, and often aid in the recruitment of Art Collective members. Finally, the CCC often provides us with a space to store our percussion instruments and meeting supplies, which were crucial to our music production and the student movements that occurred during the course of my research.

Also essential to Art Collective's development and purpose is the presence of the Ethnic Studies Department on campus. Ethnic Studies faculty provides many Art Collective members with tools for intellectual growth, as well as resources for mentorship and personal guidance. Many of their faculty's' pedagogical repertoire and approach have been incorporated into Art Collective's structure. We have often explored the multiplicity of theories presented in the department's courses through art. A premise of Ethnic Studies is to theorize through reflection and action, a concept I will later delve into much deeper during my discussion of praxis in Part I. It encourages students to grapple with issues of social inequality introspectively and creatively, illuminating

realizations about personal identity. Ethnic Studies is essential to our critical understandings of systems of domination and processes of grappling with how we are implicated by/within them. One specialized course offered by Professor Wayne K. Yang of the Ethnic Studies Department was catalytic to the formation of Art Collective. The two-quarter student led course, *Chicana Collectiva*, which explored Chicana identity through the study and creation of film, music, poetry and photography, seemed to set the stage for an on-campus art collective. Diana participated in this class during the winter and spring quarters of 2009, then carried some of the ideas and practices gained into her vision for Art Collective. The overlying theme in this class was the correlations between art, identity and activism—one that strongly informs Art Collective's mission statement. In essence, ethnic studies coursework and faculty fostered the exploration of our identities and have influenced our artistic processes and poetic content.

Finally, the student organizations, Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan (MEChA) and the Black Student Union (BSU) were important aspects of Art Collective's development. Many of my collaborators held membership in these organizations and Art Collective simultaneously, which allowed us to collaborate closely on student organization sponsored performance events, demonstrations and protests. The cohesion of the BSU, MEChA, and Art Collective expanded our goal of building community and activism, not to mention it increased the critical mass of bodies at our protests and performances.



All of these elements informed Art Collective's initiation and early development; however, our purpose did not remain static during the course of this project. As it progressed, my collaborators and I continuously grappled with the definition of the collective, its fluctuating purpose and function, and how it could be more effective as an organization. Some key performances, along with the various racial incidents that occurred during winter quarter of 2010, specifically the so-called "Compton Cookout"<sup>2</sup> and the student movements that followed it, impacted Art Collective's structure and organization.

Reflecting on how Art Collective has developed from an informal space to a campus organization, and the turning points and collective dialogues that informed this transformation, is crucial to understanding the group's purpose. During the fall quarter 2009, Bryant, Diana and I had been meeting regularly, outside of the general body meeting time, to discuss and reflect on the process of developing Art Collective, while simultaneously recruiting artists on campus to join. Initially, Art Collective meetings provided a communal space to learn about and critique one another's work through processes of "show and tell" and through member-facilitated poetry workshops. The project's main goal was to unite socially conscious artists on campus in an environment that would cultivate individuals' artistic crafts and create a space for dialogues about issues of social justice. In our early general body meetings, we struggled to find organic methods of facilitation without adopting a hierarchical paradigm. Some issues

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<sup>2</sup> The "Compton Cookout" was a "ghetto-themed" party thrown by a UCSD fraternity that mocked and degraded black culture during Black History Month. It portrayed black woman as obnoxious and ignorant, and black men as baggy-clothed thugs.

we encountered were centered on participants' level of commitment, punctuality and accountability. The goal was to maintain a space that was structured enough to maximize levels of productivity within our one-hour meeting, but at the same time, would be structured loosely enough to not stifle artistic creativity.

During the later portion of the winter quarter and beyond, our meeting time became dedicated primarily to rehearsing for upcoming performances. Typically, we would spend the first ten or fifteen minutes organizing artistic thoughts and ideas, introducing new performance opportunities, and reflecting on past performances. The rest of the time, we would split into groups; usually the split would be between visual artists and musicians and performing artists. This shift was initiated by our first formal performance at the Student of Color Conference (SOCC) in the fall of 2009, a show in which I was, sadly, unable to participate. SOCC was held as a means to unite students of color within the UC system to build solidarity across diverse lines including those of ethnicity, socioeconomic class, education, and country of origin (SOCC Website). The motivation for this conference was rooted in protest and social justice. Accordingly, Art Collective's piece was crafted in a way that critiqued diversity within the UC system, which set the standards of style, format, and content of preceding Art Collective performances.

At the conference, my collaborators delivered a performance entitled, *Just Trying to Live*, which combined elements of theatre, MCing (written and

improvisatory), spoken word poetry, improvisatory singing, and guitar playing. The performance critiqued UCSD's lack of diversity by juxtaposing statistics of campus racial demographics with excerpts from the university's welcome pamphlet, which seems to forge images of its diverse campus environment. What was especially salient about this performance was the segment, referred to as "oppression statements," in which the performers sequentially aligned at the edge of the stage and announced intimate aspect of their identity to the crowd. Grant reflected on his experience of sharing his oppression statement:

It was the first time I ever, in front of a crowd of people, admitted that I was queer... I came up and I was like 'I am a queer Black male.' And I've never done that before, I've never said it out loud on a stage in front of people... and that was groundbreaking for me, it was crazy, kind of like out-of-body experience. Like I can't believe I'm on the stage saying this, when a couple of years ago I told myself I was going to go to the grave with this secret. So that was the most significant time for me and it was a time of recognition.<sup>3</sup>

This experience challenged and empowered Grant and it also transcended the realm of staged performance. This aspect of the show was designed to reveal and extend aspects of my collaborators' identity and struggle to the audience. In effect, the crowd's support and encouragement attributed to Michael Ian's openness to sharing. Furthermore, the barrier was broken between audience and performer, opening up a space for the exchange of shared experiences of oppression. Diana described this connection, as more than just a performance. She reflected, "I feel like it wasn't a performance, it was more like a conversation we had. I feel like we were just articulating the feelings that were in the

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with Grant White, San Diego, CA, May 11, 2010.

audience” (Interview with Diana Cervera, San Diego, CA, May 10, 2010). Later, she continued to explain that many of the crowd members she met had the same struggles of being underrepresented on a university campus. Diana highlighted the means through which the performance was influenced by their connection to, not just people of color, but specifically *students* of color within a university setting. This connection was brokered through SOCC, which served as conduit for dialogue, politically charged performance and identity assertion. The event's premise informed the content of this performance and much of the subject matter of preceding performances. It also shaped Art Collective's organization and development, and solidified a cohesive membership of performers through the process of preparing and rehearsing *Just Trying To Live*. Many of the members had not performed onstage before, so this experience was one of personal growth and collaborative artistic development. Diana referred to it as the essential to the groups' status as a “*performance group*” (Interview with Diana Cervera, San Diego, CA, May 10, 2010). In essence, the Art Collective meeting space began to transform into a place for preparation and rehearsal, as opposed to a place to share, learn, and create art informally.

Following the performance at SOCC, we became more oriented towards organizing and structuring performance material. This shift in our meeting objective was shaped by the state of “racial emergency” on campus and our collaborations with the various student movements that were organized around these issues. Racial emergencies, or incidents of racism that gained campus-wide recognition, heightened the level to which Art Collective engaged with the

community through performance. It also, informed much of the content of our spoken word pieces. Examples of such racial incidents on campus are the Compton Cookout, the noose hung in Geisel Library, the faux-KKK hood placed atop the Dr. Seuss statue, and the vast number of minority staff workers being laid off. Given these types of incidents, UCSD became a site for “racial emergency” and a variety of responsive art. However, it is important to note that our performances cannot be reduced to merely “responsive,” as our vision to deconstruct systems of racism and other systemic forms of domination through art, coalition building, and dialogue, predates these incidents. Additionally, these racial incidents stem from a long history of race based exclusion throughout the UC system due to an inept administration that has failed to invest in diversification of student body and faculty and has consistently exploited public institution to benefit private capital (Alvarez et al., xi). In Part II, I delve deeper into the historical contexts that have shaped UCSD’s campus climate. Art Collective’s work, while it did not completely depend on racial emergency, was deeply influenced by the incidents and often was an essential component of protests and demonstrations. Many of my collaborators, as members of student organizations such as BSU and MEChA, spearheaded the student movements during these pivotal moments on campus. For instance, Diana, being a core member of BSU, helped organize many of the protests and participated in the negotiations with the chancellor’s administration in regards to the BSU demands to improve campus climate. Her experience of injustice on

campus and her activism became enmeshed with her artistic expression and identity. She remarks:

The artists that are in art collective were at every protest at 8am, you know we were crying together feeling that, like chanting that “real pain, real action” like screeching, like our throats hurting because we were screaming so loud and really feeling that pain. So it wasn't even really a response, you know, it was just like all that could come out at that time. It was like, ‘how can I do anything else?’ It was like my life. Our identity as an artist or a poet and then as a person of color... I don't know. I'll speak for myself. I think those identities kind of like fused into one; it was like feeling like ‘how do I let this out and let people hear me?’<sup>4</sup>

Her comment reveals, not only the interconnectivity her art and activism but also her process of internalization of her experience of inequality. As campus climate became more infected with racial tension, we were called upon more frequently to perform; therefore, our meeting time, and many hours outside of that time, were used to practice and structure our performances.

The movements and performances we participated in were crucial to the development of the group's structure, content and inner reflections and assertions of identity. These examples illustrate how Art Collective's performances are only a portion of our incorporation into the community. There is cohesion between our common interests and that of the community. Considering this, it becomes clear that, in certain ways, Art Collective gives voice to its community through music and performance. The space that Art Collective has become transcends its original purpose of communal music making. It has become a tool for student movements. Our music and art making, in itself (whether deemed political or not), is a form of activism, as opposed to a solely a

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with Diana Cervera, San Diego, CA, May 10, 2010.

compartment of a greater social movement. Theorizing through rhymes, drums beats, theatrics and spoken word, Art Collective demands for the restructuring of institutional systems within the university.

### **Praxis**

Paulo Freire, Brazilian educator and critical theorist, is credited for developing a form of pedagogy centered on critical thinking/reflection, dialogue and liberation (McLaren & Leonard 1993, 4). In his groundbreaking 1972 book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire outlines his pedagogical approach, which links personal liberation to the practice of reflection, action and theorization. These aspects culminate in what he defines as “praxis,” or “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (Freire, 51). He goes on to explain that, “[i]t is only when the oppressed find the oppressor out and become involved in the organized struggle for their liberation that they begin to believe in themselves. This discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include serious reflection: only then will it be a praxis” (Freire, 65).

Freire lists two stages of the pedagogy of the oppressed. First, he posits that the oppressed must “unveil the world of oppression” through engaging in praxis, which results in their critical consciousnesses (Freire, 54). This is a personal and reflexive process that is experienced solely by the oppressed, which results in the discovery of their immediate experiences of subjugation. Second, he suggests that this internal reflexive work develops into a “libertarian pedagogy,” which is circulated and recognized as the “pedagogy of all people,” (Freire, 54).

This, according to Freire, results in a transformation of societal power dynamics via educational paradigm shifts. These stages resonate with Art Collective's reflexive processes of liberation from the constraints of the university structure and the broader societal systems of social inequality. Through ethnic studies classes, community dialogues and self-reflection, we come to understand the oppressive nature of our histories and how the university reinscribes such systems of domination like imperialism and elitism. With our activism and music, we seek to contribute to the dismantling of these paradigms in order to rebuild a more equitable and inclusive university system. Moreover, Freire defines praxis as reflection that leads to communal dialogue and action. Suitably, Art Collective's creative processes and performances are the basis of our theorization, reflexivity, personal liberation, and activism.

Postcolonial and critical race literature informs Freire's discussion of "the oppressed" and "the oppressor." His work draws heavily from the work of Franz Fanon, the radical French philosopher and psychiatrist who fought in the liberation movement to free Algerians from French colonization in the 1950s (Fanon, 1961, xxii). In his book, *Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon calls for an end to colonialism and imperialism through radical, violent action—the very force that he argues defines colonization's oppressive nature (Fanon 1961, xxi). Like Fanon, Freire's conceptualization of oppressed people is informed by colonization, or the physical and psychological violence inflicted on indigenous peoples in the pursuit of power and economic gain. Further, Freire's work can be viewed as an extension/expansion of Fanon's ideology, as it asserts that liberation is achieved



through forms of education that initiates a critical consciousness of one's oppression (or colonization). Commonly, ethnic studies students and theorize that UCSD reinscribes the notion of colonization through its imperialist and capitalist function (Paperson 2010, 9). Hence, many of my collaborators and I align ourselves with the viewpoint that UCSD is a colonial institution, a topic I discuss in more detail in Part II. This education-based colonial oppression is relatable (though not reducible) to Freire's oppressor-oppressed paradigm. Additionally, Freire's framework helps us to understand the oppressive histories that Art Collective carries in its consciousness, as well as our more immediate experiences of oppression stemming from the corporate "machinery" of the UC system, which marginalizes students as it reproduces systems of privatization and capitalism (Alvarez, et al. 142).

Art Collective engages with both theory and praxis in order to achieve autonomy. We theorize through our performance and art, which is an alternative way of processing knowledge—one that cultivates community, bonds of solidarity, and empowerment. I argue that through Art Collective, participants are able to redefine activism and systems of learning through the process of communal, reflexive music making and performance. The activism we are used to hearing about often is associated with organizing protests, getting petitions signed and partaking in demonstrations at various political sites. While these forms of activism are direct, and sometimes effective, ways to change systems of inequality, they are not the only types of valid activism. As historian Robin Kelley notes, social movements are more than "sit-ins at lunch

counters, voter registration campaigns, and freedom rides; [they are] about self-transformation, changing the way we think, live, love, and handle pain" (Kelley 2002, 11). In a speech delivered on March 4, 2010, Professor K. Wayne Yang, of the UCSD ethnic studies department mentioned the notion of "deep activism." Deep activism highlights the crucial role that behind-the-scenes organizing and personal dialogue plays in social movements. Yang's notion of deep organizing draws from the concept of "kitchen table organizing," a term coined by the Black freedom movement activist Ella Baker early in the civil rights movement (Ransby, 2005). These alternate conceptions of activism reveal the layers of activism that are often overlooked by the public eye. Deep activism, hence, implies that the infamous faces within social movements are not the only people organizing—it is also the people who withstand the struggles of social inequality by means of love and communal interaction. These individuals' resilience and acts of kitchen table organizing (i.e. making flyers and posters, or simply attending rallies) are central to sustaining social justice movements. Yang's point reveals the connection between Art Collective's work and Freire's concept of praxis and critical pedagogy. The processes of facing, reflecting on and transforming experiences of inequality and oppression characterize deep activism.

Freire's notion of praxis and critical pedagogy is useful in mapping out Art Collective's work. He stresses the importance of subjectivity and critical consciousness in transforming the world. Art Collective exemplified this nuanced concept of activism through our presence in the movement in 2010, as well as

through the continuous reflexive and community-based work we do that centers on theory and creative practice. I conceptualize Art Collective's activism and performance as extensions of one another, both a critical part of our praxis. Through our lyrical performances, theatrics, and bodily reclamations of space we come to transform our subjectivities and cultivate community. Moreover, art and performance are vital agents of Art Collective's praxis, which provide us with means to socially construct ourselves within social spaces and mobilize action to change the inequitable nature of our university.

As I write this thesis, I realize that my reflections, research, and scholarship are essential components of my praxis. This project is rooted in Participatory Action Research, an approach that employs collaborative methodologies and community-based inquiry in order to solve localized problems of social inequality (Creswell 2008, 555). This project is based on my collaborative work with and for my community, from within my community. I conceptualize my research to exist within a realm of multiplex, intersecting subjectivities. It is my responsibility and desire to better understand these transecting subjectivities and grapple with my own placement within them. Moreover, this thesis functions as a means for me to reflect on my interpersonal experiences within Art Collective, document the art and activism during a pivotal moment UCSD's political history, and illuminate the importance of art, performance in cultivating and sustaining praxis-based education.

PART I:  
THE MOVEMENT AND  
ART COLLECTIVE'S PRAXIS

You leave me hanging  
Heart on my sleeve  
Bare bodied, bare soul  
Like a fucking noose  
That hung loosely on a tree  
That you leave me exposed  
—Julianne Aquino, *March 4<sup>th</sup> Rally, UCSD*

A social movement that only moves people is merely a revolt. A movement that changes both people and institutions is a revolution.  
—Martin Luther King Jr., *March on Washington*

Reflection—true reflection—leads to action.  
—Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

Art Collective is a localized project, couched in the campus mobilizations that occurred between February 15th and March 4th of 2010 at UCSD (see Appendix A). In this particular movement, thousands of students, faculty and staff mobilized to combat the rapid privatization of UCSD and the historical and immediate structural racism faced by the campus community. While Art Collective's story does not necessarily begin within this timeframe, our participation in the movement developed and united us as a group in many ways. During this time, the mentorship we received from certain faculty members, as well as the theoretical frameworks that they transferred to us, enabled us to articulate and translate the historical contexts of the racial incidents. This guidance and knowledge was a crucial aspect of our activism and informed our performance material. The theories we learned about

materialized as immediate issues before our eyes, evoking our emotional and creative responses. It was a time of raw creativity, extreme solidarity, and meticulous organization. Our anger and frustration fed our inspiration, heightened our creative flow, and enhanced the cohesiveness of Art Collective. During this time of crisis, our meeting times became more frequent and began to concentrate on organizing demonstrations and performances. At this point, Art Collective became a shared space of art making, communal processing, and political organizing. We shared space and time continuously, so our process of creating and dialoguing all seeped into one constant meeting time, which often utilized the hallways and empty spaces around campus during the late night and early morning.

In the months preceding the movement, my collaborators and I had been working on a performance and a series of hip hop and poetry workshops to be presented at the 2010 BSU/MEChA High School Conference entitled "Roots of Resistance: Art & Activism." Meanwhile, one of the collective's main founders was unable to attend our weekly meetings because of her commitment as head organizer of a student led coalition, which organized against the tuition hikes, budget cuts and the privatization of UCSD. On the coalition's agenda was the large-scale demonstration, March 4<sup>th</sup>: Day of Action to Defend Public Education Rally. Thus, before the mass mobilizations began, Art Collective had already begun to bridge communities on and off campus and address issues surrounding campus climate through music and performance.

In the midst of our music making and activism, we received news of a campus fraternity party entitled "Compton Cookout" that was being promoted on Facebook using overtly racist content. The party urged invitees to attend dressed in stereotypical "black" attire, such as cheap oversized clothes, chains and "nappy" hair, and to speak loudly and obnoxiously, in order to "honor" Black History Month. Following the exposure of this blatantly racist event, many students of color and allies came together to protest and demand that the administration take action. These demonstrations were met with a series of new racial incidents, which ramped tension and student mobilization and intensified the toxicity of the campus climate. With March 4<sup>th</sup> on the horizon and the unresponsiveness of the administration, Art Collective began to create our own responses comprised of beats, poetry, improvisatory MCing and hip hop dance.

### **Real Pain, Real Action!**

It was around 1 am on Friday, February 26<sup>th</sup>, I was awoken by my vibrating cell phone. It was a picture text. One of my collaborators had snapped a photo of a bright green noose hanging from a bookshelf in Geisel Library. I remember a feeling of numbness come over my body. I wanted it to be a joke, a tasteless joke, or perhaps a dream from which I would soon awake. I wanted to believe that this couldn't happen in 2010 at a public university. It was not a dream, nor was it a tasteless joke. It was the reality that had been rapidly submerging the campus since the Compton Cookout incident about a week before. I immediately called a few of my collaborators that had just left for a conference

in Berkeley. Most of them were in tears. Their tears stemmed from frustration but also from fear for their safety as well as their friends' safety.



**Figure 1.1:** Noose hanging from a bookshelf on the seventh floor of Geisel Library. (Photo by Grant White)

Less than a week before the noose was hung, the BSU chair had made various calls to the Secretary and Chief of Staff of the UCSD administration, as well as the University of California Police Department (UCPD) in regards to a UCSD student run television station that aired UCSD students calling black students “N” words and other racial epithets and mocking them for being upset about the “Compton Cookout.” His calls were met with less than concerned responses and the only “actions” taken were a couple apologetic mass emails and police warnings addressed to the general student population. However, the morning after the noose was hung, we made one of our largest stands by occupying the chancellor’s office, in hope of getting the administration to take *real* action.

The morning after the noose was found, I woke up early to join the demonstration at the chancellor’s complex to demand that the campus be shut down to insure students safety after the continuous acts of race-centered

aggression exhibited on campus. No plans to occupy had been outwardly communicated, only an 8 a.m. protest at the chancellor's office to demand that the administration take action. I arrived on campus and followed the distant chants, "real pain, real action." The voices sounded hoarse already but their desperation and weakness was masked by wild fury. We began to circle the small cottage-like buildings that comprised the chancellor's complex. The media had arrived shortly after I had. Some of the lead organizers asked us to cease "aggressive" behavior like banging on the doors and windows, as it could have been filmed and broadcasted on the news. This was an important part of the movement—to maintain peaceful demonstrations and protests that did not reinforce stereotypes of "angry protesters." After twenty minutes or so, one of my collaborators who was coordinating the protest informed me that we were going to occupy the chancellor's main office. The goal was to force the administration to sign a document that committed them to signing the BSU demands, which, by the way, were originally proposed in the summer of 2009 in a report issued by the BSU entitled "Do UC Us?" (see Appendix B). She mentioned that they needed as many bodies as possible in order to create a critical mass (both to make a statement and to make it harder for police to dismantle).

As I made my way around the office entrance I thought about the consequences of this action. There was a chance that some of us would get arrested and since nobody could leave until the sit-in was finished, there was a chance that I would lose the whole day and be forced to cancel plans and disregard classes and paper deadlines. I also thought of my collaborators, my



close friends. I thought about their tears, their safety, and their struggles. I thought about my own trajectory and the hardships I faced as a first-generation college student. I thought about what higher education meant to my family and me. In these brief moments I acknowledged what *mattered* to me. And while my adrenaline had a large role in pushing myself into that crowded office door, these reflections ultimately overshadowed the consequences of my entry.



**Figure 1.2:** Students occupying the chancellor's office (photographer unknown).



**Figure 1.3:** Art Collective member, Jennifer Maldonado, keeps our spirits up as she sings and plays Son Jarocho songs on her *jarana* (photo by Nelvin C. Cepeda).

Being inside the chancellor's office can only be described as the embodiment of solidarity. Inside there were groups of students spanning across various departmental and racial lines, all sacrificing time and energy for the

greater good. It was much more intimate than the protests that had been taking place during the last couple weeks. The room was packed with people, some conversing about political issues facing campus, others about classes and social life. We spent a great deal of the time singing popular R&B songs to handclaps and *jarana*. I remember feeling a strong bond with the people around me even though many of them were strangers. In this realm we all became a unified force of power and togetherness existing in a moment of space reclamation. Allies stood around the outside of the office building to show support and guard the entrances and exits. Throughout the day food and water was passed to us through the windows, as we peacefully waited inside for the chancellor to present the document. We all dreaded 5 p.m. because it was the complex's official closing time, a point in which we all would be technically trespassing.

Many of us decided that if the document was not presented by 5 p.m., we would stay, despite the laws prohibiting our presence after hours. I decided I would stay. As the complex's closing time neared we all gathered hand-in-hand and reflected as we waited for news from the administration. Eventually, they produced a document, though it was not thorough or written with clarity. Professor Daniel Widener of the History Department spoke to us after we received it. He remarked:

From 8:00 this morning until now, the University operated on our timetable, on our schedule. And although they didn't do the best job of coming back to us with something we could comprehend, something we could implement. Today we seized the heart of this place. Next week—Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday—we come back to seize the heart, but we move out to seize

the brain, the eyes, the lips, the teeth, the tongue, the arms, the legs, the whole thing! (Alvarez, et al. 100).

This type of positive reinforcement, support and encouragement invigorated and sustained our activism. For Art Collective, the community and its energy were invaluable to our creative process. Our art and performances reflected this energy and were one of our contributions to the community and the movement.

As student-activists, our discontent had to do with the administration's historical lack of action to address a curriculum and campus climate that excluded students of color, just as much as it had to do with the immediate racial incidents. As Professor K. Wayne Yang of the Ethnic Studies department noted, the students of the movement, especially the BSU and a range of student organizations, transformed the personal insult of Compton Cookout into a "push for structural changes that [were] sorely needed on our campus" (Alvarez, et al. 41). In essence, the racial incidents that plagued our campus presented us with an opportunity and some leverage to implement structural changes within the university. At the pinnacle of the mobilizations was March 4<sup>th</sup>: International Day of Action to Defend Public Education Rally, which addressed the drastic tuition increases and budget cuts, signs of the rapid privatization of UCSD, as well as the thread of racial incidents prompted by the Compton Cookout. While the rally most definitely addressed issues of racism—especially given the ways in which class exploitation and racial inequality inextricably transect—it was not a direct response to the racial incidents. As noted earlier, it was being planned months before the Compton Cookout. The main goal of the March 4<sup>th</sup> rally was to encourage students and teachers to protest the state of higher education with

walkouts, rallies and teach-ins, and occupations. At UCSD, March 4<sup>th</sup> was a day of teach-outs that led to a large-scale rally in front of Geisel Library and then later a march through downtown San Diego to the Governor's Office.

### **March 4<sup>th</sup>**

I will never understand the spirit of my ancestors, but I know it. I know it lives in me. And though fear insists on itself, I intend to acknowledge this spirit as one that overcomes us. I write because my writing mind is the only chance I have of becoming the manifestation of their hope. I write because my writing mind is the only chance I have of becoming what the living dead are for me.  
—Jericho Brown

Our gestures are marked by radical a love. Our clenched fists hold flowers and chalk and pens. These will be the most effective counter tools to nooses and coercive corporate plans in this battle for the university. Our words and our writing are the weapons we will use--these are the gestures that the apparatus cannot efface or excel over time" (Alvarez, et al. 148)  
—University Liberty Coalition, *Another University is Possible*

Do U.C. Me?!  
—The Movement, *Rally Chants of UCSD*

The day of the March 4<sup>th</sup> Rally was a surreal experience. I arrived at Geisel Library just forty-five minutes before the campus-wide walkout was to take place, still a little groggy from our rehearsal, which lasted into the early morning. Library walk, the main strip of walkway leading from the center of campus to campus's main library, Geisel Library, was eerily vacant, quiet, and speckled with yellow shirts—the dress code for rally coordinators. I arrived to a small black stage positioned in front of the library, where I met Chevy, Diana, and Bryant for a sound-check. As more Art Collective members arrived we decided to do a dry run of our piece inside Geisel in a hallway nearest the first floor bathrooms. Soon

after, I received a call from one of the event coordinators, instructing us to report to the stage. The rally was beginning. Walking towards the stage we all stared in amazement at the swarm of people that had impregnated library walk. Tambourines, djembes, shakers, and chants pierced the air as we made our way to the stage.

The issues surrounding the rally effected a wide range of individuals; the crowd included laid off immigrant staff workers, professors in fear of losing their jobs, students—of varying socioeconomic statuses—angry about tuition hikes, and student-activists incensed by the toxic, racist campus climate. The rally had a mixture of on-stage events, mainly student and faculty speeches, which ranged from informative statistics about the UC budget crisis to heartfelt personal reflections. Among the highlights was the announcement that the chancellor had agreed, in writing, to the BSU demands to repair campus climate and acknowledge and *act on* the underrepresentation and under-servicing of minority students at UCSD. Art Collective's performance was positioned amongst mainly non-musical acts, however the energy and enthusiasm of the immense crowd seemed to be self-sustaining no matter what was happening on stage.

I view our performance as the culmination of our frustration and struggle with the systemic problems at UCSD, and our visceral reactions to the more covert racism on campus. Demanding to be heard, seen and acknowledged, we merged theatrical monologues, spoken word poetry, freestyle rapping, drumming, and hip hop dance. The piece had three specific movements that ramped in energy, climaxing during its final stages. The first movement began

with me lightly beating a pulsating syncopated rhythm on the cajon. Soon after Diana, Bryant, and Julieanne paraphrased a quote from Edwidge Danticat's novel, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*," the original text reads:

My mother, she told me about a group of people in Guinea who carry the sky upon their head. They are the people of Creation. Strong, tall, and mighty. They are people who can bear anything. Their Maker, she said, gives them the sky to carry because they are strong. These people do not know who they are, but if you see a lot of trouble in your life, it is because you were chosen to carry part of the sky on your head.

The first three sentences of this passage were recited by Diana, then the next two by Julieanne, and the last by Bryant. My collaborators appropriated this passage by poeticizing it, rephrasing portions and changing words. For instance, Bryant replaced the word "trouble" with "pain," a salient appropriation considering the BSU student movement slogan: "Real Pain, Real Action." Following this portion, five performers recited the phrase: "My rage is dignified and I am strong" in various languages; Julieanne in Tagalog, Diana in Spanish, Bijon in English, Patricia in Korean, and Michael in Yuman (a Kumeyaay dialect). Each time the phrase sounded, I increased the volume, tempo and density of the cajon pattern until finally the whole group shouted the English version in unison. At this point I struck the cajon with full force and let a pause of silence set in; however, the audience cheers overpowered the silence.

The second movement began with singular performers screaming these words: "Stop. Listen, do you hear me?! Stop. Stop. Listen. Do you see me?!" Then all of us in yelled in unison: "DO YOU SEE ME?!" Following this, an array of spoken-word pieces unfolded in a slow cascading progression, each performer stepping

forward when their turn came and back as they finished. After they finished, they continued reciting their piece on a loop under their breath. The spoken word pieces featured an array of self proclamations, "I am 1.3%<sup>5</sup>," "I am my mother's daughter," "I am a product of obstacle and sacrifice," "I am excellent, I am worth more." Additionally, *collective* experiences of oppression were expressed. For instance, "we were never meant to survive," "we will no longer sit in complacency, we will no longer stand idly by as our people, as our *gente*, are treated as if they were anything less than dignified." Bryant's piece, entitled *History*, touched on both the "I" and "we" points of view in a critical way. The following is a portion of his lyrical performance:

History  
 What is history?  
 It's not my story  
 It's not her story  
 It's not my brothers story, it's not my sisters story  
 It's not my moms story, it's not my dads story  
 It's not my grandpa's story, it's not my grandma's story  
 It's *his* story

Bryant's performance of this piece utilized various vocal techniques such as dynamic intonation styling and word accenting, stretching and syncopating syllables, and the strategic uses of pausing for dramatic effect. (His)story, a play on words, alludes to a critique of the selective inclusion and exclusion of historical narrative taught in schools, which was a salient connection to the rally's theme. Additionally, Bryant made the distinction between "*his* story" and his own story. Within this distinction lies a critique of the colonial past and oppression

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<sup>5</sup> According to the 2007 UCSD Final Report from the Advisory Committee on Increasing Yield of Underrepresented Students, Black students comprise 1.3%-1.9% of UCSD's student body.

his ancestors struggled through in Honduras, and the ways in which many indigenous cultures and peoples were obliterated, controlled, and erased from Western history. This piece is representative of Art Collective's artistic agenda, in that it explores identity through means of art and critical thought.

The second movement ended with the last spoken word artist screaming, "holler back," a call and response phrasing borrowed from the Black Panther Party movement of the 1960s and 1970s. It is delivered as follows: the caller yells, "holler back" and the responders answer with, "I got your back;" the cycle is repeated three times. This has been an instrumental expression of solidarity within the BSU student movement and is most usually used to end rallies and other events or meetings.

The third and final movement showcased hip hop dance, and improvisatory rapping, singing and beatboxing delivered by Omar, Bryant and myself. During this movement, the crowd stood up, danced, and clapped rhythmically, as Art Collective broke through the barrier of the piece's withheld energy and onstage stillness. This was an explosive moment that marked a period of catharsis, perhaps, for the audience after hearing the poets express such personal, complex issues that, I assume, were challenging for many to emotionally process. To begin, Chevy and two other performers executed a self-choreographed dance routine to a hip hop music mix that the DJ cued. As the dance routine music faded out, audio of the Martin Luther King Jr. speech, *The Dilemma and the Challenge*, faded up and played under my cajon solo. Next, Diana began her vocal improvisation over the improvised cajon beat, which



soon was accompanied by Bryant beatboxing, Omar MCing, and the crowd clapping along. During this section, a series of call and responses were implemented such as, “Whose University?/Our University!” and “U-C-S-D/Throw your hands in the air and just ride with me.” The energy of the crowd propelled our performance and visa versa; it was a circular relationship and communal experience.

A general observation to be made about this performance is that it did not attempt to code or “candy-coat” any political messages or musical practices. The spoken word artist’s political stances were explicit; their delivery style demanded for them to be heard and seen. There was no melody or theatrical storyline to divert the political message, just the poets’ vernacular virtuosity and introspective richness, accompanied by trance-inducing percussive rhythms. The aesthetic was engaging without utilizing common “pop” music formulas. The formation of their bodies on stage, their militant gazes, the aggressive forcefulness of their vocal deliveries, the way they moved forward to deliver their pieces, their interlocking speech patterns, intonations and textures; these were the aspects of performance that enthralled the crowd.

With this performance we demanded recognition, to be seen and heard. Many of the poets asserted and rearticulated<sup>6</sup> their identity through their words

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<sup>6</sup> I am using the prefix “re” in a similar way that performance studies theorist Elin Diamond uses it. She writes, “a performance embeds traces of other performances, it also produces experiences whose interpretation only depends on previous experience. This creates the terminology of “re” in discussions of performance, as in *reembody*, *reinscribe*, *reconfigure*, *resignify*. “Re” acknowledges the preexisting discursive field, the repetition—and the desire to repeat—within the performative present, while “embody,” “configure,” “inscribe,” “signify,” assert the possibility of materializing something

and references. As a group, we also rearticulated a collective identity that functioned across a spectrum of difference, whether through ethnicity, sexuality or background. This process of rearticulating was implemented by our appropriations of past performance styles and theoretical concepts. We did this by recalling ancestral oppressions, reclaiming our voices and appropriating space. The process of rearticulating identity through appropriation follows patterns of *signifyin'* and other African-derived drum and oratory styles. The use of drum-vocal combinations has historically informed artistic expressions of resistance. *Signifyin'*, a theory developed by Henry Louis Gates Jr. refers to systems of coded rhythmic lexicons historically employed by African Americans for centuries, which wittingly critiques dominant power structures through threads and patterns of collective references and the assertion of verbal prowess as means of catharsis from subordination (Gates 1988). Art Collective's style of writing and delivery recalls the Black Nationalist poets of the 1960s, such as The Last Poets and Gil Scott-Heron, whose vocal 'toasts' frequently critiqued dominant power structures over percussive rhythmic accompaniment (Kayes 1996, 244). More interesting than this adaptation of past *signifyin'* poets, is Art Collective's referencing and riffing off of ancestral struggles. Most of the performed spoken word pieces recalled specters of the poets' oppressions as a means of articulating their present feelings of subjugation. This articulation of ancestral suffering positions the poet in a sense of being in the past and present simultaneously; voicing the pain of an oppressive history as a means to demand

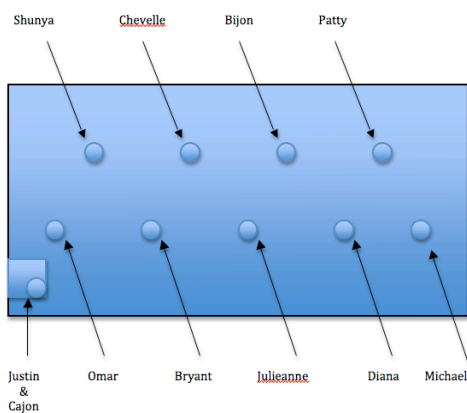
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that exceeds our knowledge, but alters the shape of sites and imagines other as yet unsuspected modes of being" (Diamond 1996, 2).

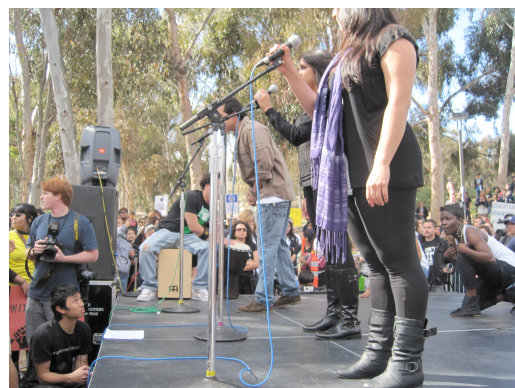
a new future for themselves and the generations to follow. In essence this imaginary, emancipatory space was explored during performance introspectively but was often heightened by the crowd responding with cheers and claps. These references channeled the strength of past revolutionary movements and evoked an urgent call for present change.

Another quintessential example of this practice is the group's incorporation of the *unity clap*, an expression of solidarity amongst Latino and Filipino workers in United Farm Workers coalition during the 1960s. Given the language barriers between the workers, they would do a unity clap together, which starts out slow and follows the rhythm of the heartbeat. It would then increase in speed and tempo until the clap dissipated. This practice was often used as a means of communication between workers and to collectively silence the workers' bosses. The UCSD activist community appropriates the unity clap by adding to the end of it the Tagalog phrase, "isang bagsak" (which means, "one rise, one fall,") and the call and response, "holler back." It is important to note that these additions are unique to the UCSD community, as other UC campuses do not incorporate "holler back" or "isang bagsak" (Interview with Edwina Welsh, San Diego, CA, May 12, 2011). The merging of these cross-cultural elements is symbolic of the multiethnic organizing that propelled the mobilizations on campus. Similarly, it was illustrative Art Collective's creative processes and instrumental to our reconciliation of feelings of past and current oppressions. UCSD's hybrid version of the unity clap is often used to end rallies and protests; in the case of the March 4<sup>th</sup> rally it closed out our performance and was integrated

into the performance itself. By incorporating this practice, Art Collective referenced not only passed oppressions, but also a gesture of collaboration across lines of ethnicity and experience.



**Figure 1.4:** March 4<sup>th</sup> stage plot.



**Figure 1.5:** Stage view of Art Collective front row, March 4<sup>th</sup> (photo by Leslie Quitanilla).

As mentioned earlier, our performance, the occupation of Library Walk and the various teach outs were a reclamation and reappropriation of space. These gestures sought to take back the university, which we did by teaching/learning about the UC budget crisis in public spaces on campus and overpopulating normally spaces of docility and normality. This was a common tactic within the movement. Most notably was the massive teach-out that was implemented on February 24<sup>th</sup> 2010, which was a response to the administration-organized teach-in, which various community members felt trivialized the work done year-round by teachers and students to examine race through critical lenses (Alvarez, et al. 43). On stage, Art Collective contributed to this form of resistance and alternative theorizing/learning through music, poetry and unified

bodies. In the realm of spoken word (even in spoken word troupes) it is uncommon to numerous poets occupy one stage, integrate phrasing and share space. As seen in Figure 1.4, Art Collective diverged from this normative method, performing on stage as a mass of bodies, rhythms and intertwined lexis. As an anonymous onlooker remarked, "the image of ten diverse bodies and voices occupying space and time was extraordinarily powerful." And being part of this onstage mass was just as powerful for many of my collaborators in Art Collective.

Being a part of this moment moved me in a distinct way. The swarm of energies and bodies surrounding us further augmented the ineffable feeling of being part of a seemingly unbreakable, solid and unified mass on stage. This moment, I believe, is what Jill Dolan calls the "utopian performative." Dolan defines the utopian performative as a "small but profound moments in which performance calls the attention of the audience in a way that lifts everyone slightly above the present, into a hopeful feeling of what the world might be like if every moment of our lives were as emotionally voluminous, generous, aesthetically striking, and intersubjectively intense"(Dolan, 2005, 5). Her understanding of the utopian differs from definitions that ground it in fantasy, marking it as non-tangible. Instead, she argues that fantasy and desire are salient agents in moving and shaping history; therefore, the utopian is a powerfully real force (Dolan, 2005, 7). In short, these utopian performatives allow for a communal vision of a better future, which Dolan argues are essential catalyses for social change. Protests and political rallies are common sites for intersubjectivity, however on March 4<sup>th</sup>, Art Collective articulated and brought

these interpersonal connections to the fore through artistic expression. We stood in front of hundreds of students, faculty, and staff; many were strangers, yet we somehow felt an overwhelming feeling of togetherness with them. As the performance closed, the explosive spontaneous improvisation on stage evoked something in the crowd and created a feedback loop of energy and musical entrainment. I felt the support and energy of the people that I shared the stage with, but also the reciprocity from the audience as we shared in the dream of transforming our university into what it should be—an inclusive place of higher learning with equitable policies and affordable tuition.

Art Collective's ideologies and politics of reappropriation and reclamation coalesced with those of the movement. The act of proclaiming an artistic identity, or in Diana's words "rearticulating ourselves through art," is central to Art Collective. I have watched this function grow from members claiming their artistic identities, in meetings by saying things like "I am a dancer" (as opposed to "I dance"), to members becoming comfortable with their craft enough to publicly assert those identities in performances. Saliently, as the intensity of campus climate rose, our claiming of artistic identity evolved into the reclamation of campus spaces and of more interpersonal layers of identity. For instance, the chant: "Whose university? *Our* university!" became popular in UCSD protests and then quickly became integrated in Art Collective performances and the overall group lexicon. During the movement, claiming identity was a tool that coincided with protests and personal artistic expression. In some ways, I view our March 4<sup>th</sup> performance as a metaphor for the movement, as it

embodied the intersectionality of race, sexuality and gender represented through the bodies on stage. As noted by Roberto Alvarez in his 2010 book, *Another University is Possible*, this was a movement directed by “multiethnic organizing,” in which students worked across difference towards a common cause (Alvarez, et al. xi). In essence, Art Collective and the community that it is couched in share a politics of difference and both illustrate a nuanced level of “diversity,” one unimaginable to the UCSD administration.

In the wake of March 4<sup>th</sup> various small-scale mobilizations continued on localized levels at UCSD. Many departments vowed to attempt to “diversify” their curriculums and increase their consciousness of social and racial inequity. The ethnic studies department organized a series of group dialogues. A cross-discipline graduate student coalition was formed in order to organize strategies for nuancing conversations about race, class, gender and sexuality in the classroom and discussion sections. Some of my colleagues and I developed work groups within the music department to dialogue about our complicity in the university’s structural problems and our responsibility to initiate departmental changes. It was a crucial moment for the university because the heat of the protests cooled after the BSU demands were signed, which posed a risk that the energy of the previous quarter’s mobilizations might easily slip away. For many who were not direct targets of the racism on campus, I presumed it would be easy to forget about the issues that remained and continue with “business as usual.” I found myself feeling uneasy during certain dialogues in which participants were unsympathetic to the issues faced by raced students on

campus, mainly due to their lack of connection to communities of color and their level of privilege. These feelings of unease often reached me during the music department work groups, especially given my personal connection to the communities that were closely affected by the toxicity of the campus climate.

I often had conversations with my music colleagues in which we would grapple with understanding the lack of minority students in our department. Many perceived the problem as an effect of nonwhite students' low enrollment rate, making it an issue that was out of the department's hands. Because "the diversity issue" was not fully perceived as an explicit responsibility of the department, there was a general attitude that seemed to condone the disinvestment in departmental diversity initiatives. I sought to explore why such low enrollment existed in our department in the first place. According to Professor Sara Kaplan of the Ethnic Studies Department, the problem at UCSD is one of acceptance, not one of poor admittance (Alvarez, et al. 33). The 2007 Yield Report (a UCSD Final Report From the Advisory Committee on Increasing Yield of Underrepresented Students) states that only 13% of admitted African-American students enroll in UCSD (compare to 44% at UCLA) (Alvarez, et al. 42). Despite these statistics, there still remains a presumption that the underrepresentation of raced students at UCSD is a result of their failure to apply or their lack of interest in higher education. And, as many of the commentaries under the online news posts covering the UCSD's racial conflicts illustrate, such assumptions often imply that the lack of black students on campus stems from



their laziness and impoverished work ethic.<sup>7</sup> In essence, the responsibility for the low enrollment of minority students at UCSD is commonly placed on the students as opposed to the institution. It is necessary for departments to reevaluate their programs and grapple with the possibility that students of color may feel unwelcomed or uncomfortable within the space that the department provides.

Grappling with these issues of race and retention within the music department workgroups I became even more invested in my community work. During spring quarter of 2010, a colleague and I were able to mobilize a group of music graduate students, along with one faculty member, in order to implement an outreach program designed to cultivate relationships with high schools and communities in San Diego through musical creative interaction. To me, this type of work was needed within the music department and I invest just as much energy into it as my graduate education. It is a key element of my praxis and a process I consider to be essential to my education and personal growth. I view my community projects as a social obligation to reinstate the mandated values of public education. It is within this framework and ideology that I operate within Art Collective as a space of creativity and retention for students across lines of difference. The process of cultivating protests, rallies and performances fostered our personal and intellectual growth and united our communities.

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<sup>7</sup> See video commentaries here:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S3BwfUmPUag&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p0YCqqnKpms>

PART II:  
SPACE, PLACE AND APPROPRIATION

So what I really want to say is, since we're all here together, is that maybe we should think about how we can make this OUR space. Right? It's not the chancellor's complex; it's our space. And it's our time.

—Micha Cardenas, *UCSD Chancellor's Complex Occupation*

The university is lot more than an economic engine: it is a quality of life engine. And when it is truly public, it is a moral engine.

—George Lakoff, *Privatization is the Issue*

The violence of power is answered by the violence of subversion.

— Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*

Art Collective's performance on March 4<sup>th</sup> solidified us as a *performance* group and expanded our opportunities to perform at various events on and off campus. Additionally, March 4<sup>th</sup> was a pinnacle of the movement because it marked the day that the administration signed an official document that obligated them to implement the BSU demands (see Appendix C). While these were salient turning points for the movement on campus, the broader structural and economic issues surrounding privatization still loom over UCSD. I will address these issues through the framework of space in order to highlight the ways in which Art Collective navigated and reclaimed institutional spaces. Our art and activism was/is propelled by our resistance to institutionalized spaces that operate under and reinforce state apparatuses and dominant ideologies. Hence, our work consists of intervening in these spaces by appropriating them through our performances, public music making, and activism.

A brief overview of some theoretical works surrounding issues of space is necessary to deepen an understanding of Art Collective's experience within the UCSD landscape. Michel Foucault, in his 1977 book *Discipline and Punish*, contends that institutional spaces such as prisons, hospitals, and schools are structures that assert power and surveillance upon the individuals within them. Foucault first situates space and discipline within the context of the plague. He states, "[t]he plague gave rise to disciplinary projects. Rather than the massive, binary division between one set of people and another, it called for multiple separations, individualizing distributions, an organization in depth of surveillance and control, an intensification and a ramification of power" (Foucault, 198). He goes on to examine Jeremy Bentham's design of a prison, which depicted a tall central tower that housed guards who constantly monitored prisoners from small slits in the tower, making it impossible for the prisoners to see when, or from where, they were being watched. From Bentham's design, Foucault constructed his theory of panopticonism, which conceptualized such an institution as an apparatus, or "a machine for creating and sustaining a power" (Foucault, 201). According to Foucault, this apparatus eventually causes its inhabitants to self-police their behaviors and perceptions of self. In this context, members of a society become socialized to be docile within these spaces via their subconscious self-monitoring.

Foucault's reading of the panopticon as a metaphor for state power assertion over modern society (Sharp 2009, 59) has opened up areas for various scholars to critique space and place. French urban theorist, Henri Lefebvre

expands Foucault's philosophical/metaphoric critique of society's structure by transposing it into a matrix of social, material spaces that include (but are not reductive to) spaces of domination. He attempts to locate and characterize the type of space that Foucault alludes to. He does this by bridging the gap between "mental" and "social" space, or "the space between the space of the philosophers and the space of people who deal with material things" (Lefebvre 1974, 4). From this standpoint he attests that space is "a tool of thought and action; that in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence domination, of power; yet that, as such, it escapes in part from those who would make use of it" (Lefebvre 1974, 26). From this viewpoint it is clear that space is product of complex social systems, which are informed by power and domination. However, Lefebvre adds nuance to this definition of space by asserting that individuals produce social space through localized material processes, rather than reducing the production of space to the consequence of hegemony or domination.

Following Lefebvre, sociologist and human geographer David Harvey extends the work of Foucault using Marxist thought by asserting that processes of domination, markedly capitalism, define space. In his article, *The Political Economy of Public Space*, Harvey highlights the ways in which spaces are situated and segmented by class and status. Through this framework he seeks to make geography a political factor in addressing social injustice. Both Lefebvre and Harvey highlight the ways in which social conditions and interactions create one's experience of space. However, gaining deeper understanding of how

space relates to *place* will prove to be useful in understanding the political contexts of UCSD, and how Art Collective fits within it.

Space and place are complex yet simplistic ideas because they are part of our everyday language, but have been theorized through various lenses in political discourses for decades. In his book, *Place: A Short Introduction*, Tim Cresswell conceptualizes space to be defined in relationship to place. For him, space describes social constructs, like Foucault's panopticon and Harvey's Marxists take on space and class, while place denotes "being-in-the-world" (Cresswell 2004, 29). In this context, space is in the abstract or theoretical realm. Place, Cresswell suggests, describes the ways we experience the world and make it meaningful; though these institutional issues inform our experiences because issues of power affect our daily lives (Cresswell 2004, 12). He argues that place is not merely a product of social processes, though he acknowledges that it was once a device for the maintenance of oppression and domination (Cresswell 2004, 29). As a critique of Harvey, and other theorists that "privilege the social in geography" (Cresswell 2004, 30), Cresswell poses the question, what is socially constructed about place? He recognizes that place is defined by the meanings we attribute to it, which are often molded by societal norms and western cultural values, and by its material qualities that are physically built by society. However, his concern is not to deny that place and space are products of culture and society, but rather to illustrate how "place is primary to the construction of meaning and society" (Cresswell 2004, 32). In essence, Cresswell factors in human agency into his understanding of place. He states, "human

agency is not so easily structured and structures themselves are made through the repetition of practices by agents" (Cresswell 2004, 36). This observation draws from structuration theory, markedly associated with the British sociologist Anthony Giddens. Structuration theory seeks to:

[U]nderstand the relations between the overarching structures that influence our lives (ranging from big structures such as capitalism and patriarchy to smaller scales structures such as national and local institutions) and our own ability to exercise agency in our everyday lives. Structurationists say that our actions are neither determined by structures above and beyond us, nor are our actions completely the product of free will. Structures depend on our actions to exist and our actions are given meaning by the structures that lie beyond them" (Cresswell 2004, 35).

A discussion of place and space within a structural framework is helpful to the exploration of the campus climate of UCSD and how Art Collective navigates its social and political landscape.

Long before its establishment in 1960, UCSD was being constructed under the premises of race and class based exclusion. In his book, *Brown Eyed Children of the Sun*, George Mariscal highlights that explicitly racist and bourgeois ideologies informed the original spatial placement, purpose, and admission restrictions of UCSD. He explains that the campus was originally proposed to be built near downtown San Diego, an area more accessible to working the class. However, in 1958 the funding committee voted to place the school in La Jolla, an area mostly populated by white privileged elite (Mariscal 2005, 217). Hence, the university was positioned in opposition to raced populations in a lower income bracket through its physical placement but also through structural racism and anti-Semitism. Mariscal quotes the La Jolla property deed, which states that

resources be excluded from “any person whose blood is not entirely that of the Caucasian race” (Mariscal 2005, 217). In addition to this type of deep structural discrimination, founder Roger Revelle intended for the school to concentrate on a select few who would become innovators of science and technology (Mariscal 2005, 218). With this selective creed in mind, he proposed to only accept students with IQs above 140, which, in the context of the 1950s, weeded out many of the working-class students of color that did not have access to quality education (Mariscal 2005, 218). UCSD’s history of race-based selectivity has normalized the low rates of black and Latino students. In fact, the UC administration has ignored the 2007 Yield Report’s statistic representation of low enrollment of underrepresented students and neglected to implement the strategies it offered to improve campus climate. Not to mention the UCSD anthropology department, which uncovered Native American human remains over 30 years ago, yet has failed repatriate them since (Alvarez, et al. 42). Ironically, Native American students on the UCSD campus have never comprised as much as 1% of the student body. In essence, the current and historical social space of UCSD bares the mark of elitism and racism.

Issues surrounding space and place were at the heart of the conflicts that spurred the student mobilizations. After all, it was essentially a battle between private and public space; as corporate forces attempt to privatize public space, they reinforce class and race based inequities. As a public university, UCSD is mandated to provide equal access and affordable higher education. By definition, it is a “public” university and is obligated by law to provide inclusive

and accessible education. According to the UCSD Faculty Coalition, the 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education in California reinforced this standard, one which has been celebrated by Californians and contributed to a significant stimulus to California's economy (UCSD Faculty Coalition, 2010). However since 2001, the state support for the University of California has dropped 30%, causing state aid provided to UC students to decrease by 50% (UCSD Faculty Coalition, 2010). These drastic cuts have caused a move towards the privatization of UCSD and have incited the mobilizations to "take back public education." This protest slogan, along with this one: "education is a right, not a privilege," reflect a convergence of students' experience of place (the way they make meaning of their experience as a UCSD community member) and their resistance to space (systems of domination and capitalism which propel corporatization of higher education). The slogans are collective expressions of feelings of injustice, which are couched in a legacy of decades of high-quality postsecondary education provided by California junior colleges, state schools, and public universities like UCSD (UCSD Faculty Coalition, 2010).

The current budget cuts and tuition fee hikes experienced by UCSD faculty, staff, and students have sparked a conflict that is rooted in economics, and transected by issues of race and privilege. The issues at hand are associated with social space and domination, as highlighted by Harvey and Foucault. However, as Cresswell reminds us, political agency enables social spaces to be renegotiated and reimagined. As such, members of the movement critique UCSD's social space via their protests from *within* the physical



spaces of UCSD. As both Mariscal and Alvarez highlight, UCSD's history as a social space has been constructed through forces of capitalism and racism. However, the ways in which we currently engage with the physical space of the campus is crucial to how we navigate and reconcile UCSD's historical and current exclusionary qualities.

As mentioned earlier, Foucault implies that the systems of discipline in prisons resemble that of other societal institutions like schools. The basis of his critique is that social space is manifested through physical space; however, place is also entailed because he explains how the prisoners' experience of social and physical space impacts their ways of being (i.e. they become "docile bodies"). Yet, this interpretation of self-monitoring bodies within place is incomplete according to Cresswell's understanding of it, because it does not aptly consider human agency. In the case of UCSD, place is important because it illustrates our struggles against structures of power and resistance to assimilating into to the university's system of corporatization. The student movements that have taken place at UCSD, past and present, indicate this struggle for autonomy, as does the work of Art Collective.

Some connections can be drawn between the organization of physical space illustrated by the panopticon and that of UCSD. Of course, Foucault himself said that it is no coincidence that prisons resemble schools (Foucault 1977, 228). However, there is value in pinpointing how this spatial layout at UCSD has informed Art Collective's work and how it connects to our experience of place, as well as how we give meaning to this experience. Take for example,

Price Center, our main student center, which is cylindrical, tall and narrow. It is narrow enough to inhibit a critical mass of people to convene horizontally, and layered cylindrically, which affords the upper levels a clear view of levels below it. A common university oral history indicates that these narrow tall constructions and diffuse community spaces were purposely engineered to stifle large masses of crowds, a design decision informed by the large-scale demonstrations implemented at UC Berkeley. Additionally, there are underground tunnels that run beneath the campus grounds, which many speculate were built in order to allow officials unimpeded travel across space in the case of protests and riots (Mcelhinney 2004). These spatial elements are part of UCSD's political landscape and are symbolic of the systems of domination that the campus was built upon.

The question remains: how does Art Collective fit into the discussion of space and place? Art Collective, in and of itself, is a social space, one that struggles to simultaneously exist within a hegemonic structure (the university), while also attempting to resist and deconstruct it. I am concerned with the ways in which we are positioned by the space of UCSD and how we position ourselves against it. Our position is informed by our affective experience of the immediate situation—the tuition fee hikes and overt/covert racism on campus. And equally important, we are positioned by our consciousness of the historical, structural concerns of the university and broader society. We reconcile these experiences and understandings of marginalization through our activism and art. These outlets are essential components of our praxis and human agency, which inform

how we position ourselves in the university space. Art Collective positions itself in resistance to the toxic campus climate and its colonial contexts. We consider ourselves agents of the movement and demand a more inclusive and equitable public university. We implemented this by deconstructing and appropriating physical and social space using creativity and performance.

### **Appropriation**

Just days after news of the Compton Cookout broke, the administration launched a campaign entitled, "Racism: Not In Our Community." The campaign produced hoards of buttons, signs and banners, which all bared this same slogan. We immediately began to strike a marker line through the "Not," so that the message on the buttons we wore read "Racism: In Our Community." To my mind, this is a political statement that transcends a fashion trend (though some may have thought of it in that way). It became a signifier of students who were critical of the administration's surface-level responses to the racism on campus, and distinguished those in the thick of it from those who expressed sympathy from afar. What is important about this example is that it reflects our rejection of the administration's co-opted response to the racial events by appropriating an artifact of that very institution.

This example of intervention through appropriation captures the character of Art Collective and the movement. We are students within an institution trying to make sense of our subjective feelings of marginalization *using* institutionalized education systems. As James Stout, a UCSD PhD student movement member puts it, "we live in a country, and a university where public

space is institutionally controlled, it's our environment but on their terms" (Alvarez, et al. 172). Our critical mindsets are the marker line through the "Not." This process is on par with the way many of my Black and Latino collaborators seek to rewrite themselves into history and scribble over narratives that reduce them to products of damaged communities or histories of conquered and enslaved groups. As Bryant eloquently put it, "we are trying to dismantle the university from the inside in order to reconstruct it" (Interview with Bryant Pena, San Diego, CA, April 28, 2011). As I have illustrated in Part I, in the movement we reclaimed space through teach-ins, demonstrations and occupations. However, I now seek to demonstrate how our appropriation of space via performance and public music making has the potential to sustain our motions for an equitable system of public education.

Generally, there were two main realms of performances in which my collaborators and I partook: informal public space and formal performance venues (often at community events). Informal public performance occurred spontaneously throughout public campus spaces, and typically manifested as loud dramatic recitations of past spoken word performances. We would commonly borrow one another's lyrical phrases as a way to both poke fun at the originator, while at same time using it as means to sonically and assertively overtake public space. They were occurrences of over-exaggerated mimicry that, in a half-serious half-joking way, represented a connection to other members' struggles and stories. "Jam sessions" and informal public performance frequently took place on the Price Center Triton Steps and in the Graffiti Stairwell

located in Mandeville. The Triton Steps became our designated area for jam sessions and rehearsals, often in broad daylight amongst student traffic.

In the months during the winter quarter mobilizations, we used public spaces on campus to rehearse mainly because there were no other enclosed spaces available, especially to house our frequent, long lasting meetings and rehearsals. However, in retrospect these public rehearsals contributed to our sense of empowerment and self-determination. Similar to the large-scale performances and protests in which we engaged, this process was a reclamation of public space, an embodiment of the “our university” maxim. Our sessions incorporated various percussive layers and improvisatory vocal styles. Informal public performance was a key aspect of our cohesion as a group and often served as a platform on which to cultivate new material. In a sense, it also allowed us to reach the broader public (whether our presence and music was desired or not) by taking up space with our bodies, voices and music. These public performances had to do with claiming spaces, asserting identity, and demanding visibility in a campus where we felt silenced and marginalized. In essence, these jam sessions had to do with us artistically and sonically inhabiting institutionalized spaces, but also politically *claiming* them with our bodies and voices.

One evening after an Art Collective general body meeting, held in the Price Center's 2<sup>nd</sup> floor east wing, some of us remained in the lounge area outside of the CCC Comunidad Room. I was playing cajon and beatboxing over which a small group of my collaborators were freestyling. It was a

particularly energetic jam session, one that seemed to flow seamlessly between laughter, side conversations and musical-lyrical entrainment. Bryant and another Art Collective member had staged an impromptu freestyle rap battle, which accentuated our levels of vigor. As the battle began to climax, a redshirted Price Center staff member broke us up and informed us that if we did not stop “making noise,” security would remove us from the building. This had a salient impact on us. We felt as though we were being subjected to an aggressive force that sought to silence us. This was especially damaging to our collective sense of belonging on campus, given our preexisting feelings of exclusion from university spaces. Many of us had already felt unwelcomed in our departments, or that our histories and heritages were not reflected in their representations of art. Moreover, while an outsider may have perceived this situation as a matter of noise or disruption monitoring, we experienced it as an attack on our subjectivities and a policing of our already subdued human agencies.

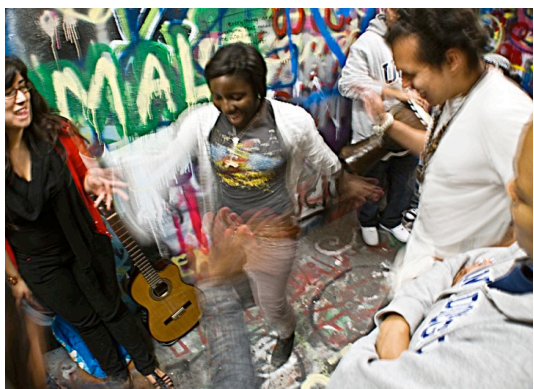
An interesting epilogue to this anecdote—about 2 months later, we held a rehearsal in the same area from which the staff member had previously escorted us out of. This time we were in a group of twelve aligned in a V-formation; I played cajon while others recited spoken word pieces and practiced step routines. This was our final rehearsal before our show at the 2011 Students of Color Conference in Santa Barbra, so energy was high and the pressure made us impervious to any consequence of “disrupting” the Price Center. Ironically, in the middle of one of our run-throughs, I spotted the same staff member who disrupted our jam session last time. He approached. I was not quite sure if it was

our increase in size or our more intentionally orchestrated organization, but he hesitantly looked at us briefly then walked away without saying a word. This was a victory for us because we were able to make the space our own; we moved the furniture to make room and had a decent amount of community members sitting around us watching. It was a feeling of empowerment to be within this swarm of energy and creativity that transcended university restrictions, even if just for one evening.

Other instances of space appropriation and reclamation were not met with such compliance from university staff and students. I recall vividly the expression on the faces of the students in Price Center cafeteria as my collaborators and I marched past them. Our experimental found-sound marching band incorporated cans, steel pipes, trumpet and bullhorn-amplified text evoked responses of disgust or indifference. A man at the phone recycling kiosk came in arms distance of me and shouted “you’re obnoxious,” a remark I took with a grain of salt and rebutted with louder can shaking and beating. A similar critique was catapulted at our saxophone player, which was answered with an explosive free jazz riff. Not to mention the long days of protesting and organizing only to return to my apartment and hear my roommates complaining about the “annoying protesters and their distracting demonstrations.” There was an instance when I overheard my roommate in our kitchen express that he “just wanted to get his work done and not worry about all the issues on campus.” Yet it did not occur to him, and many other naysayers, that the individuals protesting were *also* students attempting coursework, exams and deadlines. This type of

standpoint reveals a level of privilege. These critics of the protests felt unaffected by the class or race centered issues, yet these are issues that directly affect them. Perhaps, to some of them, money is not a concern due to their socioeconomic status, or they somehow do not feel the civic responsibility to speak out against racism within their community.

In some cases we consciously chose to occupy less restrictive areas. For example, the Graffiti Stairwell was the site of a monthly event called “Basement Beat Tuesdays,” in which members met to jam in the highly resonant reverb-drenched hallways. The Graffiti Stairwell is located in an abandoned area of UCSD's old student center in the Mandeville wing of buildings.



**Figure 2.1:** Chevy dancing at a jam session in the Graffiti Stairwell (photo by Jorge Narvaez).



**Figure 2.2:** Triton Steps open jam session (photo by Jorge Narvaez).

It is surrounded by classrooms, which have been out of commission for years, though a few still function as visual art class spaces. In contrast to the new pristine, highly policed Price Center, this space is “liminal,” or “at the edges of structure, in marginality; and from beneath structure”(Turner, 1969, 128). The walls are covered with graffiti; the narrow confines brought us together in close



clusters. Most sessions would start off with members auditioning new pieces and then we would break into spontaneous improvisations, which incorporated protest chants and freestyle rapping and dancing. These moments were ones that defined our musical and creative growth, facilitated our assertion of agency and affirmed our subjectivities, while bringing us closer as a community.

### **Spectacle and Visibility**

Often, in our group dialogues and meetings, my collaborators and I discussed and questioned the definition of “political art.” These conversations materialized most frequently in the fall of 2011 after the movement. At this point we had been known for our politically charged poetic work, so we found it important to conceptualize our political work on our own terms. Meanwhile, our general body meetings in the beginning of the academic year expanded in number and in participants’ backgrounds and skill levels. Some people who attended the meetings were amateur musicians, poets and painters or just students that were generally interested in art. Often in meetings we would engage in dialogues about what political art could be. During one meeting a few participants voiced that they didn’t know how to make their art “political.” A sax player and a visual artist, in particular, felt as though they could not contribute to the conversation or identify the politicized aspects of their art. Some of the Art Collective veterans (members involved in the movement during the prior year) and I began to think about what exactly our vision was for the group. Was it to make a specific type of art, which exclusively addressed sociopolitical issues? How were we defining political art or socially conscious art?

These are important questions, which I do not have ample time or space to fully solve; however, in the case of Art Collective, our definition of political art has been informed by our engagement in the 2010 movement. Through our activism we learned that the body is political in the space of UCSD, and with our performance and art we are able to assert our identities and voice our experiences. To us, this process, our praxis, is inherently political. Perhaps, because some of the newer Art Collective members did not experience the movements in the way we did, they struggled with this definition of “political” art.

In a conversation with Bryant, we discussed our mutual feeling that something had changed within the Art Collective space. It seemed to have a different “vibe” than it did during the previous year’s student mobilizations. This climate change within the general group meeting had to do with the downward slope of the movement’s energy and momentum. There was, for one, less of a sense of urgency and immediacy. Secondly, (and this goes for the general environment of the community) the physical and psychological effects of the tireless organizing and the processing of the racial escapades had taken a toll on us. Many seemed to be processing internally more than outwardly. Perhaps the sparkle of our progress had been so bright during those times that the present revealed more worn-down bodies and psyches than in-the-moment creative luster. Regardless, some of us began to question why we were not performing as much and how our attendance had become so low? By winter quarter, Art Collective meetings had only a handful of attendees, mostly those who had comprised the original group. During a conversation with the director

of the Cross Cultural Center, this same question surfaced. She answered my question with another question: is Art Collective a *space* or a *group of people*? In grappling with this question I recalled my memories of the winter quarter of 2010 during all of the mobilizations, protests, and performances. There was a clear bond formed between all my collaborators and I, which we have not been able to replicate with new members that joined in the quarters that followed. I have always viewed Art Collective as more than a group of people or an expanded network of individuals in the community. As Part II has revealed, I consider it as a space in many capacities. On a macro level, there is social space, which is constructed by structural powers. While on a micro level there is the space that Art Collective constructs within those structural confines. As Cresswell reminds us, the micro is always affected by the macro; however, it is the meanings, experiences and agency of the collective's members that Art Collective a place (Cresswell 12, 2008). Through public music making and the appropriation of space, we inscribed our identities into UCSD's environment on our own terms. Our bodies became the political link between space and identity.

Returning to the original question of the definition of "political art," I argue that, in our case, there is something inherently political about our bodies being in certain institutional places—especially ones that have historically excluded underrepresented groups from higher education. Art Collective's public performativity during the movement was politicized because of our occupation and reinvention of *public* space. However, how can our formalized

performances be regarded within the realm of representation, visibility and political power? There was a marked difference in our experiences of music making in the Graffiti Stairwell, as opposed to onstage performances outside of the protest realm (especially ones outside of the movement's timeline). Each type of performance was dependent on a level of spectacle. Although, how can our use of spectacle be understood through a politics of visibility and representation?

An analysis of our performance entitled *Spectacle* is a sufficient means through which to tease out some of these considerations. *Spectacle* was created for the UCSD Arts in Action Festival, a campus-wide artistic response to the racial incidents on the UCSD campus. The festival provided a forum for artistic responses featuring short one-act plays, music compositions, dance flash mobs, spoken word performances, and staged performance protests. Jade, the artistic coordinator of the festival worked with Art Collective to help create and coordinate our piece. The vision for the performance was to problematize some of the multiplex issues of visibility and representation within the realm of "ethnic art." Our goal was to achieve a form of nuanced ambivalence within our expression of identity and to resituate the possibilities and functions of spectacle. This type of ambivalence was a challenge in that it required the raced bodies on stage to be visible without becoming a spectacle; to depict "otherness" without commodifying or exotifying it in the traditional ways that multicultural shows often do. In fact, the introduction of the show bordered on parody, as a one of the group's graffiti artists sported a suit jacket and introduced the performance as a

“cultural exhibition.” The first act of *Spectacle*, Leslie, who is Salvadoran-Chicana activist-artist, entered the stage belly dancing to an accompanying music track dressed in Middle Eastern traditional garb. She executed a short choreographed dance that was abruptly interrupted by four other Art Collective members who surrounded her and disruptively commented on her performance and image. Comments like “oh girl I have to learn that for my boyfriend,” “you look so sexy” and “I know this restaurant you can work at dancing like that.” Overcome with this overbearing commentary, Leslie breaks through their clamor with a forceful spoken word piece. She delivered these powerful words with a fierce tremble in her voice, “I will *not* be appropriated, boxed, shipped, and sold out in your multicultural exhibitionist-lack-of social-consciousness, multi-colored yet *colorblind spectacle* of what you *think*... I am supposed to be.” The initial ambivalence of her archetypal multicultural show entrance first hooked the crowd in (they clapped along to the beat and cheered at times) then challenged their attraction to it. Jade explained that it forced the audience “to step out their moment of enjoyment... and force[d] them to remember that there [was] a body onstage in front of them performing something; and that they [had] to engage critically and that it [was] not just for their consumption” (Interview with Jade Power, San Diego, CA, May 13, 2010). In essence, this segment of *Spectacle* achieved a level of ambivalence and, by doing so, critically engaged the problematics of the representation of the racial “other.”

The next act featured Bryant, who marched onto stage thrusting a protest picket sign above his head and chanting, “no cuts, no fees, education must be

free.” He was met by an exaggeratedly sarcastic Julieanne, who says “what are you yelling about *this time?!?*” The interaction escalated and she finally told him that he should be going to class instead of wasting his time protesting. After this skit Bryant and I began a spoken word/rap beatbox/cajon duet in which he lyrically critiques this staged situation. This piece addresses two key concerns; the first is that of privilege, and the second that of representation and visibility of raced bodies. A salient moment in Bryant’s lyrical performance is a series of questions that poses:

You think I want to do this?  
 You think I *want* to skip class?  
 You think I want to miss my lecture  
 So that I can go march  
 Out in the hot raging sun?  
 For two hours pounding this big ass drum  
 And screaming at the top of my lungs  
 So that you’ll hear us?  
 Do you hear us?!

Byrant’s questions point to his feelings of obligation to fight for social justice; an obligation that, he explains later in the piece, is propelled by his family’s hardships and socioeconomic status as well as his racialization as a “brown body.” These are factors that may not occur to onlookers of protests who have different backgrounds than Bryant. Comparable to the example of my roommate, Julieanne’s character has the notion that ignoring the issues in will assure her the comfort of a regularly planned education. Bryant’s second point of focus of was the common misconception that racialized bodies are “up to no good,” violent and illogically hostile. He presents himself as a protester and then

critiques some of the common racialized perceptions of the act of public displays of discontent.

The piece continued with more spoken word pieces that addressed issues of visibility and representation through nuanced modes of spectacle. They attempted to challenge the audience to see beyond the racialized bodies before them and attain a deeper understanding of their subjective experiences. Diana, Chevy and Jenny performed a stunning trio in which they explored the casual (mis)use of the word “ghetto.” Shooting phrases between one another, often finishing one another’s lines, they mapped out the historical connotations of the term ghetto and the commodification and normalization of its use in contemporary society. This piece was a coded critique of the Compton Cookout, as “ghetto” was similarly used in the part’s invitation as a reductive identifier for black culture. Shortly after this piece finished, *Spectacle* climaxed with Chevy performing an explosive hip hop dance routine, which was abruptly interrupted by a sound collage that I triggered. As the collage seeped into the soundscape, our bodies zigzagging across the stage as some collaborators and I began a found-sound percussive performance. At this point Bryant and Chevy executed improvisatory breakdancing until the percussion pattern modulated into a sparser pattern, which then dissolved into silence as we all made our way upstage. We all stood, then, before the audience and stated our name and where we “repped” (our place of origin or neighborhood/community).

The observation can be made that this performance challenged local, UCSD-based acts of discrimination by putting personal experiences of inequality

in dialogue with systematic issues through music, dance and spoken word. Another observation is that *Spectacle* critiqued the surface-level brokering of cultural identity and ethnicity through cultural shows and festivals. These types of events cannot cultivate sustainable diversity, as they gloss over the sociopolitical contexts of the performers and their art practices. Further, a cultural festival cannot solve institutional issues of race and class; it entertains at the expense of overlooking the broader institutional issues that are embedded in the very fabric of our society. On another level, it attempts to forge “diversity” at the expense of the exoticization and cultural commodification. In other words, events like “salsa night” reveal little to nothing about Latino/a political struggles, rather it homogenizes ethnic identities and cultural subjectivity, which reinforces processes of fetishization and reinscribes systems of “othering.” *Spectacle* was an attempt to resist these modes of cultural consumption/production, and it used a UCSD facility to do so. It appropriated institutional space and subverted trivial modes of diversity management by strategically staging a variety of onstage spectacles.

The creation of this performance was a crucial process—one that deepened and expanded Art Collective's praxis. Our development as performers and activists requires us to think about the implications of our art and the obligations we have as artists with critical consciousnesses. Many of us embrace this obligation, as it gives us purpose and nurtures our passions and hopes for a better future. Yet, it can also be viewed as a reinscription of power and oppression in the case of the UCSD movement because many of my



collaborators were designated to create art that responded to and explained the injustices on campus. Therefore, atop the pressures of class deadlines and organizing demonstrations, and coping with an unsafe campus environment, the students-artists of Art Collective, being marginalized to begin with, felt obligated to un-marginalize themselves through their art and activism. Just as Bryant demonstrated in his piece, privilege allows one to stay complicit while others are obligated to bare the burden of fighting for social change. And while fighting for change, they are simultaneously facing immediate experiences of inequality, or as we put it, “real pain.” So in this context, our performances processes are both burdening and empowering, though essential to Art Collective's creativity-based praxis.

### **Visibility, “Preaching” and “Converting”**

Our performance of *Spectacle* underscores questions about the power of spectacle and visibility in formal performances. A discussion about visibility requires a critical look at the reach and reception of our work. To whom are we speaking in our performances and how does their political positionalities affect the dynamic of this exchange? To address these questions it is helpful to first look at the multiplex correlations of visibility, representation, and political power.

Various scholars have examined the concept of visibility and representation in the context of performance, cultural consumption, and social life (Debord 1967, Foucault 1969, Turner 1977, Bourdieu 1984, Butler 1990, Fusco 1995). I find the work of feminist scholar Peggy Phelan to be helpful in thinking

through *Spectacle's* multilayered representational aspects. In her 1993 book, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, Phelan examines the political implications of visibility and the “particular configurations of power and desire, which inform and infect our external gaze” (Phelan 27). One of her basic points is that the increased visibility of disenfranchised communities does not necessarily equate their increased political power. She writes, “While there is a deeply ethical appeal in the desire for a more inclusive representational landscape and certainly underrepresented communities can be empowered by an enhanced visibility, the terms of this visibility often enervate the putative power of these identities” (Phelan 7). In the realm of performance, Phelan posits that fetishized bodies become a reflection of the desire that they induce, as opposed to that of their own subjectivity. Further, she suggests that to be “unmarked” is to be outside of spectacle and “out of political surveillance”(Phelan 7). Similar to Foucault, she highlights the ways in which visibility traps the visible. For Phelan, “nonvisible, rhetorically unmarked aspects of identity” (Phelan 26) are essential to engage critically with the visibility politics of performance.

How can Phelan help us understand issues of visibility as they relate to Art Collective in the space of UCSD? Importantly, she allows us to zoom out of a local perspective and consider the broader implications of our work that transcend personal empowerment. She points out a trap of visibility—that it informs representation, which is determined by hegemonic order. The trap Phelan suggests becomes further complicated when related to the context of the movement at UCSD. Visibility was instrumental to the effectiveness of our

mobilizations to pressure the administration to sign the BSU demands. Our protests (and protests in general) require enhanced levels of visibility and the presence of bodies to be effective—they require a spectacle. Art Collective strategically merges spectacle and activism using critical thought and performance. We protest and perform, then critique those actions by incorporating questions of political representation within our art. Bryant used his lyrical performance as a way to deconstruct race-centered stereotypes of “angry protesters.” Leslie performs a commonly exoticized cultural dance, and then reveals the to the audience, through theatrics and spoken word, its problematic characteristics. In some ways, these pieces destabilize the power dynamics that exist between the visible (the state/the elite) and the invisible (marginalized bodies) or, in Phelan's terms, the “looking subject” and “the image of the other” (Phelan 26). Moreover, while the traps of Art Collective's visibility on campus do exist, our performances transgress mere spectacle because they bond our visibility with our critical consciousnesses and reflexive activism.

In some ways, Phelan's binary of visible-invisible assumes that the audience members/consumers are of communities that do not share similar subjective realities as marginalized artists. However, at our performances, this was often not the case. We performed *Spectacle* in front of various community members, activists, and socially conscious artists of color. Hence, much of our politics paralleled that of the crowd. However, in a protest climate such as March 4<sup>th</sup>, or in moments of critique from conservative standpoints, our work may be perceived in different, less affirming ways.

In their article, "*Preaching to the Converted*," Tim Miller and David Román deconstruct the common critique or, in their words, the "dismissive" that queer community theater is solely about gay issues and performed to gay audiences; hence, it cyclically articulates the same issues to the same group (Miller & Román 1995, 172). They argue that this meaning of the phrase reduces queer theater and other community-based work to mere "propaganda" or "victim art" and negates its artistic merit, not to mention the important cultural work it does for its communities (Miller & Román 1995, 173). In considering this notion of "preaching to the converted" I am reminded of an experience I had in the fall of 2010. A small group of Art Collective poets and I were having an informal rehearsal for a performance to be featured in a conference celebrating the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Ethnic Studies. The piece was a spoken word duet, in which the two poets drew heavily from the theories and critical frameworks promoted by ethnic studies discourse. The content was a critique of whiteness, privilege and systems of inequity that hinder marginalized youth from attaining access to higher education. Their delivery was rapid; the two poets seamlessly fired off poignant and concise phrases back and forth, sometimes finishing each other's sentences. At a certain point one recited the pledge of allegiance to the flag, while the other one recreated a simulated conversation between a mother and her daughter.

Captivated by the performance, I realized that I was late for a meeting with one of my colleagues from the music department, so I asked him to meet me in the facility where we were rehearsing. He arrived midway through a take

of the piece, after which the poets had to leave. After they had gone, Julieanne, a Pinay<sup>8</sup> poet and playwright, remained and asked us to give her feedback on a spoken word that she had currently been working on. After she finished her piece, my colleague began commenting on her poem as well as the piece that was previously rehearsed. His general critique was that the piece lacked subtlety and was a cliché representation of political struggle, or in his words, “a laundry list” of activist jargon. His comments initiated a dialogue between the three of us, which was thought provoking in some ways, but resulted in the poet feeling challenged in an uncomfortable way.

A few things can be drawn from this interaction. Most importantly is the fact that my colleague, being a white male, was exercising his privilege by questioning the validity of the content of the poetry presented, though he perceives his critique to be rooted in aesthetic value. To put it plainly, it was easy for him to reject this type of art because he will never have to experience the poet's particular struggle. His gaze is from the outside, where he is free from discrimination based on his racialization and feelings of being voiceless. In context of this example, positionality and privilege matter. My colleague dismisses the content of the poem without acknowledging its pertinence to the poet or to the community it was addressing. He was critiquing Julieanne's poem as a product and disregarding Art Collective's greater function as a space of shared experience and outlet for comfortably expressing experiences of oppression.

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<sup>8</sup> Pinay (pronounced /'pi:nɑɪ/) is a colloquial term for Filipina, the feminine form of Pinoy.

Miller and Román do not argue against “preaching to the converted;” instead, they subvert its accusatory and shaming applications by ascribing into it their own definition of the phrase. They assert that it should be defined as, “a descriptive which names the potential affinities between the two terms of its locution-preacher/congregation, performer/audience; [and] second... as a descriptive for community-based, and often community-specific, lesbian and gay theatre and performance” (Miller & Román 1995, 173). The concept of preaching to the converted presupposes two monolithic groups, the preachers and the converted, which, in itself, is quite essentialist. The authors’ re-envisioned preacher-converted relationship emphasizes the process and quality of the interaction, as opposed to implying a reductive model of theater that assumes queer artist’s only “preach” in order to convert. In essence, it highlights the fruitful interpersonal and communal processes that their performances cultivate. Feminist artist/performer, Holly Hughes, once said, “‘conversion’ is always unstable, that people are never, finally, converted to anything; there’s always ambiguity, ambivalence, and doubt. Performance... is a renewal of faith, and progressive politics are always faith-based” (Dolan, 2001 465). Hugh’s sentiment calls for a motion towards embracing the process of “conversion,” or as a Miller and Román phrase it the “constant state of negotiation” (Miller & Román 1995, 178) that performance offers.

Considering this take on “preaching” and “conversion,” my colleague’s critique of Julieanne’s poetry falls short—or is arguably invalid—because it fails to acknowledge the power imbalances that have influenced her trajectory; It falls

into the trappings of the “preaching to the converted” dismissive. Embracing Miller and Román’s version of the “preaching to the converted” model allows for a more thorough exploration of the preacher-converted dynamic in Art Collectives performances. We “preach” as a means of self-articulation and empowerment more so than to convert others (whether community members or “non-believers”). Yet, in our group meetings, rehearsals and conversations, I have noticed that the collective often grappled with the idea of “conversion.” While this is not a definite means to the group’s ends, it is still in our creed to reach people, and we hope that our work will contribute to social change. I believe that our work can be extended not only to identity-based communities—though this is crucial for personal empowerment and transgression—but also to broader audiences that have limited consciousnesses of, or investments in, issues of social justice. Yet, how might Art Collective’s work be more effective in front of audiences that share a political standpoint similar to that of Julieanne’s critic?

Evidently, Julieanne’s poem did not speak to him; however, maybe it wasn’t written for him? By this I mean that, as a political group performing in protests that have certain political agendas, we execute different pieces with those agendas in mind. Language and intentionality is important to consider when situating the performer-audience dynamic at our performances. To what and to *whom* are we speaking? Do we speak to ourselves and to only others that share similar struggles? To an injustice? An oppressor? Perhaps Julianne was not speaking directly to my colleague, but to his complacency in structural systems of oppression. It is not just the protest’s themes that influence artistic

direction and intentionality, it is also our trajectories and subjectivities that may or may not resonate with given audiences. This potential for dissonance or resonance presents itself more nakedly in the realm of public protests, taking into account hecklers and onlookers with varied interests and investments in the issues being contested. For instance, our performance at the March 4<sup>th</sup> rally exemplifies the complexities of “preaching” and “conversion”, among other important issues. Imagine a moment similar to the one I reflected on in Part I, in which I was on stage immersed in the moment of utopia with my collaborators. Now picture Julieanne’s critic within the crowd amongst others with divergent political positionalities. Perhaps, instead of feeling moved by the performance some of these audience members may have felt confused, indifferent, annoyed or guilty of being complicit in the perpetuation of the issues presented on stage. This example begs the question: to accomplish levels of true utopia, does the performance have to reach people from all trajectories and political stances? If not, do we fall back into the trappings of preaching to the converted?

Instead of venturing answers to these questions, I feel the need to accent the important work that Art Collective did during the movement, and continues to do on campus through art and activism. Our process of music making across lines of diversity is of more value than reaching those in need of “conversion.” This being said, I offer a telling sentiment provided by an anonymous onlooker of our March 4<sup>th</sup> performance. In an interview, she commented on her experience during our performance. She remarked:

Being surrounded with like-minded individuals helped me interact with the performance by clapping and cheering throughout its



delivery... I felt the safety in numbers, and a sense of community through commonality. It didn't really affect my political understanding, but the way I could express my solidarity; because I wasn't necessarily learning anything new in terms of political issues but it allowed me to hear different expressions of oppressions that I know, understand, feel, stand in solidarity with.

Her sentiment speaks to the profundity of the performance for reasons that transcend "conversion," ones that are rooted in solidarity and shared experience. In this example, she highlights the importance of having a connection with the performers based on similar experience and identity. The concept of being "converted" is not considered because more crucial connections and interactions take precedence. This "commonality" that my collaborator recalled articulates a shared reality in the *present*, as opposed to some utopian vision of the future (à la Dolan's "utopian performative"). Later in the interview she said, "I didn't necessarily feel a sense of hope for a better future, but a sense of relief that these forms of oppression (some of which I have experienced) were being voiced and brought to the forefront. That's where my sense of community and commonality comes from. My hopes are never fantastical." When pitted against Dolan's interpretation of "utopian performatives," my collaborator's remark seems to reveal a different interpretation of the performance's functionality. Dolan writes, "theatre and performance can articulate a common future, one that's more just and equitable, one in which we can all participate more equally, with more chances to live fully and contribute to the making of culture" (Dolan 2001, 455). These two sentiments both emphasize commonality but in two different respects—hoping for future social justice and feelings of in-the-moment solidarity. Perhaps this is

just realism/pessimism butting up against naivety/optimism—or maybe it is a simulated encounter between the preacher and the converted.

The fact remains that, while performance is a method of conversion, or at least a mode of social intervention/subversion/resistance, it is possible that the “utopian performative” will not carry over into tangible social change. This is an issue grappled with for decades amongst performance studies scholars like Dolan, and one that I feel is worth engaging. One may argue that art and performance only gets activists so far in the quest for social justice, especially if the ones “preaching” cannot reach “unconverted.” This is an important concern, however I believe that one cannot simply apply quotas to activism or devalue localized “small” levels of change. Activism cultivated through creative and accessible means has the potential to change, whether local or large-scale basis. This type of change has proved to be effective in the case of Art Collective at UCSD. This is because the music and art created was essential to many of our reflections and contributed to the community’s resilience and, eventually, to action and changes in campus climate. In essence, Art Collective formed as a catalyst for solidarity and action during the movement; and beyond this, it has been an important tool to sustain community. It is my contention that praxis is at the heart of social change, and Art Collective operates as a space to cultivate such critical reflection, creativity and action.

## CLOSING THOUGHTS

Revolutionary dreams erupt out of political engagement; collective social movements are incubators of new knowledge.

—Robin Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*, 2002

My contention is that creativity is as important in education as literacy and we should treat it with the same status

—Sir Ken Robinson, *TED Lecture*, 2006

I cordially invite you to ask why can't it be?

—Lupe Fiasco, *All Black Everything*, 2011

Hence far, I have fleshed out some of the key moments and contexts that have informed Art Collective's purpose and structure, and used theories of space, place and visibility to further illuminate the broader implications of our work. Considering these contexts and frameworks, I will now work through some possible "definitions" of the collective. Though I view this project as one with fluctuating definitions— a continuing process rather than a study reducible to a finite outcome—I find value in mapping out the essential characteristics of Art Collective in order to explore the correlations of art, activism and identity at UCSD. The value in understanding the inner workings of this collective is the opportunity to gain insight into how communal music and art making can be used to implement critical pedagogy and social movements, as well as to navigate feelings of marginalization on a university campus.

Art Collective can generally be defined as a socially conscious organization of UCSD student-artists who seek to address the intersecting issues of race, gender, class, and sexuality through music, performance and visual art

(markedly theatre, hip hop, spoken word, percussion, graffiti, and photography). Jade, in her introduction to our performance of *Spectacle*, provides another way of conceptualizing our work and credo. She remarked, "this group of students has been an inspiration to me for the way in which they apply their politics to their personal lives and individual interactions, for the way in which they combine their university-acquired-knowledge with a rich collection of lived experiences, for their loving spirits, for their incredible talent, and for their passion about their right to an education, to be heard, seen and understood." It is necessary to further expand these perceptions of the Art Collective. I would describe Art Collective as art-based praxis. It is a space and a process, an ever-modulating platform for creativity, identity exploration and community engagement. One cannot reduce it to an exclusive band or troupe; rather, it is an inclusive community-based project. As my collaborator Bryant articulated, "Art Collective cannot be separated from its community" (Interview with Bryant Pena, San Diego, CA, April 28, 2011). Because we have an open space that constantly incorporates newcomers, Art Collective is an ever-growing base of like-minded community members, some of which are not self-proclaimed artists. The space is an extension of broader communities that shares similar visions of social justice, and goals of inner exploration and personal growth. These communities are cultivated by centers on campus like the CCC, Student Promoted Access Center for Education and Service (SPACES), the Woman's Center. In other words, these communities and Art Collective are woven

together by ideology, but also through their shared participant memberships and physical spaces.

Art Collective is a matter of retention rather than a matter of production. To solely analyze our art would be to overlook the rich processes and space cultivation that make this collective distinctive. Thus, I will pinpoint the central aspects that comprise our processes of art making. Below is a list of statements collectively compiled by my collaborators and I, which illustrates some of Art Collective's essential principles:

- Art Collective is a space where we rearticulate ourselves through art
- Art Collective is a space where we translate ideologies, emotions, and struggles into artistic spectacles, which have the potential to positively influence the climate of our campus
- Art Collective is a space where we theorize through art and performance
- Art Collective is a space where we attempt to dismantle the constructs of the university in order to rebuild new spaces of inclusion on our own terms
- Art Collective is a space where we deconstruct hierarchies of oppression
- Art Collective is a space where we embrace the strength in difference
- Art Collective is a space where we reconcile our positions as students and activists; *existing* in the university yet *resisting* the university

A few themes arise from these tenets, which are helpful in honing in on the importance of Art Collective. One overriding theme is the construction and articulation of identity through the merging of art and theory. The theories and ideologies learned in the classroom are catalysts for our art and activism. Art Collective provides a platform for us to grapple with our position within the university. This leads to the next theme, which is a collective feeling of

marginalization experienced at UCSD. Our experiences of oppression on campus, as well as experiences within our immediate and distant histories, impact the art we produce and the dialogues in which we engage. In essence, the space Art Collective creates provides us with tools to cultivate critical, personal consciousnesses and to build and strengthen our community while enhancing our activism. These themes fit within two main frameworks that are helpful to understanding the salience of Art Collective: space and process/praxis. These frameworks have helped me to situate my collaborator's insights, as well as my own critical reflections. The process of writing this thesis is mirrored by that of Art Collective—a process informed by the culmination of action, theory, and self-reflection.

Situating Art Collective requires conceptualizing it as both a space and a process. The space of Art Collective incorporates the narratives of diverse ethnicities and political struggles. It allows for members to cultivate performances that reflect and channel the narratives of their communities and past struggles. Importantly, these performances are constructed on the artists' own terms and from critical standpoints. In this space, we explore alternate ways of performing and art making that engage critical race theory and postcolonial studies. As a process, Art Collective provides a medium through which internal reflection, self-determination, and empowerment are garnered. When viewed through these lenses, our work can be further understood as an alternate space for learning and personal and artistic development, one that has the potential to transform the world around us.

To conclude, I return to Freire's idea of praxis. He links the process of reflection to concrete change and to the attainment of human agency. Art Collective's reflections are organized through communal music making, which provide us with a platform on which to construct collective feelings of hope. It is a space in which reflection and theory are coded into musical and lyrical interaction, which then become catalysts for internal and external revolutions. Our deep organizing and creative-based activism afford us the tools to explore and reflect on our identities and uncover our ancestries. These elements are at the core of Art Collective's purpose. In an interview, Leslie reflected on her process of writing a spoken word piece entitled *Transnational Chicana*. She stated, "when I first performed it I cried. It's different. It's vulnerability. It's a different type of activism that's internal; to deconstruct and construct who you are. So, who I am and how I've been socialized to be; that internal processing and writing it down is activism" (Interview with Leslie Quintanilla, San Diego, CA, May 6, 2010). Leslie's insight is essential to conceptualizing the intersections of identity, activism, and art. It also illustrates Art Collective's creativity-based praxis, and its deep impacts on its members.

In *Walkout*, the 2006 documentary about the 1968 Los Angeles Chicano/a student movement, there was a scene where a major loss had been taken. In this moment of defeat, a downtrodden activist said, "nothing has changed." The activist's comment was met with this powerful statement: "no, we've changed" (*Walkout*). During a speech at a student movement gathering on March 10, 2010, professor Daniel Widener shared a similar sentiment. He commented,

“[O]ne of the things that I've seen, and felt, and experienced the last couple of weeks is people *opening themselves*, even as we've started to open up the university, to the possibility that all of us might become *something different than who we were, or who we imagined ourselves to be*” [italics original] (Alvarez, et al. 171). These parallel stances pinpoint a fundamental premise of Art Collective's praxis. They identify inner reflection and growth as a primary component of social change and accent how individuals are changed *through* process. From this standpoint, process becomes the vital center of change and freedom dreams.

My experience in the movement and as a member of Art Collective has shaped my perception of self and my perception of activism and political art. Our performances and creative practice have illuminated new dimensions of action; ones that allow us to collectively imagine and perform what new futures may look like. Our current mission is to secure the collective's foundation so that, as we all filter out of the university, a space remains on campus in which art activism and identity may be explored. This is a matter of retention of students of color and a means of sustaining movements for equitable public education at UCSD. A central goal of this project is to insure that Art Collective remains a resource for generations to come, as we move towards the future of UCSD.



## APPENDIX A: TIMELINE OF THE MOVEMENT

Below is a timeline of the events that underscored the UCSD student mobilizations during the winter of 2010 (courtesy of Edwina Welsh, Coordinator of UCSD Cross Cultural Center).

### **UC San Diego Timeline of Events: Fall 2009 – March 24, 2010**

#### Pre-Context

Summer 2009	Black Students from various UC campuses pen the “Do UC Us” report sent to campus administrations, UCOP, faculty, and staff
Fall 2009	Coalition of students, staff, faculty, unions, and community members began mobilizing concerning impending budget cuts and tuition increases. Classes and teach-ins planned throughout the fall on the issues. Groups also planning for a national day of action March 4, 2010
	Student of Color Conference at UCSD. Over 1000 students UC wide Attend
Sun., February 14	Compton Cookout Party occurs at off campus location
Mon., February 15	Students are aware of the party as it is being promoted; begin organizing to speak out against it
Tues., February 16	Letter sent to campus community by Chancellor condemning party
Wed., February 17	University launches campaign: <b>Racism: Not in Our community</b>
Thurs., February 18	California state legislators convene on the steps of the state capitol to condemn racist acts at UC San Diego
	Koala TV airs a live broadcast on Student Run Television using racial epithets and slurs. Refers to students of the BSU and others with the “N” word

- Fri., February 19      BSU and other students respond to the student broadcast and issue "A State of Emergency" with 31 demands to be met by the Chancellor and university. **Real Pain Real Action** campaign launched by the students
- Media arrive on campus to cover the "State of Emergency." Students organize impromptu demonstration and demand that the Chancellor and campus leadership view a taping of the student run television program
- The Chancellor reads to the campus community present the 31 demands.
- The Chancellor and key leaders meet with 20 student leaders for dialogue
- Sat- Sun, Feb 20-21      Faculty Group meets to discuss faculty response. Community members meet on Campus to support BSU and discuss community response
- University leadership meets over the weekend and launches the **Battle Hate** website
- Wed., February 24      Administration organized Teach-In held. Second student press conference held prior to the Teach-In. Students enter the Teach-In, speak, and then lead the students out for the Teach-Out. Students from several nearby campuses are involved: SDSU, UCR, UCLA, CSUSM
- Student government freezes media funding temporarily while it sorts out how to deal with rogue student publications that are mean spirited and attack students
- Thurs., Feb. 25      Student government holds highly charged forum on freezing student media funding.
- During meeting text messages and photos are sent to students stating a noose was discovered in the library
- Fri. Feb, 26      Noose discovery sparks large protest on library walk
- Crowd size grows. Chancellor and key leaders address the crowd, meet with key student leaders all morning. Students ask that the university be shut down

	BSU criticizes the university's response to its demands as being unsubstantial
	Students occupy the Chancellor's Administrative Complex and the Chancellor's office for the remainder of the day. No arrests are made and the students leave in the late evening peacefully
Sat-Sun, Feb 27-28	Black History Month Brunch—key alumni and community leaders build bridges between administrators and students
Mon., March 1	University administration holds large meeting with University leaders, BSU, and their faculty supporters to discuss the demands
	A crudely fashioned homemade KKK hood is found near by the library. The Chancellor meets to discuss with key student leaders, urges staying focused on student demands
Thurs., March 4	BSU and university administration sign agreements and change the terminology from demands to common goals
	Crowds of students wait outside to learn of the outcome
	Students join approximately 800 other protestors (students, faculty, staff) for the nationally organized "Day of Action"
Thurs., March 11	BSU leaders visit University of California senior leadership in Oakland
Sat., March 20	California State Assembly-member Isadore Hall hosts community forum with other local State Assembly-members and elected officials at UCSD to address intolerance in higher education
Wed., March 24	BSU leaders meet University of California Regents and present their frustrations and demands at the meeting
Spring 2010	Campus turns Battle Hate website into <b>Campus Climate</b> website and posts the updates and progress on all Common Goals (previously called demands). Website continues to be updated
	Campus creates Council on Climate, Equity and Inclusion, similar groups convened by each UC campus, by the UC Office of the President (system) and the UC Regents

## APPENDIX B: DO UC US REPORT

Below is a copy of the “Do UC Us” report, a document authored collectively by black students from various UC campuses and presented to their respective campus administrations, UCOP, faculty, and staff (courtesy of Edwina Welsh, Coordinator of UCSD Cross Cultural Center).

### **Do UC Us?**

Campaign to Increase Numbers of African-American Students at the University of California, San Diego

#### **Opening Statements of the UC San Diego Black Student Union**

We, the Black Student Union of the University of California, San Diego, in order to assist the University of California San Diego with Black yield, campus climate, and the overall diversity of the university as stated in the principles of community, provide this report.

“We affirm each individual's right to dignity and strive to maintain a climate of justice marked by mutual respect for each other.”

“We value the cultural diversity of UCSD because it enriches our lives and the university. We celebrate this diversity and support respect for all cultures, by both individuals and the university as a whole.”

With these statements of the University of California, San Diego's value of diversity, we would like to emphasize the reason why we strive to increase the yield of Black students at the University of California, San Diego. As stated by the university, diversity plays a critical role in the college experience and our lives in general. Many of the members of the Black Student Union can attest to the positive experiences we have had at UC San Diego when collaborating with other students of diverse backgrounds. Enriching interactions such as these are often identified as highlighting moments of learning and growth in a students' college experience.

However, in order for ‘enrichment’ to occur among students all around campus, students must be able to interact with other students of diverse backgrounds. Currently, the chances or probability of UCSD students interacting with a Black student on campus is slim to nothing because there are such a small number of Black students that make up the student population. Therefore, this crucial element of cultural and social enrichment among UCSD students is not

occurring. In order to address the lack of social interactions, as well as the isolating experience of Black students at UCSD, the University of California, San Diego must recognize and analyze the problem at hand, commit to proactive solutions, and collaborate with those, such as the members of the Black Student Union, in order to increase the number of Black students at the university. We passionately feel the Black Student Union will be a strong asset in the University's attempt to increase African American yield, and in solidarity with the Black/Afrikan Student Unions across the UC system, are committed to the activities we have proposed and any efforts the University of California, San Diego puts forth as well.

Building on the models at University of California, Los Angeles and University of California, Berkeley, we feel that one of the first and most effective steps to increasing the number of African-American students at UC San Diego is to have a Black Admit Overnight Program as part of a series of yield events that will reach out to prospective African American students. It is our hope that with the information provided in this report, and the sincere commitment of the African American students in the UC system, you will join us in solidarity in creating a more welcoming environment that celebrates the diversity African American students bring to the University of California, San Diego.

### **University of California, San Diego's Lack of Diversity in Numbers**

For the 2009-2010 academic year, the number of enrolled African-American students at the University of California, San Diego is 299 out of 22,500 which constitutes only 1.328% of the student body population. For the 2009-2010 academic year, 1,639 African-American students applied to UC the University of California, San Diego. Of the 1,639 applicants, only 333 African-American students were accepted, which is 20% of the applicant pool. Of that 333 50 freshmen applicants decided to submit their student intent to register (SIR); for the transfer students, only 52 submitted their SIR for the University of California, San Diego.

Of the 333 admitted students, 172 were also accepted by the University of California, Los Angeles and/or the University of California, Berkeley. The other 161 applicants were not admitted by either the University of California, Los Angeles and/or University of California, Berkeley. Of the 172 applicants who were admitted to the University of California, San Diego as well as the University of California, Los Angeles and/or the University of California, Berkeley, only 10 applicants submitted their SIR for the University of California, San Diego. Furthermore, of the 161 applicants only 40 enrolled at UC San Diego.

Another interesting fact is that of the 1,306 African-American students who were not admitted to the University of California, San Diego, 74 of them were admitted by either the University of California, Berkeley or the University of California, Los Angeles. To attempt to address this discrepancy, the University of

California, San Diego's Office of Admissions plans to do a pilot with the University of California, Los Angeles in order to analyze the basis of acceptance of these 74 students. In addition, with this pilot explore how much the University of California, San Diego would benefit from adopting the University of California, Los Angeles's holistic admissions criteria (See Table 2). Although we are questioning the use of Eligibility in the Local Context (ELC) points within UC San Diego's admissions criteria, 21 of the 50 enrolled Black freshmen were accepted as ELC students (See Table 3).

(See Table 1A, Fall 2003-Fall 2009 Freshmen Yield, and Table 1B Fall 2003-Fall 2009 Transfer Yield)

### **University of California, San Diego Current Yield Efforts**

- A letter was sent on behalf of the Chief Diversity Officer (Dr. Sandra Daley) to all Admitted Students which included a special video message from her.
  - The letter addresses the "importance" of enrolling a diverse student body, presents information regarding the African American Studies and Chican@/Latin@ Arts and Humanities minors, as well as other ethnic-specific programs on campus, and highlight the services of the Community Centers (Women's Center, LGBT Resource Center and the Cross Cultural Center)

### **University of California, San Diego Current Yield Efforts**

- Regional receptions were hosted in Los Angeles, San Diego, and the San Francisco/Bay Area for newly admitted students and their families.
  - A Black Student Union representative was sent to the San Francisco Bay Area Reception, as well as representatives from MEChA. The BSU representative who was in attendance at this reception reported that there were no African-American admits in attendance.
  - The reason why there was such a lack in African-American students in attendance at the SF/Bay Area Reception for UC San Diego was due to the fact that it was scheduled concurrently with that of both UC Los Angeles and UC Berkeley's overnight yield programs for African-American admitted students.
- Conducted Freshmen and Transfer Phone-a-thons for newly admitted underrepresented students.
  - These calls could be more effective if they were not just one phone call informing students that they were accepted into UC San Diego, rather a call where admits have an opportunity to make a

- connection with current students who could possibly share similar experiences.
- Furthermore, we feel that current UC San Diego African American students should be able to contact newly admitted Black students, as done by UC Santa Cruz and UC Berkeley.
  - We are in complete agreement with the 2007 Advisory Committee on Increasing Yield of Underrepresented Students' recommendation of inviting Black and Chicano/Latino Alumni Association affiliates and members of the Student Affirmative Action Committee (SAAC) and Student Initiated Outreach Committee (SIORC which has now been renamed to Student Initiated Access Programs and Services-SIAPS) to participate in the annual Phone-a-thons.
  - Visited select high schools in the San Diego and Los Angeles basin.
    - Fnann Keflezighi went on the trips with the Admissions representatives, Biology faculty, and Financial Aid representative to the selected high schools in San Diego (Helix, Preuss and Otay Ranch) and those in the Los Angeles county (Bravo Medical Magnet, California Academy of Math and King Drew) in the Spring as a student representative in the Spring, as a yield effort.
    - Both Fnann Keflezighi and the alumni who were in attendance did not feel that the visit was structured enough, nor as effective as it could have been in making UC San Diego appealing to African-American students.
    - Students were very reluctant to ask questions or speak because of the way the space was presented and dominated. As if UC San Diego needed more students of color solely to increase their numbers not because of a true commitment to diversity as they claim in the University's mission statement.
  - UC San Diego worked collaboratively with SPACES to plan the Overnight Program for newly admitted students attending fourth and fifth quintile schools from the San Diego County, Imperial County, and Inland Empire.
    - As students who volunteered and even were host in the Overnight Program, we saw how effective this program was for the students to feel acquainted with the campus and the UC San Diego community
    - SPACES had a 75% yield rate in their 2008 overnight, and 72% in their 2009 program.
    - This proved to us that having admitted African-American students do a similar overnight program can have a great impact on increasing overall yield at UC San Diego as seen with SPACES efforts, UC Los Angeles, UC Berkeley, UC Santa Cruz and countless other UC's efforts.
  - Worked with campus community groups to assist with the Affinity Group workshops and welcomes held during Admit Day.

- This activity proved to be quite effective, although the number of students and parents in attendance was very low. In order to make this effort more successful, we feel it is, again, very important that current UC San Diego students be the ones to contact the admitted students for Admit Day/the Affinity Group workshops.
- Conducted numerous Financial Aid workshops for prospective and newly admitted students and their families.
  - Although UC San Diego makes the effort to present relevant Financial Aid information to its admitted students, many students of color come from underprivileged and/or first-generation backgrounds where the students and parents' are not familiar with the Financial Aid process. Because UC San Diego's Financial Aid website page is not the easiest to interpret, we feel that it is necessary to provide a sample Financial Aid package that includes a breakdown of each component (ex: Subsidized Stafford Loans, PLUS Loans, UCSD Grant-in-Aid etc). In addition, a student perspective should also be included in the presentation in order to address concerns of the students/parents that are often specific to underprivileged and/or first-generation backgrounds.

The following three yield activities were directed towards increasing the yield of underrepresented transfer students. The Black Student Union is rarely, if ever, notified of these efforts nor have we seen the numbers on the effectiveness of these yield activities and therefore cannot speak on the effectiveness of these programs.

- Conducted routine visits at 34 Community Colleges in Southern and Northern California with significant enrollment of underrepresented students.
- Participated in numerous community college fairs throughout the State.
- Conducted special tours for prospective community college transfer students.

### **University of California, San Diego Campus Climate**

For decades UCSD has been known to have a socially "dead" environment, but more than that, the campus struggles with developing and cultivating a socially healthy climate for particular groups of students to feel welcome.

### **University of California, San Diego Campus Climate**



- As members of a UC-wide student coalition, University of California African-Black Coalition, we have found that the issue of poor campus climate is prevalent on all of the campuses within the UC system.
  - Only 35% of students “agreed” with the statement: “In general, my campus is supportive of its Black students.”
  - Only 21% of students “agreed” with the statement: “The community surrounding my campus is diverse and welcoming of Black students.”
  - Only 20% of students “agreed” with the statement: “I trust the student government on my campus to consider how their decisions impact Black students.”
  - 76% of students “disagreed” with the statement: “I never hear negative statements about Blacks used by non-Black people on my campus.”
  - 77% of students “agreed” with the statement: “The BSU is a valuable source of support for Black students on my campus.”

*State of the Black Union: Black Students in the UC System : John Johnson  
 Doctoral Candidate, Social Psychology, UC Santa Cruz*

- As taken from the Bunche Research Report, Vol. 4, No.1, *Gaming the System: Inflation, Privilege, & the Under-representation of African American Students at the University of California:*

“Anecdotal evidence suggests that many African-American applicants perceive the racial climate at UCSD as a hostile one, opting not to attend the campus after being offered admission. Similarly, the low enrollment numbers of Black admits could reflect their fear of experiencing racial isolation at the university because of its exceedingly small African-American population” (Bunche, 21).
- An excerpt from *Study Group on University Diversity Campus Climate Report* further discusses what “campus climate” means and why a hostile climate is important to address:
  - What do we mean by “campus climate”?
  - Campus climate is a measure—real or perceived—of the campus environment as it relates to interpersonal, academic, and professional interactions. In a healthy climate, individuals and groups generally feel welcomed, respected, and valued by the university. A healthy climate is grounded in respect for others, nurtured by dialogue between those of differing perspectives, and is evidenced by a pattern of civil interactions among community members (UCR Framework for Diversity Report). Not all aspects of a healthy climate necessarily feel positive—indeed, uncomfortable or challenging situations can lead to increased awareness, understanding, and appreciation. Tension, while not always positive, can be healthy when handled appropriately. Conversely, in an unhealthy environment, individuals or groups often feel isolated,

marginalized, and even unsafe. The University of California strives to create and promote healthy climates across its campuses, where all community members, including students (graduate, undergraduate, and

### **University of California, San Diego Campus Climate**

professional), staff and faculty feel welcomed, supported, included and valued. Campus climate is a multifaceted reflection and manifestation of diversity. Campus climate is about moving beyond the numbers (Hurtado, 2007). The very presence of individuals from different backgrounds results in diversity. Climate, on the other hand, refers to the experience of individuals and groups on a campus—and the quality and extent of the interaction between those various groups and individuals. Diversity and inclusion efforts are not complete unless they also address climate. Stated another way, addressing campus climate is an important and necessary component in any comprehensive plan for diversity.

Why does climate matter?

- Research shows that a hostile campus climate directly impacts a student's ability to transition successfully into college (Hurtado, Milem, Clatyon-Pederson & Allen, 1999). In an unhealthy climate, students are less likely to adjust academically and are less likely to develop a sense of belonging on the campus. Furthermore, positive intergroup interactions affect academic outcomes positively.

([http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/diversity/documents/07-campus\\_report.pdf](http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/diversity/documents/07-campus_report.pdf) )

### **Black Student Union Constituency Testimonials**

- TESTIMONY #1: "What I've found difficult is having to be an "ambassador" for the entire black race wherever I go. I am often the only black person in most situations so I become the spokeswoman for every issue. Friends and colleagues often ask me my opinion on things like black pop culture, Obama's election and presidency, and they often have the urge to touch my curly hair without permission. I have become accustomed to my role as an "ambassador" and use these opportunities to share my thoughts on black politics or the differences between straight and curly hair. And most importantly I remind them that I am only one person and cannot testify to the opinions of the entire black community.

I also have to be aware of race sensitivity issues. For example, I served as

an RA and in an event celebrating black and African culture, what the group decided to use to decorate the venue were wooden animal sculptures and safari themed articles, having almost nothing representing the actual people who live in the continent! When a lot of people think about Africa, they often do not appreciate the rich and diverse cultures, languages, and customs that exist there. All they understand about Africa is what they see on National Geographic. And this was a group of student leaders who have had some diversity training and are supposed to be able to understand and serve the diversity of our student

### **Black Student Union Constituency Testimonials**

body. I made a comment to my supervisor about it, but I do not believe my suggestions to not make the same mistake again were taken seriously.

It is occasions like this one that show the value of having diversity in the workplace and the classroom. My colleagues who made this mistake did not realize that what they were doing was very offensive to my race. If I was not there, this probably would have gone unnoticed and could offend future black students who do not have the voice to complain. Having people from a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences benefits everyone because of the unique points of view and abilities each one can bring allows for the best and most comprehensive solutions to any challenge."

- TESTIMONY #2: "My experience at UCSD is one that had been an intense circumstance from the beginning. I am now entering into my fourth year at the university and have to re-assert my presence to the entire campus on a daily basis simply because I am constantly looked at to represent the entire Black Community. It urges me to present myself in the most presentable manor which is one aspect I appreciate, but the underlying issue is that I am constantly under surveillance no matter the scenario, from the classroom, to social atmospheres, faculty expectations, etc. The pressures of being part of such a small percentage of the students in such an environment is always effecting my personal aspirations, by this I mean I find myself constantly setting aside my personal intuition in order to progress and secure our place here as Black students. One specific instance I recall is being the only black male in a sociology class with over 300 students enrolled in total, while the class lecture covered and discussed black male sexuality. I was open to discuss this issue but in this situation I felt as if I could not actively participate in the discussion because of the fact that I would be representing more than just my own personal stance but rather the entire black male image. This mentality to answer in the most appropriate way possible combined with such a looming sense

of alienation would have been some what alleviated by the presence of others in the class room who could relate to the discussion personally as well. This is one specific incident, but scenarios such as this come into effect each day. The experience of a Black student at UCSD is one which is completely unique. The added pressures are constantly distracting and make it difficult to be attentive to academics even in a class room environment. To further complicate matters, my achievements are being constantly down played and demeaned by those around me. When I make any sort of progress within my status or situation students without the capacity to relate to my experience as a Black student tend to depreciate my work through statements such as "You only got here because you are Black", or "Well, you did good because they make it easier for you because your Black", while they have no clue the issues I endure daily simply to continue to stay in school, even before considering academics. It is a task in itself to combat slanderous words such as these, but regardless I proceed and continue to excel as best I can. Personally I feel as if I am alone at times and it

### **Black Student Union Constituency Testimonials**

takes a critical effort to find those who I can relate to. The addition of others who look like me around campus would be a positive reaffirmation that I can succeed and I'm not alone in such a hostile environment - it would provide hope to succeed and the inspiration to continue."

- TESTIMONY #3: "The most significant challenge that I encountered during my first year of college was the lack of ethnic diversity at UCSD. I was already hesitant to attend UCSD because of the staggering 1.3% Black population. Once I finally decided to attend the university, my concerns regarding the lack of ethnic diversity were confirmed. I was extremely disappointed to find that many of the students, faculty, and staff at UCSD lacked cultural awareness. Many people do not understand what it feels like to be one of the few Black people on the entire campus. I have heard expressions such as "people are just people" and "race shouldn't matter." This is true to a certain extent; however, it is very difficult not to take race into account when people are constantly judging me and/or assuming that I must behave in a certain manner due to my race. It is exhausting attempting to educate people on "Black history." I must constantly explain to people that I am not from the "ghetto," my hair texture is different, my parents are not on drugs, and I attend UCSD as a result of my GPA, SAT scores and extracurricular activities (not because of affirmative action). Please do not misunderstand me. I am not friends with Black people exclusively; I have friends of all ethnicities. However, it would be comforting to know that there are more people who can relate to my daily struggles and who understand what I have endured as a Black female in society.

In order to overcome my feelings of isolation and frustration, I decided to join the BSU (Black Student Union). I quickly felt a sense of community and family within this organization. Older members mentored the younger members and made us feel welcomed. During the weekly meetings, we discussed various topics concerning the Black community and we shared our personal experiences. This assured me that I was not the only person experiencing a slight disconnection from the university. If it were not for the BSU's commitment to me and other incoming Black students, I would have transferred to UCLA. The love and support that the BSU community offered me is ultimately what made me stay here at UCSD.

I wrote this testimony to inform the UCSD admissions officers, the chancellors, the UC regents, ect, of the importance of creating a comfortable campus climate for African Americans. I have spoken with other Black students who have felt or who are feeling a disconnection from the campus just as I have. If the Black students here on campus are not comfortable with the overall climate of the University, then how can we promote UCSD to other Black students and make the campus appeal to them? Admitted Black students will not want to attend UCSD if they know that the campus is not very "ethnic friendly." It is CRUCIAL that the atmosphere of our campus is changed to incorporate the needs of Black students; otherwise, the inadequate percentage of Black students attending UCSD will continue."

### **Black Student Union Constituency Testimonials**

- TESTIMONY #4: "I am one of UCSD's few African-American female students. My role on campus almost seems like a full-time job in itself. What bothers me isn't the borderline (and in some cases passed the line) offensive remarks, and overall ignorance of the individual students on campus, who may not have ever been exposed to any different cultures. Shockingly, what bothers me the most is the climate and overall 'feel' or 'vibe' of our campus. It definitely ties into our flawed campus climate that makes it so easy for minorities to be overlooked and unseen in the classrooms, sitting in Geisel, and most of the time completely absent from our campus's own restaurants.

I feel we need the support that should have been given to struggling universities like UCSD a long time ago. We have all the ideas, but it's time to get the assistance and move forward with the leadership of the BSU and other like-minded groups, to really make things fair for all students. If we all got accepted into the university, why do only some students get to feel welcome?"

- TESTIMONY #5: "I am from Long Beach therefore diversity has never been a problem for me. I knew before attending UC San Diego that the number

of Black students was extremely low. What I did not expect was the lack of administrative support and student understanding. My first introduction regarding the hostility at UCSD came via the Summer Bridge program. I was resistant, not wanting to essentialize a whole campus as ignorant, unaware, and uninterested, however, I soon learned that I was not viewed as an individual, but rather as a representation of a mythical figure. When I moved into my freshman dorms I was excited to meet new people, make friends, and more importantly create salient connections to help alleviate some of my homesickness.

What I found was an even greater longing for home, longing for understanding. I would come to the dorm from class and just became frustrated. I took a lot of naps freshman year. I just wanted to wake up, go to class, and not be bothered with roommates unaware of their privilege and disinterested in my experiences. I was tired of the bold, rude questions: why are you always watching BET, why do you need to go to BSU, why can you only say “nigga”, why do you think red rooster hot sauce is bomb, why do you talk in quadruple negatives? While I was wondering why conversations would always be about the newest Lil Wayne song, why I was always asked to go “mad Black woman” on loud roommates, and why they would bring up Roscoe’s Chicken and Waffles and give compliments as if Roscoe himself were my Uncle.

Being the person I am, I did not give a FUCK about the essentialized notions people had about me and my race. I could act loud, go “mad Black woman”, watch BET, eat fried chicken, yet still get an A on my paper, speak without an ounce of inferiority, and exert my opinions eloquently. I do not feel as if my roommates even still to this day understand the complexities, intersections, differences that are within people of African decent. I had a Black roommate from Ethiopia who was less “angry” and “bossy”. They associated our

### **Black Student Union Constituency Testimonials**

differences with the fact that I was from “ghetto” Long Beach and she had been adopted into a white family in Santee. They lacked the ability to see that we are different because we are not the same person. Blackness is not a disease that creates a typified collective; our personalities, experiences etc cannot be deduced into a small category. We are complex. My roommates do not know me and are probably content with the little pieces of myself I did share.

After my experiences my freshman year I was determined to get involved. I joined the BSU board as the Student Affirmative Action Committee (SAAC) representative where I began to understand that students of color in general were experiencing disconnect at UCSD even if they were represented on campus percentage wise. I realized that

campus climate in general needed to be tackled in order to retain Black students and all students of color at UCSD. Admissions was most definitely not enough. Getting involved for me meant that I would see Black faces often, struggle besides all students of color, and feel as if I had a group of people I could rely upon. I was no longer drifting along; I had finally found my safe space.

Next year I will be in Associated Students, SAAC, African American Studies Association, along with continuing my support of BSU and all the great work we do. I want to focus on administrators to make them understand that accepting Black students is not enough. There is a problem when a Black student does not feel comfortable walking around campus; there is a problem when a Black student has to play the representative of their Black race. No one wants to feel excluded, unrepresented, and misunderstood. I am usually the only Black student in my classes, even classes for my African American Studies minor. Not seeing Black students goes beyond a comfort level because it also affects my ability to form study groups, ask questions, and provide insights. I want the opportunity to see a familiar Black face next to me, also in front of me lecturing, so that I can feel as if I have an ally and can participate in class without thinking that people assume I know the answer or do not know the answer. I want to be free to be myself while being proud of my race.

The steps administrators need to take to improve campus climate and insure a greater yield is fund cultural based events, lecture series', yield and outreach programs while also getting students involved in the efforts enacted in the Chancellor's office in order to create a bi-directional mode of communication and accountability for students and administration. I do not have all of the answers. I do not have access to an unlimited amount of resources and money. What I do have is a voice tired of being silenced. What I do have is a passion to see change. I am prepared to dedicate my time to increasing the number of Black students on campus through programs and improving campus climate. I am ready to see the active dedication of administration as well in hopes that they educate the whole UCSD community and themselves."

### **Black Student Union Constituency Testimonials**

- TESTIMONY #6: "I feel as if I am like a social pariah in class. Example: One day I was sitting in class and I noticed there was NO ONE sitting next to me in all directions. I watched as each person came in the classroom they would look at me and sit somewhere else...even if they had to go around people and sit in the crowded middle. It made me feel as if they were scared of me or as if my skin was a disease."

- TESTIMONY #7: 'The campus climate at UCSD for me, personally, in terms of diversity (or rather its lack thereof) is, to put it simply, an incessant struggle to connect. I am a black Thurgood Marshall student entering my junior year as a structural engineer major, and so far it seems as if my classes and connecting with other students are on the same level of difficulty. This is not to be misunderstood with my ability to make friends-in which I have made more than enough. I believe there is a crucial difference between just making friends and actually establishing a connection with someone. When people from similar backgrounds and traditions meet, they can quickly create long-lasting, powerful connections. As a black student at UCSD, this type of connection is apparent among the other more prominent races making it easier for me to realize and feel this lack of connection. For instance, I roomed with 9 other guys my first year and we became the closest of friends and till this day I see them as my closest friends at UCSD. Nonetheless, I never felt a connection with them. The lack of connection was not at all because they didn't have the same color skin as me or because they didn't look like me. It was due to the fact that our backgrounds were so discrepant and some things they really just didn't understand about me and vice versa. For instance, they didn't understand why I brushed my hair or why I didn't want them throwing the "N" word around leisurely. On numerous occasions I would have to deal with the infamous series of "acting black" questions usually starting with "Why don't you..." and ending with "...like all black people do?" Besides the stereotypical comments that I reluctantly brush off, I respect the differences that we have. If there were no differences, life would be rather dull and mundane. But like my roommates, who share common backgrounds and traditions with each other and mostly everyone on campus, its nice to be able to share a connection with other people who come from similar backgrounds and can relate to you with common experiences. Essentially, I have to go through college coping with "understood differences" without ever really being understood myself. Near the end of fall quarter of my freshman year, I was printing transfer documents in order to transfer to UC Berkeley. I knew there was a more eclectic set of students there and I was sure to be able to find some that I could relate to. I became really close with my roommates at UCSD, but I just couldn't (no matter how hard I tried) relate with them in just about anything. I started going home every single weekend because I felt like I was suffering from "idiosyncratic asphyxiation" where I just couldn't be myself at school anymore. Fortunately, I met and CONNECTED with another black student who came from a similar background and lifestyle (we actually made a list of all our commonalities). If it wasn't for that student, I know for a fact that I would not be at UCSD. The university just didn't provide the social experience I hoped to experience while in college.



After two years at UCSD, I've been able to enjoy the various discrepant lifestyles and backgrounds with other black students whom I've been fortunate enough to connect with, and I believe that the crucial ingredient of "connection" has made my stay at UCSD so much more enjoyable. However, I believe the diversity issue at UCSD has much room for improvement. For me to find another black student in my class or even around campus for that matter is comparable to looking for a needle in a haystack. I believe everyone should be able to enjoy their stay at UCSD and be able to enjoy others no matter how different they are, but they should also be able to make those crucial connections with others with whom they have a lot in common. In fact, college students should not be "searching" for others that have things in common with them – it should be readily available. Instead, we should be looking forward to meeting new people and experiencing the different lifestyles other people from various lifestyles offer. Ultimately, this will offer every college student a great experience and a chance to mature culturally. As a black student at UCSD, I simply long to "fit-in" and enjoy an authentic "college experience".

### **BSU's Reaction to 2007 Advisory Committee on Increasing Yield of Underrepresented Students**

We, members of the Black Student Union, recently attended the Diversity Council Summer Retreat and met individually with the Chief Diversity Officer, Dr. Sandra Daley, about the current yield issue of African American students. She was apprehensive about us taking action on demands without giving our targets (Chancellor and Vice Chancellor) an opportunity to react to our demands. She also attempted to redirect our attention to faculty and "the campus as a whole," rather than administration. Her philosophy is that UC San Diego's yield issue is not just a Black issue (nor a historically underrepresented groups issue), but rather an issue across the board. She believes that any effort to increase the yield for one group needs to be implemented for all groups, because in her eyes, bettering the climate of the entire campus will automatically bring more underrepresented students. However, as long there is a group that makes up only 1.328 % of the undergrad population and another that represents 30%, we strongly feel that efforts to increase the yield of the 1.328% represented group while ignoring the other groups' yield is completely justified.

After reading the report, we feel that as students it is time for us to take action. The report clearly outlines effective yield activities and who should be involved in these activities, yet a proactive effort on the behalf of the Council members has not been made in order to put the report recommendations into action. Surprisingly, many of the activities that we came up with, or have seen other campuses adopt, were actually outlined in the 2001 and 2007 Diversity Reports. Therefore, we feel the demands we are making and the actions that we plan on implementing are feasible and imperative.

## Do UC Us Campaign Demands

- Short-term
  - Yield Activities
    - Phone-A-Thons: Have BSU members call admitted Black students
    - Black Admit Welcome Package: includes a Welcome DVD, letter from BSU and UJIMA, Black Directory, Postcard invitation to Admit Day, and a T-shirt/lanyard
    - Black Admit Overnight Program for the 2010 UC San Diego Admitted African-American Students

## Identified Allies

- The Black/Afrikan Student Unions of all UC undergraduate campuses
- Office of Academic Support and Instructional Services (OASIS) out of UC San Diego). Another strong asset of OASIS is that ATP hosts Summer Bridge, a free annual four week summer residential program for incoming freshmen who fit the criteria of being either low income or a first generation college student.
- TRIO Outreach Programs
- Student Promoted Access Center for Education and Service (SPACES)
  - Student-Initiated Access Programs and Services (SIAPS)
  - Academic Success Program (ASP)
- Student Affirmative Action Committee (SAAC)
- The Campus Community Centers which consists of the Cross Cultural Center, the LGBT Resource Center and the Women's Center
- African American Studies Minor
- UJIMA
- UCSD Chicano/Latino Concilio
- The UCSD Diversity Council
- Black Alumni Association

## Attached Documents

- Final Report Advisory Committee on Increasing Yield of Underrepresented Students March 2007 ([http://diversity.ucsd.edu/pdf/FINALREVISED\\_YieldAdvisoryCommitteeReport32607.pdf](http://diversity.ucsd.edu/pdf/FINALREVISED_YieldAdvisoryCommitteeReport32607.pdf))
- UC San Diego Admissions Criteria and Point Breakdown
- Mae Brown's Outreach, Recruitment and Yield Activities 2008-2009 Report

## APPENDIX C: BSU UPDATED DEMANDS

Below are the revised BSU's demands, which were signed by Chancellor Fox on March 4, 2010 (Black Student Union).

### **Updated Demands February 24**

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By bsu - Posted on 03 March 2010

STATE OF EMERGENCY: THE UCSD BLACK STUDENT UNION ADDRESS

Response needed by March 4th, 2010

To: UC San Diego Chancellor Marye Anne Fox

Vice Chancellors: Penny Rue, Paul Drake, and Gary Matthews Associate

Vice Chancellors: Ed Spriggs, Gary Ratcliff

Chief Diversity Officers: Dr. Sandra Daley and Glynda Davis

PREFACE:

It is with IMMEDIATE CONCERN and URGENCY that a state of EMERGENCY must be declared in order to address hostile and toxic campus climate being faced by various communities of color at the University of California, San Diego. We are dealing with a pernicious campus in which our safeties, in addition to our emotional, physical and mental well-being are constantly threatened. . This issue now merits substantive administrative action. In order to begin transforming this campus climate we must establish a base from which to build. The University has constructed a meaning of diversity along with diversity efforts that does not directly confront the institutionalized racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia faced by historically underrepresented and underserved people of color. We affirm diversity is the representation of historically underrepresented racial groups, underprivileged persons of low socio-economic background and women. We affirm the definition the University needs to put at the forefront when considering efforts to increase underrepresented and marginalized people of color on this campus. Diversity is not recruiting students from certain regions of the United States--this is a masked effort to privatize the University of California.

The University of California system is not representative of communities of color; low-income communities and other historically underrepresented and marginalized communities. The detrimental effect of the campus climate that we now witness is only a continuum of institutional, systematic racial inequalities and intolerance that administration has been well aware of through documentation such as the 2007 yield report as well as the "DO UC Us?" Campaign. Students in general feel isolated and unsupported, which contributes to the continuous cycle that prevents underrepresented communities from entering the university. For students of color, queer-identified students, and students from low socio-economic backgrounds, this has been a continuous struggle to validate our own presence at the university academically and socially.

We stand in solidarity and in struggle with all other marginalized and underrepresented communities on the UCSD campus, which include but are not limited to: our Native American and Indigenous brothers and sisters fighting for the repatriation of ancestral remains found on the University of California, San Diego campus and our fellow MEChistAs who are struggling to permanently place a Chicano mural on this campus as well as increase the number of Chicano/a Latino/a students on this campus, We understand the subsequent effects on access, yield, and retention of indigenous persons who do not feel welcomed and embraced by a campus that continuously disrespects the spirituality and unique culture of the native nations.

We will hold the University accountable to its mission statement that; "UC San Diego embraces diversity, equity, and inclusion as essential ingredients of academic excellence in higher education."

We would like to stress that none of the following demands are new. We will not be ignored anymore.

DEMANDS:

Access: WE DEMAND PERMANENT FUNDING FOR STUDENT-INITIATED ACCESS PROGRAMS.

As a public institution, UCSD has a responsibility to the historically underrepresented community that it should serve. On top of the fact that it has the Student Promoted Access Center for Education and Service (SPACES) doing more than enough work in the field of access, SPACES is a student-run and student initiated center—MEANING THAT STUDENTS ARE THE ONES DOING THE WORK OF THE UNIVERSITY. Yet, the funds of SPACES are not secured. With a budgetary crisis, it is now more important than ever for the funds of SPACES and Student Initiated Access Program and Services (SIAPS) to be secured permanently so as to assure the outreach to our historically underrepresented communities. Due to California's shift in funding allocations from schools to prisons over the past decade the number of freshpeople enrolling into UCSD has decreased and will continue to decrease dramatically. Therefore, we demand that the university match funds with the SPACES budget, including SIAPS—the branch that works towards access in SPACES. In addition, we demand that the university also supplement the difference of the cut in funds from the students' fees that would have been paid to SPACES had enrollment decreased in the present academic year in comparison to the previous year.

Admissions:

WE DEMAND THAT THE ADMISSIONS POLICY CONTINUES AS COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW WITH ADDITIONAL POINTS GIVEN TO FIRST GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS AND STUDENTS WHO ATTEND A FOURTH OR FIFTH QUINTILE HIGH SCHOOL IN CALIFORNIA.

The Senate-Administration Task Force on Budget recently proposed to increase Non-Resident Enrollment by switching from a Comprehensive Review to a Holistic Review. We demand that half of the revenue generated from non-resident tuition be allocated to programs specifically designed to support the access for and retention of underrepresented California students at UC San Diego. In order to increase the number of students of color on this campus, we demand that the

admissions policy give more points to historically under-represented groups on this campus, first generation students, and students who come from fourth or fifth quintile schools. We demand that the University announce public plans to ensure that the pool of admitted out of state students resembles the demographics of California.

Yield:

WE DEMAND THAT THE UNIVERSITY BEGIN TO DO ITS WORK IN RECRUITING HISTORICALLY UNDERREPRESENTED STUDENTS BY IMPLEMENTING YIELD PROGRAMS INITIATED BY THE STUDENTS AND FULLY FUNDED BY THE UNIVERSITY.

Yield is designed to facilitate the transition between student initiated access and student initiated retention. This is solely the responsibility of the University to FUND, IMPLEMENT AND MAINTAIN such listed programs. We demand the University implements, maintains and fully funds BSU's Student Initiated Yield Programs, as well as other historically underrepresented and marginalized communities on this campus. Having this demand protects students of color from disappearing from the University of California public education system. It institutionalizes the efforts of recruitment to this campus by placing part of the responsibility in the hands of administration.

Retention:

WE DEMAND THE NECESSARY INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES FOR PROGRAMS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO OUR INTELLECTUAL AND SOCIOCULTURAL DEVELOPMENT, RETENTION, AND ACHIEVEMENT.

The Academic Success Program (ASP), housed within the Student Promoted Access Center for Education and Service (SPACES), is geared towards retaining underrepresented students via programs such as their quarterly Book Lending Program and tutoring. These services are invaluable to students, especially historically underrepresented minorities on campus, who need a community that not only provides a safe space but also provides tools promoting success in institutions of higher education.

ASP is funded through student fees and therefore vulnerable to enrollment percentages. As a result, WE DEMAND that the University supplement the SPACES budget whenever first year enrollment is purposely capped. ASP cannot provide substantial resources to underserved communities when funding is continuously subject to administrative whim and decision-making processes without compensation. The University must take it upon itself to ensure the sustainability of these programs via this pledge to counteract administrative enrollment caps. Also, WE DEMAND the University match funds with SPACES (ASP and SIAPS). Access and retention should be a priority of the University as a whole and therefore warrants financial support. Students should not be expected to initiate, run, and pay for the University's commitment to diversity. As the entity supporting all student-initiated efforts, SPACES should be funded with the help of administration.

The Office of Academic Support and Instructional Services (OASIS) not only provides academic support but also builds community for people of color on UCSD's campus. Through programs such as Summer Bridge, students are given the opportunity to learn about the struggles historically marginalized groups

encounter, how to formulate a sense of community even when encountering heightened underrepresentation, and ways in which to keep one's self retained on this University campus. With the persistent budget cuts, OASIS has decreased the number of students the Summer Bridge program can support. This does not reflect a commitment to diversity at the University level when salient programs are decreased in an effort to cut down on spending. A true commitment to diversity requires continual funding, constant program implementation, and expansion. Cuts to an entity such as OASIS are detrimental to say the least. When students are not given the opportunity to learn, gain mentorship, be tracked, and feel connected, there becomes little to hold that individual within the institution. Connections must be forged. OASIS provides that space. Secure funding for Summer Bridge along with Mentor Practicum, tutoring, and other programs will help the center maintain and increase the amount of students it mentors and continue the work of keeping all students engaged and tied to the University. WE DEMAND OASIS receive mandated, permanent, budget-crisis free funding from the University since OASIS is a force on campus at the forefront of retaining the underrepresented, underserved, underprivileged populations on campus. WE DEMAND the

University provide additional funding to OASIS for free tutors for African-American students as well as other historically marginalized students who seek academic support. We suggest that this program be structured similarly to the tutoring program provided for Athletes through the Academic Department.

In relation to OASIS, the Campus Community Centers (Cross-Cultural Center, Women's Center, Lesbian/Gay/Bi-Sexual/Transgender Resource Center) also require secure institutionalized funding. The Community Centers provide a safe space that creates a sense of belonging for marginalized students, fosters a commitment to community, and ultimately breeds activism on campus. The Campus Community Centers provide internships to students, host events relevant to minority struggles, with a clear focus on validating the presence and contributions of underrepresented groups.

Academic:

**WE DEMAND STRONG INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT FOR ACADEMIC PROGRAMS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO AN IMPROVED CAMPUS CLIMATE.**

Supporting the African American Studies Minor (AASM) and the Chicano/a and Latino/a Arts and Humanities Minor (CLAH) is a form of retention, reflective of a prioritization of people of color studies, and also can improve campus climate at UCSD. If these programs are fully funded with appropriate coordinators that act as curriculum guides as well as a support system, it shows that the University views these disciplines as worth studying. This creates true commitment to cultural engagement. The minors along with Critical Gender Studies and Ethnic Studies majors provide insight not only about the people we are sharing a classroom with, but also, presents knowledge about the subterranean histories of the country every individual at UCSD inhabits. Emphasis should be placed upon the fact that everyone is a beneficiary of diversity. It creates an enhanced marketplace of ideas, teaches individuals how to interact with people of different communities, and ultimately calls for a critical assessment of the

dominant philosophies in society. Therefore, we DEMAND full financial support of the AASM, CLAH minor, Critical Gender Studies major, and Ethnic Studies major because these disciplines serve to educate communities of color, as well as the campus community as a whole. These courses will help students acknowledge their personal privilege, realize their positionality in society, understand the historical and continual oppression of people of color, and comprehend their role in preventing the perpetuation of ingrained societal frameworks that uphold inequalities.

We demand the University establish an Organized Research Unit to work towards supporting research on African American, Chican@, and Native American and indigenous communities.

We demand an increase in the number of historically underrepresented faculty and post-doc positions.

We demand the Chancellor, the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, and the UCSD Academic Senate mandate a diversity sensitivity requirement for every undergraduate student, which will be met by taking an African-American studies, Ethnic Studies, or Critical Gender Studies course before graduating from UC San Diego.

Administrative Accountability:

WE DEMAND THAT THE UCSD ADMINISTRATION TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR IMPLEMENTING INSTITUTIONAL ACTION TO DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN A CRITICAL MASS OF UNDERREPRESENTED STUDENTS.

Administrative accountability serves to institutionalize the diversity efforts presented in these demands. With this we will accomplish and work to diminish the institutionalized and systemic racism that exists on the University of California, San Diego campus.

Part of administrative accountability includes that the administration and faculty also represent the demographics of the state of California. It is clear each year that the faculty of color either remains stagnant or drops in numbers and those numbers have not improved over the past number of years. This stagnancy is the first problem that the university must solve in order to begin becoming administratively accountable to the underrepresented student population. Students, particularly students of color and womyn, need to be able to see themselves and their cultural backgrounds be reflected in the professors that are educating these students. In order to see the kinds of third world majors that we want to see on this campus, we must first see the faculty of color, including womyn of color, which will teach these courses. In hopes to establish a Department of Black Studies, Department of Chican@ Studies, and a Department of Native American Indian Studies, we demand that the university begin the hiring process of three faculty each department respectively. Seeing as how some faculty might be hired as assistant professors, we consequently demand one of these three faculty for each department be hired as tenure faculty so as to assure that their teaching positions and their critical positions as faculty of color at this university are not in danger of being slashed from our already reduced people of color community. Along with teaching classes of ethnic identity, sexuality, race, class, and gender, these faculties will be hired on

the premise that their work and research will be instrumental towards working on the establishment of their respective community's Resource Center. This way the faculty can be working towards what will eventually be departments for Black Studies, Department of Chican@ Studies, and a Department of Native American Indian Studies who will ultimately contribute to the betterment of campus climate.

We demand the University to increase the African-American populations and other underrepresented marginalized communities of color in various aspects of campus to reflect the greater San Diego Population.

We demand the expansion of the Chief Diversity Officer to an Associate Vice Chancellor of Diversity Affairs as a fulltime position with a fully funded office with responsibility for all campus diversity initiatives. This person WILL NOT be responsible for the Preuss School. We demand students from SAAC should participate in the search process.

We demand the Chancellor and the University issue repercussions to those that violate the "Principles of Community."

Campus Climate:

**WE DEMAND A CAMPUS CLIMATE THAT PROMOTES AND ADDRESSES THE NEEDS OF HISTORICALLY UNDERREPRESENTED COMMUNITIES.**

We demand that the Chicano Legacy mural become a permanent installation on this campus. We demand full funding for outdoor, permanent, and centrally located art spaces that are reflective of historically underrepresented communities. We demand that students sit on the Stuart Committee and become involved in the decision-making process as voting members. We demand that students have the utmost say in the conceptual development of the art pieces established.

We demand that the naming of Sixth College and prominent campus buildings to reflect the minority population of California be made an immediate priority. In doing so, we demand that a committee comprised of SAAC-recommended community members, UCSD undergraduate students, and faculty be involved in this decision making process.

We demand the establishment of the African American resource center, a Chican@ Resource Center and a Native American Resource Center.

**FINALLY:** We demand that the administration respond to these demands on March 4th. The Chancellor has had more than enough time these past few years to make a decision. We expect all of administration to be out on Library Walk on that Thursday to state their message on these demands while allowing the students to respond back. As students, we will set up the stage and speakers on Library Walk, we only ask that your presence is there (Chancellor, ALL Vice Chancellors, Academic Senate Representatives).

If these demands are not addressed and decided upon, **WE AS AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS AND ALLIES WILL BE FORCED TO SEND OUT A PUBLIC CALL TO OTHER UNIVERSITIES TO PROVIDE US THE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT FREE FROM DEGRADATION, HOSTILITY, AND INTIMIDATION THAT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO REFUSES TO PROVIDE.**



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