

UC Irvine

UC Irvine Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

Pedagogies of Love: Militant Education and the Development of Liberation Schools on Turtle Island

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0kd8g1gm>

Author

Hodge, Dejay

Publication Date

2024

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
IRVINE

Pedagogies of Love: Militant Education and
the Development of Liberation Schools on Turtle Island

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Education

by

Dejay Hodge

Dissertation Committee:
Professor June Ahn, Chair
Professor Julie Washington
Professor Rossella Santagata
Professor Judy Wu
Associate Professor Diane Nevarez

2024

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES.....	iii
LIST OF TABLES.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vi
VITA.....	viii
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION.....	ix
CHAPTER ONE—RECORDING THE NOISE.....	1
CHAPTER TWO—THEORIZING ANTI-COLONIAL RESISTANCE.....	23
CHAPTER THREE—DOCUMENTING LIBERATION STRUGGLE.....	99
CHAPTER FOUR—HISTORY IS A WEAPON.....	115
CHAPTER FIVE—NEIGHBOR PROGRAM AND THE ORIGINS OF MXA.....	189
CHAPTER SIX—FROM PEDAGOGIES OF RESISTANCE TO PEDAGOGIES OF LOVE.....	260
CHAPTER SEVEN—THE MXA CURRICULUM AND STRUCTURE.....	294
CHAPTER EIGHT—CONCLUSION.....	334
REFERENCES.....	340

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 5.1 Neighbor Program’s Core Decolonization Programs.....	212
Figure 6.1 Image of MXA scholar adding carrots to grocery boxes.....	265
Figure 6.2 Image of MXA scholars packing boxes for their annual turkey distribution.....	266
Figure 6.3 Image of MXA scholars participating in a community circle with Dre T.....	377
Figure 6.4 Image of MXA scholars participating in a community reading circle.....	285
Figure 6.5 Image of Alter MXA scholars built to honor their ancestors.....	287
Figure 6.6 Image of MXA scholars helping install a fence.....	291
Figure 6.7 Image of two MXA students cooking food for breakfast.....	293
Figure 7.1 Graphic of MXA’s Circle of Learning.....	297
Figure 7.2 Image of MXA scholars participating in a community drum circle.....	305
Figure 7.3 Image of MXA Day Trip to Brickhouse Art Gallery.....	307
Figure 7.4 Image of MXA scholar learning how to approach a horse.....	308
Figure 7.5 Image of MXA scholar feeding a horse.....	309
Figure 7.6 Image of MXA scholars discussing the layers of a food forest.....	311
Figure 7.7 Image of MXA students preparing the Assata Shakur Freedom Farm with mulch.....	313
Figure 7.8 Image of MXA scholars planting.....	315
Figure 7.9 Image of an MXA scholar trellising the tomato plants.....	317
Figure 7.10 Image of MXA scholars’ music lesson.....	319
Figure 7.11 Image of MXA scholars practicing piano.....	320

Figure 7.12 Image of MXA scholars practicing their Muay Thai skills.....323

Figure 7.13 Image of MXA scholars setting up their own art activity.....328

Figure 7.14 Graphic of the MXA daily schedule during the first academic.....329

Figure 7.15 Image of MXA scholars conducting interviews.....331

Figure 7.16 Image from an MXA scholars' photography portfolio.....332

Figure 7.17 Graphic of the MXA daily schedule during the second academic year.....333

LIST OF TABLES

Table 7.1 Malcolm X Academy Scope and Sequence Documents: Math & Literacy.....	299
Table 7.2 Malcolm X Academy Scope and Sequence Documents: Cultural History.....	310
Table 7.3 Malcolm X Academy Scope and Sequence Documents: Farming.....	317
Table 7.4 Malcolm X Academy Scope and Sequence Documents: Music.....	321
Table 7.5 Malcolm X Academy Scope and Sequence Documents: Arts.....	322

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am filled with a deep sense of joy and gratitude as I write these lines for they are both a beginning and an end to this journey. Just as Rudolph T. Ware III wrote, “though they are the first words for the reader, they are the last for the writer, and thus they are filled with emotion.” The story that follows details a journey that has occupied the last five years of my life. It feels impossible to give praise to all of the people who have made this work possible, but I will try.

I must first thank my life partner and wife, Sam, who has been a central figure in my life throughout this journey. Together we have co-founded a community-run organization, participated in the opening of a liberation school with Neighbor Program, and we have so many more dreams we hope to build alongside each other in this lifetime. She has been the source and the lifeblood of everything we have accomplished together, including this dissertation. This project is a result of our collective political education journey where we have shared countless hours reading, listening, and studying together. Without her patience and care, none of this would have been possible. I love you eternally.

To my family, without your undying love, belief, and self-sacrifice for your children, I would be totally lost. To my parents, anything I accomplish is an attempt to honor the sacrifices you have made that have enabled me to be the person I am today. To my siblings, you have kept me grounded throughout this entire journey and I love you all more than you may ever know. This accomplishment is just as much yours as it is mine.

There is no way I can thank all of the people who have made this project possible but I must thank by name, however, Jordan, mel, Hoos, Raiin, Dre T, Adriana, Nicole, Anaclara, Mama Kim,

Miss Barbara, Miss Margie, Miss Marlene, Miss Mariah, Miss Ambrosia, Miss Tametra, Miss Shante, Miss Shala, Angela LeBlanc Ernest, Ericka Huggins, and every member of the Malcolm X Academy family who has trusted me with their stories. To the community of Oak Park and to Neighbor Program, I can never put into words the love and grace I have received from every member of this community.

Lastly, to my scholarly support system, June, Diana, Julie, Judy, Rossella, Ashley, Cecilia, and so many others, thank you for supporting me and encouraging me to create a project about a small community school in a neighborhood most people have never heard of.

VITA

Dejay Hodge

- 2017 BA in Creative Writing, English, Gonzaga University
- 2017-2019 7th Grade English and Science Teacher
- 2017-2019 Masters in Education, Sociology, University of Notre Dame
- 2020-2022 Teaching Assistant, School of Education, University of California Irvine
- 2022-2024 Research Assistant, School of Education, University of California Irvine
- 2024 Ph.D. in Education, University of California, Irvine

FIELD OF STUDY

Community Schools and Pedagogies of Resistance

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Pedagogies of Love: Militant Education and
the Development of Liberation Schools on Turtle Island

by

Dejay Hodge

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Irvine, 2024

Professor June Ahn, Chair

Across the field of education—whether it is in policy making, higher education, or mainstream media—educational equity for Afrikan and Indigenous students is centered around the reformation of compulsory institutions that are rooted in settler-colonialism, genocidal violence, and the removal of colonized children from their communities. As a way of challenging these dominant beliefs, this study utilizes a critical ethnographic approach to investigate the violent history of settler-colonial schools and the historical development of militant education projects as a response to settler-colonial domination within colonized communities—with the focus being on one school in the Oak Park neighborhood of Sacramento, CA. The study combines critical ethnography, Black Studies, Indigenous Research Methodologies, and Pedagogies of Resistance to understand the development of these schools

throughout history. Findings show that militant education projects and community-run liberation schools function to provide Afrikan and Indigenous children with a wholesome educational experience that prioritizes their safety, cultural knowledge, and socio-emotional well-being while simultaneously providing them the skills necessary to organize their communities for self-determination. Although the focus of this project is on a single school in North America (Turtle Island), this project utilizes historical analysis to place the school within the context of Afrikan and Indigenous liberation movements that have developed their own educational systems throughout modern history.

Chapter One—Recording the Noise

Listen to the sounds, visions, and cries of the aggrieved, oppressed, and exploited who struggle every day while maintaining their dignity. What are the noises emerging under racial capitalism during the neoliberal turn?

— Steven Osuna

On the morning of October 3rd, 2022, Malcolm X Academy for Afrikan Education (MXA) opened its doors to the public for the first time. One could hear the nonstop sound of children's laughter during the Oak Park school's groundbreaking ceremony as they planted spinach, kale, and purple cabbage in the Assata Shakur Freedom Farm; made food for a weekly meal distribution program; and played pick-up basketball on a baby blue court with a life-size mural of the Black Panther Party's rendition of a black panther (Salanga, 2022). That morning, the MXA leadership team arrived at the Shakur Center in Oak Park filled with nerves. As they arrived, there were already two news crews on campus that began taking photos, conducting interviews, and documenting this momentous day. At MXA, educators are called learning guides—this title is inspired by the Zapatistas who call their teachers education promoters. The MXA team is incredibly precise with their language and they believe that the term learning guide nurtures a relationship of mutual respect and reciprocity between educators and learners.

MXA's team of learning guides started off the day by embracing each other, joining hands in a grounding ceremony, and then they quickly separated themselves into three different teams so they could get the Shakur Center ready for the opening day ceremony. One group was in charge of setting up the front of the building for the welcome ceremony where the team would distribute the opening day brochures and break bread with each other as a community. The group I was in was tasked with

setting up the Assata Shakur Freedom Farm with tools, seedlings, and other farming materials for our planting ceremony with students, families, and community members. The farm was named after Assata Shakur, a Black Liberation freedom fighter who has been seeking asylum in Cuba since 1984—when she was liberated from a United States prison camp. The farm is just one example of how Afrikan history is embedded into names of places at the Shakur Center. The building also housed the Tupac Performing Arts Center, the Mutulu Shakur Health Clinic, and obviously—Malcolm X Academy. There was another group inside of the Center getting the classroom space, play room, and library all set up for the children’s first day. For the MXA team and the rest of the community, this day was historic. Neighbor Program was finally carrying out its promise to the community to open up a liberation school that was modeled after the Oakland Community School developed by the founding chapter of the Black Panther Party. They believed they were finally answering Malcolm X’s call and the call of so many Black Liberation Movement elders that urged people to take control of the education of our youth.

The opening day ceremony did not officially start until Mama Kimberly Cox Marshall pulled up in front of the school. Mama Cox is the daughter of veteran Black Panther Field Marshall Don Cox—she grew up as a Panther cub of the San Francisco chapter. When she arrived, she was immediately met with a loving hug by the founder of Neighbor Program (NP), Jordan McGown—the Minister of Programs for both the organization and Malcolm X Academy. “It’s like going back in time,” Mama Cox said. “This is what my daddy wanted,” (Childress, 2022). She believed that NP was providing the community with a school where “young people are not only getting a meal, but getting knowledge to help them deal with life,” (Childress, 2022).

Mama Cox was not the only person that day who had family ties to the Party, in fact, two members of NP's core organizing team had relatives who were members of the BPP and three of the students enrolled in MXA had grandparents who organized with the BPP chapter in Atlanta (Bilal, 2022). Neighbor Program founder Jordan McGowan's father, Phineas, "was a Vietnam vet who was court-martialed for treason after associating himself with the Panthers," (Childress, 2022). In my many conversations with Jordan, someone who I consider family, he has explained the different ways his father was one of the many reasons he has continued to answer the call put forth by the elders and martyrs of the Black Liberation Movement. When he first told his Auntie about the school, she reminded Jordan that "his father is in this," (Bilal, 2022). I've seen this reality in the dozens of hours I've spent talking, building, and organizing with Jordan over the past four years. The revolutionary spirit of his father Phineas lives on through him—through his children—and Jordan has made it his duty to continue the struggle his father introduced him to.

The other member of Neighbor Program with family ties to the Panthers is our Minister of Arts and Culture, Dre T, whose father, aunts, and uncles used to play up and down the 4th avenue block that MXA now calls home. Dre is a third-generation baby of Oak Park. His grandmother benefited from the services of the Sacramento Chapter of the Black Panther Party. In fact, his grandma used to attend Sunday School in the same exact building that now houses the Shakur Center and Malcolm X Academy. This day was so much more than just the opening day of a school. Not only were we making history, but we were also carrying out the dreams of our elders and ancestors. We were finally answering their calls.

Several dozen people attended the academy's grand opening, including Dr. Elysse Versher, a former vice principal of West Campus High School in so-called Sacramento. She announced her resignation from the position in the spring, citing the so-called Sacramento City Unified School District's inaction in the face of sexual harassment and threats motivated by race. Versher hopes that both Afrikan staff members and students will feel safe at Malcolm X Academy. For Versher, "a safe space means [Afrikan] children and employees can show up, be who they are, be treated with respect, dignity, and leave feeling empowered—that's when curiosity for education grows," (Childress, 2022). The former vice principal has seen Afrikan children pushed out of so-called Sacramento schools for decades. Finally, she believes she's found a school that can truly meet the needs of Afrikans in her community (Childress, 2022).

Reflecting on this day, Jordan was speechless because "[Mama Cox was able] to see the school and know that someone is carrying on the work. So many veteran Panthers feel like their work has been forgotten," (Childress, 2022). Nearly fifty years later, Jordan, Dre T, and the rest of the Neighbor Program team are carrying on the Panthers' deep history in Oak Park. Although the Sacramento chapter of the BPP was short-lived (1968-1971), they achieved great victories within the community and offered a number of programs aligned with the survival programs launched by other chapters: a free breakfast program for students, political education seminars, a local newspaper, legal aid, and tutoring (Salanga, 2022). On October 3rd, 2022, the Black Panther Flag officially returned to Oak Park and it was flying high above the opening ceremony for Malcolm X Academy—less than one mile from where it once flew in the late 1960s (Childress, 2022). The flag is a centerpiece of the Center's courtyard that welcomes the community into the building. Being in Oak Park is historically significant

to Afrikans in so-called Sacramento and according to Jordan, the neighborhood has functioned as “a unifying space for Afrikans throughout the city of so-called Sacramento,” (McGowan, 2023).

This reflects MXA’s direct ties to the neighborhoods past, present, and future. Jordan reminds us of this fact as he addresses the community, “we want to provide a model of what it would look like for our people to be free, the same way the Panthers did,” (Childress, 2022). The opening day of MXA was a demonstration and reminder to the community that a small group of organized Afrikan and Indigenous people could provide essential programs to the community like schools, food programs, and health clinics. Jordan elaborates more about providing a demonstration for the people in an essay for Neighbor Newspaper where he writes:

We are engaging ourselves in struggle with Afrikans throughout the city known as Sacramento in order to demonstrate our belief that Pan-Afrikanism is a unifying force and stands as our only hope of survival and liberation from European kkkolonial domination. Through building with community members we are able to demonstrate that our ideology provides the framework needed for tangible steps towards our liberation. Our demonstration of Pan-Afrikan praxis provides the People with an alternative solution rather than submitting to the empire and the genocidal conditions they subject us to (Neighbor Newspaper, 2021, pg. 3).

Writing a grassroots and trans-local history of struggles for self-determination and the development of particular community schools presents a layer of difficulty inherent to the process of documenting liberation movements that operate in the shadows due to state repression and sanctioned violence. Additionally, many community organizations exist on shoestring or nonexistent budgets that often cause their struggles to be short-lived. Concerns about state violence, surveillance, and repression are valid and prompt many groups to engage in the work anonymously or encourage them to destroy any evidence that traces records of their activities (Thuma, 2019). Since the focus of this work lies on

just one contemporary militant education project being built in one neighborhood on Turtle Island, there is no guarantee that these narratives will be complete.

In this project, I aim to understand the development of community-run schools as a practice of self-determination carried out by colonized people in response to settler-colonial violence and domination. This thesis presents the following questions that interest me most as an Afro-Indigenous educator: How do settler-colonial social and economic systems reinvent and reproduce themselves throughout time? What sort of historical conditions motivate a group of oppressed people to create their own independent schools for the purpose of liberation? What type of liberatory educational projects do communities develop and what kind of curriculums do they use? What kind of organizational capacity is required to develop such schools? Who is engaged in the process of their formation? How are these educational projects structured to meet the day to day needs of the community? And, at last, how are these educational projects distinctly connected to the rich history of Black/Afrikan and Indigenous liberation struggles across the globe?

Before we continue, I want to note why I choose to spell Afrika with a “K” rather than a “C.” During European attempts to colonize Afrika, they polluted the spelling of these words by substituting a “C” for the letter “K,” which is how Afrikans themselves have spelled these words throughout history (Madhubuti, 1994). The altered spelling by Europeans represents a forced cultural subordination that Afrikans throughout the diaspora have rejected for generations. By simply changing how we spell words, we can empower our Afrikan relatives and “create the foundation for a common identity” between us (Madhubuti, 1994). This is a simple principle of Pan-Africanism—a theory we will discuss in more detail within Chapter Two.

Developing a nuanced understanding of (1) settler-colonialism, (2) decolonization, (3) liberation struggle, and (4) self-determination will be key to our analysis of the path forward within the current historical moment we face inside the so-called United States—often referred to as Turtle Island, or Abya Yala hereafter. Turtle Island is the name for North America first learned through the oral histories of the Iroquois Nation and later adopted by many Indigenous tribes in so-called Canada and the so-called United States (Kimmerer, 2015). Abya Yala is a term used by the Indigenous people of Panama and Colombia that means *Continent of Life* or *Land in its Full Maturity*. It has been used by Indigenous nations across so-called South and Central America to describe their homelands. At the end of the 1970s, leaders of the Indigenous rights movement in Bolivia called on Indigenous peoples and relatives to use the term Abya Yala when referring to the North, South, and Central American continent. They argued that, “renaming the continent would be the first step toward epistemic decolonization and the establishment of Indigenous peoples’ autonomy and self-determination,” (Escalante, 2014). Although I will further explore the above themes throughout section two of this dissertation, I want to start here with a brief introduction of these concepts for the purpose of our present discussion.

(1) Settler colonialism, by definition, is predicated on the genocidal eradication and forced removal of Indigenous nations and tribes from their land. This concept describes the physical occupation of land and the forced domination of Indigenous peoples and their culture. The process of settler colonialism uses mechanisms like prisons, ghettos, boarding schools, policing, and slavery to maintain its domination over Indigenous peoples and their homelands (Tuck & Yang, 2012). It is important to note that I will be primarily analyzing European settler colonialism as it exists within

Abya Yala. Other forms of settler colonialism exist across the globe in occupied territories like Palestine, South Afrika, Ireland, Samoa, and New Zealand (to name only a few). Knowing this, our analysis and understanding of settler-colonial relations should be understood according to particular contexts and locations within a specific historical moment. Unique political and economic relationships begin to form when two or more social groups come into contact with one another and these particular relations are crucial to our understanding of the conflict that arises within any given society (Rodney, 1972).

(2) Decolonization is the process of reversing the social and physical ills of settler colonialism through the national sovereignty of colonized peoples. Just as settler colonialism passes through multiple phases depending on various mechanisms, so too does decolonization. It is a process that is started by small groups and local communities and concludes only once the settler government and its entire socio-political systems have been dismantled. If decolonization describes the set of processes put in motion to remove any semblance of settler colonialism from the fabric of Indigenous societies then

(3) liberation struggle is the collective movement within the process of decolonization by which a nation or community of people “organize themselves to dismantle or destroy the institutions and practices to which they are subjugated,” (Borges, 2019, p. 51). Liberation struggle is a social and political phenomenon that intensifies when colonized people organize themselves to reclaim their sovereignty over the politics and the economy that govern their society—it is an overt attempt to undermine and destroy the institutions that subjugate their sense of self and their ability to govern the products of their labor. A variety of tactics, including armed conflict, economic strikes, educational

initiatives, programs, and cultural resistance, are used by the liberation movement to put an end to the colonial occupation of their lands (Borges, 2022).

Lastly, (4) self-determination is a concept that understands a people's right to freely determine their political status through the free pursuit of their economic, social, and cultural development (Muntaqim, 2000). Colonized groups of people pursue their right to self-determination through a variety of methods and it will be important for us to consider the possibilities of self-determination within the territories of global empires. These four concepts will be vital in helping us to situate our current historical moment within a global context—additionally, the interrogation of these social practices will be important to developing a nuanced understanding of community schools and their function within social movements. In the end, the goal of this project is to trace the political evolution of community schools within particular liberation movements and I hope to demonstrate the ways in which their lessons continue to shape contemporary struggles to build militant education projects within Turtle Island.

This story is by, for, and about the everyday people and community members who have dared to resist settler-colonial domination. For generations, colonized people have been brainwashed by narratives that insinuate their suffering can be transformed through individual attempts to *lift themselves up by their bootstraps*. This narrow viewpoint isolates social change as an individual endeavor rather than a collective process of revolutionary action and transformation predicated on the organization of masses of people (Muntaqim, 2000; Ture, 1973). Until European settler-colonial domination ceases its reign of terror across the globe, two realities will continue to be true: (1) Afrikan and Indigenous people will continue to engage in liberation struggle, and (2) these struggles will not

end with the promise of liberation until they center the socio political goals of the masses of colonized people within a territory (James, 2012). It is within the histories revolt that we can find a distinctive politic defined by a critique of settler-colonial violence and a clearly defined understanding of race, gender, class, ability, and sexuality as interconnected systems of power. The political developments that I unpack through these historical and contemporary narratives have grown out of the soil of local communities and perforated through the cracks of prison walls (Rodriguez, 2006).

While there is a robust history that focuses on the national politics and the tactics of war utilized by liberation struggles for self-determination, there has remained a gaping silence around the development of safety mechanisms and systems of localized community defense within these movements. This silence tends to ignore the narratives of everyday people and the collective work they engage in to build liberation struggles for self-determination. Community defense and safety, in this instance, is not solely about the taking up of arms—community defense and safety is centered around a people's ability to collectively build socio-economic programs for jobs, food, clothing, health care, and shelter; in order to establish systems that ensure the survival and safety of colonized people (Muntaqim, 2000; Newton & Seale, 1966; Schools for Chiapas, n.d.). Guaranteeing the safety of a community, in this sense, is predicated upon the level of political organization and direct action inside and outside of a territory. That is to say, it is dependent on a people's ability to mass organize social, cultural, political, and economic systems that garner support from the masses inside and outside of the community (Rodney, 1972). For example, the Indigenous-led Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) was able to survive the twelve-day military attack and bombing campaign of the Mexican Government not only because of their ability to mass organize systems of defense but also because the

people of Mexico heard the words of the Zapatistas and took to the streets to demand their sovereignty (Schools for Chiapas, n.d.). The combination of these political actions forced the Mexican Congress to recognize the EZLN's sovereignty over their land in Chiapas, Mexico.

By paying close attention to how and why communities like the EZLN build up systems of safety and self-defense, my goal throughout this project is to expand upon the work of scholars who have already begun to interrogate the function of community liberation schools as systems that are central to liberation struggle and survival (Borges, 2019; Rickford, 2016; Davis, 2013; Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, 2013). The historical contexts that bring about the need for community schools reveal to us that if social, economic, and political systems are being used to oppress a group of people—they have a right to build liberatory systems that work to envision the transformative society they hope to construct alongside future generations (Mariano & Tarlau, 2019; Tarlau, 2015; Tarlau, 2017). Through these narratives, I hope to demonstrate how the success of these liberatory programs depends on a group of people's ability to organize internal and external systems of political action and support.

This dissertation is an attempt to answer the call Steven Osuna penned in the opening chapter of *Futures of Black Radicalism* (2017) where he urges scholars and academics to commit class suicide by engaging with and building alongside social movements that are seeking solutions and producing strategies to end the violence of settler-colonial domination. Osuna (2017) builds on Cedric Robinson's mandate to *record the noise* as he writes:

Listen to the sounds, visions, and cries of the aggrieved, oppressed, and exploited who struggle every day while maintaining their dignity. What are the noises emerging under racial capitalism during the neoliberal turn? How can academics and intellectuals drop the 'megaphone,' put on the 'hearing aid,' and join the collective struggle? This

undertaking requires a commitment to ending racial capitalism and the numerous oppressive conditions it upholds and reproduces, (p. 23).

Through the process of *recording the noise* within the present moment, I outlined a project that works to build a bridge between past liberation struggles and the current moment. The purpose of this activity is to delve into the past so that we are able to understand how the present came to be and better identify the trends that will determine the future of our struggle (Rodney, 1972). Throughout this process, we can continue the work of forging our futures alongside the history of our ancestors and relatives who have resisted settler-colonial domination. “There’s no possibility of telling a Black story without telling other peoples’ stories,” (Robinson, 2017, p. 7).

Keeping these calls to action in mind, my thesis is broken down into seven distinct chapters: (1) this chapter, which serves as an introduction to MXA and an overview of the principle goals of this project; (2) a theoretical analysis and literature review focused on several key themes that have emerged out of liberation movements and revolutionary theorists; (3) an overview of methods useful for documenting liberation struggle; (4) a transnational study of militant education projects; (5) a historical overview of Neighbor Program; (6) resistance pedagogies and the methodology of Malcolm X Academy; and (7) a detailed account of the curriculum and daily structure of MXA. Chapter Two attempts to build upon the theoretical and political frameworks I opened with at the start of this introduction. This chapter will be organized around the topics of European Settler-Colonialism, Racial Capitalism, the Black Radical Tradition, and Pedagogies of Resistance that have been theorized by guerilla intellectuals, academics, community members, and self-defined revolutionaries throughout the past few decades. I rely on these frames to urge a critical thought process that theorizes settler-

colonial violence *through the aim of ending it*, (Stanley, 2021). I hope for this section to begin building a bridge for us that will better contextualize the current moment alongside the histories of past movements. How are contemporary liberation struggles theoretically and practically aligned with the revolutionary era of the 60s and 70s? In what ways have current political formations presented themselves as stewards of the ongoing liberation struggle first engaged by their ancestors?

Chapter Three focuses on the methods, methodologies, and practices developed by Black Studies, Indigenous storytelling methodologies, and critical ethnographies. By situating these frameworks alongside both the Black Radical Tradition and Indigenous Resistance, I intend to push beyond the limitations of academia, colonial histories, and metaphors of decolonization that routinely displace and erase Indigenous and Afrikan peoples. I have no intention of producing work that attempts to make decolonial futures more coherent and palatable to readers who align with settler ideologies of European domination and supremacy. When engaging with these methodologies, settler-aligned readers frequently ask for more work after doing little to consider what has already been attentively offered in these narratives (Smith et. al., 2019). I challenge readers to lower their settler-colonial gaze and follow the lead of Afrikan and Indigenous people who are fluent in the struggle of liberation and decolonization.

Chapter Four attempts to provide a brief synopsis of three political organizations and their struggle for liberation—with a distinct focus on the development of their educational projects. This section explores the revolutionary movements developed by the Black Panther Party for Self-defense, the Zapatistas, and the PAIGC of Guinea Bissau. While it is important for us to derive solutions relevant to the present social, economic, and political contexts of our historical moment, our path

forward cannot be constructed if we bury the bridge that connects us to the histories of our ancestors and relatives who've laid the foundation for our current struggle.

Chapters Five, Six, and Seven embark on an ethnographic journey of a contemporary organization who has placed itself within this robust history of liberation struggle: Neighbor Program. By utilizing the methodologies and methods outlined above, I attempt to build a narrative that centers on the development of a Pan-Afrikan community school in Oak Park, Sacramento called Malcolm X Academy for Afrikan Education. I have had the privilege of working closely alongside members of Neighbor Program as a comrade, relative, community member, educator, scholar, and friend. I was lucky enough to be named the Minister of Curriculum as the school was being formed. This project is wholly accountable to them, the community they uplift, and the legacy of decolonial struggle they've intentionally situated themselves within.

In the final chapter of this dissertation, I present the reader with a call to action. This project is being written as the so-called United States government continues its descent into overt fascism. Fascism, simply put, is the violent system of global imperialism turned inwards on its own citizens (Cesaire, 2000). By definition, imperialism is "the final stage of capitalism that is reached when the capitalists of a particular country are compelled to economically expand beyond their own borders through military force or other methods of coercion," (Bown, 2013). For the colonized people of the so-called United States, and for victims of western imperialism across the globe, this experience of fascist terror is nothing new. As I write this, the so-called United States government is aiding the Zionist state of "Israel" in an outright genocide of Palestinian people within the Gaza Strip. For the last 170 days, the U.S. government has provided "Israel" with weapons, logistics, and military units to

assist in the relentless bombardment of innocent men, women, and children who call the Gaza Strip home. Over 32,000 people have lost their lives thus far (Al Mayadeen English, 2024). This genocidal war against the people of Palestine has been ongoing since 1948.

We can find this level of violence within our own society as well. On the soil of Turtle Island, we have witnessed the prolonged genocide of Indigenous nations who have been confined to reservation style internment camps since 1758. Over the past decade alone, there have been numerous mass movements against police terror and the continued slaughter of Afrikans in the U.S. from Trayvon Martin, to Michael Brown, Eric Garner, George Floyd, Sandra Bland, and so many others. Our relatives in the U.S. prison system continue to resist genocide from within the walls of a regime that has functionally replicated the plantation system inside of county, state, and federal prisons. Over the past three years, the U.S. supreme court made historic rulings that overturned *Roe v. Wade*, gave Immigration and Customs Enforcement complete power to make warrantless arrests and assaults on residences within one hundred miles of the borders, and also voted to completely shield police from being sued for ignoring Miranda warnings that inform citizens of their human rights (Chew, 2022; Savage, 2022; Sherman, 2022).

The list does not stop there. Women and trans youth throughout Abya Yala continue to resist premature death and life-threatening gendered violence; US military aggression continues to tear apart nations in West Asia and the continent of Afrika; and, paramilitary police forces throughout the so-called United States have begun to construct “cop city” training facilities while continuing their collaboration with the Zionists Occupation Forces (IOF) to perfect the state-sanctioned terrorizing of our communities. Since the start of 2020, we have seen the development of sixty-nine police training

centers. In Atlanta, a coalition of organizations have waged a struggle to shutdown the development of their \$90 million cop city; as a result of this struggle, 61 people have been indicted for:

violations of the state's Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) law, over ongoing efforts to halt construction of Cop City. Indicted activists, including a protest observer, face steep penalties of up to 20 years in prison. Three bail fund organizers face additional money laundering charges, and five people also face state domestic terrorism charges (Bruce, 2023).

In this example, organizations are being charged as gangs and terrorist organizations for developing protests, bail funds, and food programs for individuals being targeted by state-sponsored violence. Amongst all of this genocidal violence perpetrated by the so-called United States and its allies, it is clear that colonized people have continued to organize, build power, and fight back (Chiapas Support Committee, 2020; Domingos & Khoury, 2020). The Axis of Resistance in Gaza and throughout West Asia is a clear demonstration of oppressed people's determination to end the violence perpetrated by western Imperialism. How will we situate ourselves within this global struggle for liberation? How can we build mechanisms of schooling and self-defense that are capable of liberating our people? As we consider these questions it will be important for us to hold Fanon's words close to our hearts, "each generation must discover its mission, fulfill it or betray it," (Fanon, 1961, p. 206).

An Introduction to Malcolm X Academy in Oak Park, Sacramento

Malcolm X Academy (MXA) was founded in March of 2022 by a community organization in Sacramento called, Neighbor Program (NP). According to their website, NP has intentionally forged their mission alongside the same struggle of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. NP "is a Pan-Afrikan Socialist organization committed to serving the people and radically loving [their] neighbor;

through this radical love, [they] look to carry on the People's revolutionary struggle towards liberation," (Neighbor Program, n.d.). Along with MXA, NP has various community programs that are currently in operation and work to uplift the community of Oak Park, Sacramento. They have a Free Breakfast Program, a Free Grocery Program, a Newspaper, an Arts Program, a Health Clinic, and an Expungement Clinic for folks impacted by incarceration—all of which used to be housed within the Shakur Center—a three story building nestled in the heart of Oak Park. In Chapter Five, we will take an extensive look at the history of Neighbor Program as an organization and we will detail the development of each of their community programs. As of this writing, the organization currently operates these programs at a smaller location a few blocks from the Shakur Center called the Shakur House—we will learn more about this transition in Chapter Five.

Malcolm X Academy for Afrikan Education is modeled after the Black Panther Party's Oakland Community School (OCS) that operated from 1973-1982. According to one of its founders, Jordan McGowan, "Malcolm X Academy has worked to educate our children in traditional Afrikan methods, praxis, theory, and history—using Liberation Pedagogies as our theoretical framework," (McGowan, 2023). McGowan continues:

[At MXA] students have been able to learn through action and practice, creating and building, genuinely embodying the natural learning process of trial and error. As the Panthers have taught, 'the People learn through observation and participation'; with guided feedback from elders and peers. Malcolm X Academy stands on the shoulders of every revolutionary who declared the importance of education, started literacy programs for the masses, and built schools for the people. As the Panthers declared in their 10-point program, 'We Want Education For Our People That Exposes The True Nature Of This Decadent American Society. We Want Education That Teaches Us Our True History And Our Role In The Present-Day Society.' In true Panther fashion, we are not waiting for the amerikkkan empire to give us that education. We have built it ourselves (McGowan, 2023).

The school's curriculum is shaped by a cultural history where students are able to learn about and practice Afrikan and Indigenous skills through popular subjects like storytelling, farming, STEM, and martial arts. The learning guides also utilize modern teaching methods such as project-based learning, play, interaction with the environment, community enrichment, and other hands-on activities that are led by the scholars (Ealy, 2016). Educators at MXA and members of NP "believe in the power of love and understand the importance of education as a major stepping stone towards liberation for Afrikan & Indigenous youth globally," (Malcolm X Academy, 2022).

Let's rewind to March of 2022. At the time the school was officially founded, I was lucky enough to be invited into the community as the Minister of Pedagogy—but the journey that led me into this role began two years prior, during the George Floyd uprisings of 2020. During that summer, my partner, Sam and I co-founded a community organization that had four operating programs, three of which are still operating to this day (I have omitted the name of the organization for the safety of myself, my partner, and the current members of the organization). We had a harm reduction program that provide hot meals, snack packs, and essential resources to unhoused encampments around Southern California; a free grocery program that distributed boxes of groceries twice weekly; a political education program that consisted of study groups and podcast recordings; and a political prisoner program that aimed to provide educational materials and support for our relatives on the inside of prison walls. As our work grew, we got connected with Neighbor Program through the development of state and national coalitions of organizations trying to build programs in their local neighborhoods. This is when we met Jordan and the rest of the Neighbor Program team. We began collaborating,

sharing tactics and strategies, and we worked closely on our political education programs since that was easy to coordinate virtually.

We became incredibly close with the Neighbor Program team—our comrades quickly became family. For years we had discussed the possibility of providing political education courses and learning programs to children in our communities but neither of our organizations had the capacity to rent or purchase a space to host events. Even without access to space, we began crafting outlines and curriculum for possible workshops and classes we could teach to the youth in our neighborhoods. Our core team of educators began to form and it was filled with experienced educators. Jordan McGowan was a middle-school History teacher; mel charles was an educator at UC Berkely; Sam was an early childhood expert and preschool teacher; and I taught four years of Middle School English and science. We had a team of educators, but we had no idea where this journey was taking us just yet.

In March of 2022, Jordan got us all on a group call to inform us that Neighbor Program had just acquired the rights to a three-story church in the heart of a Sacramento neighborhood called Oak Park. I grew up in Sacramento, so the thought of returning home to support Neighbor Program in opening a community school became a real possibility. That summer we spent almost every day preparing a handbook, curriculum, and business plan for the school that would eventually become Malcolm X Academy for Afrikan Education. Jordan was named the Minister of Programs, mel was named the Minister of Education, Sam was named the Minister of Care and Early Childhood Education, Dre T was named the Minister of Arts and Culture, Raiin Ali was named the Minister of Holistic Wellness, and I was named the Minister of Pedagogy. Additionally, our team was solidified by elite educators like Hoos, who played a huge role in managing the day to day operations of the school

and directed the Muay Thai curriculum—and Nicole, a core member of the team and student educator who visited the school frequently to help lead lessons and teach the students poetry. The stage was set—Sam and I planned to move back home to Sacramento and Malcolm X Academy for Afrikan Education was scheduled to open in the fall of 2022.

Conclusion

This dissertation is my response to Cedric Robinson’s call that urges us to *record the noise*—to narrate liberation struggle from below. These stories are only a narrow window into the struggle for liberation. Eve Tuck (2019) teaches us that “being an Indigenous scholar in the settler academy is like listening to someone go on and on about the dilemmas of cab rides while knowing that the subway system is just beneath the surface,” (p. 14). This project is simply an attempt to reveal parts of the revolutionary subway system beneath the surface of our settler-colonial society. I am calling my readers to the entrance of the subways, asking them to consider the histories and futures that make up the present arrangement of our communities—this is a challenge for us to think beyond the limitations of coloniality and conquest.

By engaging directly with communities that are working to forge education pathways in their neighborhoods, I attempt to ask how, why, where, and to what effect liberatory education systems have the ability to develop both consciousness and skills for the building and preservation of Afrikan and Indigenous communities, cultures, social systems, economies, and futures. Worded another way, this dissertation asks to what extent can liberation schools and educational projects serve as a primary tool in our struggle for freedom and self-determination from settler-colonial violence? I am interested

in directly interrogating the colonial system of schooling and its many capillaries: boarding schools, private schools, charter schools, prison schools, continuation schools, religious schools, etc. Within this inquiry, I hope to develop a deeper understanding of why colonial education systems are incapable of providing Afrikan and Indigenous communities with the necessary knowledge and tangible skills that could enable them to determine their futures collectively.

In its most horrific form, the project that follows is a narrative of the settler-colonial violence on Turtle Island that has terrorized colonized children and fractured deep connections in their communities that stretch across space and time. In its most hopeful form, I hope you'll find a story that highlights the revolutionary potential of everyday people in everyday communities organizing collective power for the purpose of transforming the social and economic conditions of their neighbors through love and reciprocity.

While I attempt to bring us toward a shared understanding of the historical moments that inform our present and future social conditions, this study is particularly interested in the development and function of community liberation schools that have nestled themselves into the heart of decolonial struggle. The following sections attempt to craft a transnational genealogy and practical theorization of the development of liberation schools in response to colonial domination. In the end, I attempt to argue that the communal development of liberatory education systems in our communities is one of the most transformative ways we can combat the violent conditions our children face inside settler-colonial schools and colonial society at large.

If successful, this study will elaborate on the necessity for centering the collective power of ordinary people coming together with an intention of building futures that exist in opposition to the

current logics and structural formations of militarized settler colonialism and racial capitalism (Robinson, 2000). As Walter Rodney (1972) wrote in the preface to his brilliant work, *How Europe Underdeveloped Afrika*, “hopefully, the facts and interpretation that follow will make a small contribution towards reinforcing the conclusion that Afrikan [and Indigenous] development is possible only on the basis of a radical break with the international capitalist system, which has been the principal agency of the underdevelopment of Afrikan [and Indigenous homelands] over the last five centuries,” (p. 4).

Chapter Two—Theorizing Anti-colonial Resistance and the Black Radical Tradition

The desire of Africans globally for freedom continues burning, sometimes dimming into a flicker, at other times shining bright but never stuffed out however strong winds.

—*Issa Shivji*

While Robinsons' writings seem preoccupied with history, I would argue that his vision is actually animated by a passion for the future, and by shedding light on the fugitive moments of the past, Robinson is endeavoring to outline traces of tomorrow.

—*Greg Burris*

Our journey through the theories and ideologies that guide this study will be grounded in the radical tradition of resistance that Afrikan and Indigenous communities have carried on for generations. We cannot betray their struggle by airbrushing, white washing, or sanitizing revolutionary struggle for the sake of academic discourse and theorization. As we discussed in the introductory chapter, the theoretical frameworks analyzed in this study will be utilized to help us produce an understanding of structural mechanisms within settler-colonial societies such as racial capitalism, imperialism, and white supremacy—with the goal of exploring theories and practices aimed toward ending their reign of terror over colonized peoples. This chapter of my thesis will attempt to build a discussion about various theorizations and revolutionary tendencies that have been developed by Afrikan and Indigenous intellectuals trying to make sense of the violence that has plagued their communities for centuries. Though rarely considered as such, Afrikan and Indigenous elders and ancestors who engaged in liberation struggle were theorists—they theorized the world they wanted to end and hypothesized about the world they wanted to build. This section is a continuation of that theory building—I rely heavily on scholars and guerilla intellectuals who are committed to advancing

Afrikan and Indigenous resistance to settler-colonial domination. With this foundation, we will be better prepared to take on the task of analyzing the function of community schools and militant education projects that emerge from within these conditions of struggle.

We learn from Cedric Robinson (2000) that colonial regimes founded upon racial logics are dynamic and constantly changing—this historical analysis teaches us that perceived differences in skin pigmentation are not and were not historically necessary in the construction of racist logic throughout time (Myers, 2021; Robinson, 2007). If we engage history critically in this way, some origins of settler-colonialism and racialism can be traced back as far as 1169 beginning with the British invasion of Ireland (McVeigh & Rolston, 2021). Ireland, and several other landscapes in Europe before and after 1169, operated as a sort of *testing ground* for the colonial and racial logics used by diasporic Europeans more broadly today (Robinson, 2000; Robinson, 2007; Robinson, 2017; McVeigh & Rolston, 2021). This line of thinking—one that uses racial logic to assume subjectively good *spirit* and *intelligence* are means for *ruling all of mankind* against their will—lies at the heart of modern European logic which permeates settler-colonial societies today. These logics have evolved over time and continue to empower European settlers across the globe as a justification for their genocidal occupation of Indigenous territories.

So, why are we beginning our theorization of Afrikan and Indigenous community schools with a discussion about European social logics? I do not think we can arrive at an honest interpretation of organized liberation movements carried out by colonized people without first excavating the barbaric violence of European settler societies. For the remainder of this chapter, we will work through five major themes: (a) European Settler-Colonialism and the Dynamics of Domination; (b)

European Civilizations and the Development of Racial Capitalism; (c) Decolonization and the Process of Building Self-determination; (d) The Black Radical Tradition, Maroonage, and Collective Resistance; and (e) Pedagogies of Resistance and Liberation. The opening section on European settler-colonialism is a theoretical overview of settler-colonialism and the function of settler-colonial schools throughout North American history. Once we have a foundational grasp of settler-colonialism and its relationship to educational systems, the section to follow is a discussion about racial capitalism, racial regimes, and the economic systems that are birthed from within the logics of European global domination. This will conclude our focused theoretical discussion on European systems of genocide and will lead us directly into the remaining sections that begin to unpack the theoretical and practical processes of decolonization and self-determination that serve as a split from the colonial system. In the final two sections of this chapter, we will unpack Afrikan and Indigenous theories and histories that have historically informed the struggle for decolonization and self-determination. I hope this narrative and theoretical construction will help readers to better understand the historical context of settler-colonial education and the struggle for liberation for Afrikan and Indigenous peoples within Turtle Island.

European Settler-Colonialism and the Dynamics of Domination

To fully understand the terror of European settler-colonialism and domination across the globe, it's important for us to distinguish it from other practices of warfare or conflict. As we discussed in the introduction, European settler-colonialism is a particular type of genocidal system that is predicated on the eradication and forced removal of Indigenous nations and tribes from their land

through barbaric systems of terror (Zigzag, 2006; Dowden, 2019; Smith et. al., 2019; Grande, 2003; Tuck & Yang, 2019, Wolfe, 2006). If we look closely at its history and culture, European settler-colonialism can be identified by its genocidal practices of extermination, its numerous massacres of non-combatants, its use of biological warfare, and its overt destruction of land and resources. All of the social, economic, and political systems that arise out of European settler-colonialism aid in the removal and genocide of Indigenous and Afrikan people to accommodate the establishment of settler nations, or, "colonies in which large numbers of European immigrants relocate and eventually set up new nation-states... Settlerism is, by its very nature, parasitical, taking and exploiting not only land & resources, but also Indigenous culture & knowledge," (Zigzag, 2006).

Although the methods and history of settler-colonization are unique to each historical situation it arises out of—due to variables such as geography and territorial resources—there are many patterns that we can easily recognize through the four stages of recon, invasion, occupation, and assimilation offered to us by Zigzag in their community zine on colonization and decolonization (2006). Using this lens, our analysis of European settler-colonialism throughout this study will be a comparative one—meaning, it will benefit us to consider how settler-colonial situations across the globe are interconnected. By drawing a comparative analysis to settler-colonial projects like Israel in Palestine and New Zealand in Aotearoa, we are provided with a historical and material context that will only serve to strengthen our understanding of the conditions Indigenous and Afrikan peoples face within the so-called United States (Fernandez, 2017). In our attempt to draw comparisons we must remember that not all colonized people are the same—Indigenous and Afrikan experiences of settler-colonialism are as diverse as their collective resistance to its domination (Lomawaima, 1999). It would

be a mistake for us to reduce the various strategies, methods, creativity, and forms of resistance down to unserious generalizations (Sabzalian, 2019). I hope to demonstrate the ways that these experiences and acts of resistance are both diverse and persistent throughout each historical context. Through comparative analysis I will recognize the various ways that colonized people continue to chart meaningful futures in spite of settler-colonial terroristic violence.

We noted above that European settler-colonialism begins with a *recon* mission where colonizers begin to map out and gain intelligence about new lands and regions. These recon missions are often celebrated today as voyages of *scientific discovery* and they are followed by a second phase of *invasion*. Settler-colonial invasions are the initial periods of armed conflict that arise as Indigenous nations begin their resistance to the arrival of colonial forces (Zigzag, 2006). Depending on the context, invasion can begin immediately following the recon mission (i.e., Australia, New Zealand, Israel) or it may be delayed by a period of trade and settlement that lays the groundwork for later invasion. (i.e. North and South America). As soon as the Indigenous peoples of the land are militarily defeated through invasion, the project to occupy their lands begins to expand. This step is achieved through the formation of a colonial government that is set-up to control the surviving populations of Indigenous people who are subsequently genocided, contained on reservations, or enslaved through economic, political, and social systems of control and extermination. In the so-called United States, occupation was achieved through the development of social and political systems that served to carry out the biopolitical and geopolitical management of people and land through mechanisms like prisons, ghettos, boarding schools, policing, slavery, and forced immigration (Tuck & Yang, 2012). According

to Zigzag (2006), the final step of the occupation process is the assimilation of internally colonized peoples:

[Assimilation is] an important part of imposing control is the indoctrination of surviving Natives into the European system. In order to do this, Indigenous society & culture must be dismantled & erased as far as possible. Colonial violence, including physical destruction and biological warfare, achieve this through depopulation, often during the period of invasion. Once occupation is entrenched, this process becomes institutionalized, with generations of Indigenous youth being removed from their people & forced into government or Church-run schools. The period of occupation and assimilation are connected, as only through occupation can systems of assimilation be imposed. This phase can be long and drawn out over centuries, as has occurred in the Americas, (p. 12).

Understanding the relationship between expansion, assimilation, and the operation of colonial boarding schools will be essential to our analysis of the formation of community schools within the so-called United States. If we are not able to unravel the root systems of settler-colonialism that permeate our modern schools, our analysis of community schools will fall short. We cannot ignore the ways that modern schools are connected to these genocidal systems of domination. Throughout history, we can see European colonial societies begin to form through these four stages of settler-colonialism. Let's take a deeper look into the various tendencies and symptoms of settler-colonialism that begin to arise in North America particularly. While our analysis will cover symptoms like white supremacy, gendered violence, ableism, and neo-colonialism—it is important to note this is not an exhaustive analysis of all the interlocking systems of oppression that plague colonized people.

Symptoms of Settler Colonialism

Before settler-colonialism, Indigenous and Afrikan societies were not plagued by the terror and violence brought about by social systems like white supremacy, patriarchy, queerphobia, classism, fatphobia, ableism, individualism, etc.—there were no hierarchical systems in place that resemble the ones that presently serve the interests of European colonial society and its expansion (Hill, 2009). Indigenous peoples in North America, for example, lived in communities that were classless, communal societies whose politics relied heavily on matrilineal constructs and they centered the collective knowledge of their elders and ancestors (Hill, 2009). Within these nations there were no prisons, for these communities had developed communal methods of resolving problems that did not rely on isolation and dehumanization. Before the arrival of Europeans, Indigenous people of Abya Yala knew a way of life that existed in opposition to the hierarchical systems of power that would eventually be forced upon them by European colonial society (Hill, 2009). For the purpose of our discussion, we will focus on four symptoms of colonial domination that have been theorized as white supremacy, patriarchy, ableism, and neo-colonialism. As noted above, there are a number of symptoms that plague colonized people—I am limiting my broader analysis to these four because, as we will come to see, they are the root causes of many other systems that arise within settler societies. Addressing the many violences produced by white supremacy, patriarchy, ableism, and neo-colonialism will provide us a strong theoretical foundation to proceed in our struggle towards ending all violence produced under settler-colonial societies, particularly as it exists in North America today. I omit discussion about classism in this section because we will unpack the violence of racial capitalism later in this chapter.

White Supremacy.

European colonial societies are founded upon logics of white supremacy. From the racial chattel slavery of Afrikans to the frontier genocide of Indigenous peoples, white supremacy is a primary function of the social, economic, and political systems that dominate the so-called United States. By definition, white supremacy according to Sabina Vaught (2017) is the:

Systemic and institutional superordination of White material, ideological, legal, and political power that pervades and organizes the private, public, and state spheres of the nation, producing a fluid core of severe, systematic racial hierarchies that include gender, sexuality, and class, among others. White supremacy's investments do not always yield obvious revenue. The dividends are produced across the interplay of multiple systems. Juvenile prison and what we call public school are two interconnected systems— state apparatuses that enjoy compulsory relationships with youth and for which exclusive systems of Whiteness payout to protect their exclusive property, (p. 33).

Similarly, Dylan Rodriguez (2006) defines white supremacy as the “logic of social organization that produces regimented, institutionalized, and militarized conceptions of hierarchized human difference,” (p. 11). Through this definition, Rodriguez offers us three essential components of white supremacy that guide his theoretical framework of the U.S. prison regime in his book *Forced Passages*.

First, he argues that white supremacy relies on the development of the “universalized white *human*” and the extermination of the “(nonwhite) subhuman or nonhuman,” (Rodriguez, 2006). Through his logic, the universalized white settler is distinguishable from the Afrikan or Indigenous nonhuman through white supremacist logics of racism, ethnicity, nationality, religion, and biology. As these logics are produced and reproduced throughout time, white supremacy becomes a dominating force of social order. Second, Rodriguez clarifies that white supremacy is a logic of social organization structured by technologies of genocide that lead to the premature death of nonwhite people within the

settler colony. Utilizing Ruth Wilson Gilmore's definition of racism, Rodriguez articulates a definition of white supremacy that centers Euro-American histories of militarized colonial expansion and normalized forms of "racial population control [which] include[s] coerced inaccessibility to shelter, nutrition, and health care," (Rodriguez, 2006). Lastly, he reminds us that white supremacy is *inextricably gendered*. The methods of violence that are produced through white supremacist logic rely on male/female biological binaries and masculine/feminine binaries of sexuality and social existence that have brought about systemic terror, violence, and harm through the system of patriarchy that we will discuss later in this section. Through these three frames, Rodriguez (2006) pushes us to understand that white supremacy is not a sadistic deviation from the standard practices of American culture—he concludes that white supremacy is foundational to the normal functioning of a settler-colonial society in America. Rodriguez (2006) writes that:

White supremacy, in this historical and theoretical context, may be conceptualized as a socially ordering logic rather than an 'extremist' or otherwise marginal political ideology. By way of illustration, this is to consider the American social formation as the template for the Ku Klux Klan (a proudly 'white Christian' organization), and to comprehend the complex role of 'mainstream' American civil society (in conjunction with its precedent colonial, frontier, and plantation forms) as simultaneously the Klan's periodic political antagonist and historical partner in violence. To consider white supremacy as American social formation facilitates a discussion of the modalities through which this material racial logic constitutes and over determines the social, political, economic, and cultural structures that compose the contemporary hegemony and constitute the common sense that is organic to its ordering. For the purposes of this text, I conceptualize white supremacy through its fundamental contrapuntality: the inscription of a fundamental relation between freedom and unfreedom, life and death, historically derived from the socially constitutive American production of white life/mobility through black, brown, and indigenous death/immobilization, (p. 14).

Through this lens, the genocide of Afrikan and Indigenous peoples is not a aberration of settler colonial society, rather, it is "the fulfillment of its promises of order and stability for the white

majority,” (Curry, 2014). White supremacy is part and parcel to the social, economic, and political structure of the so-called United States’ *democracy*. Racist white supremacist violence and the innocence granted to the settler-colonial systems responsible for the deaths of colonized people serve to “maintain societal order, and bolster the implicit ideological power of white supremacy in America,” (Curry, 2014). The premature deaths of Indigenous and Afrikan people serve to indicate the health of white supremacy in America—and although settler-society likes to pretend that white supremacy is not an official policy—its logics continue to exist throughout institutions of violence like prisons, the family policing system, medical apartheid, and schools.

Gendered Violence.

It is no secret that most ancient civilizations (particularly European ones) began as patriarchal systems where adult men held all economic, political, and social power. On the other hand, as we noted previously, many Indigenous societies functioned around matrilineal constructs. In these communities, women held economic, political, and social power in a number of different ways. According to the zine titled, *Settler Sexuality*, produced by Indigenous community organizers at K’é Infoshop (2019):

Prior to colonization, women/queer/trans/non-binary folks horizontally led many Indigenous societies based on their inherent sense of compassion, conflict-resolution, critical thinking and problem-solving. Matrilineal Indigenous societies honored women, queer, and trans/non-binary folks as leaders, intellectuals, caregivers, homemakers, and warriors. Indigenous conceptions of *gender* considered the mental, emotional, and social aspects of one’s expression and identity rather than an individual’s physical or biological makeup. People who would be considered *trans* today do not align with colonial understandings of *gender*. However, it goes without saying, trans/non-binary people have existed since time immemorial. Indigenous

people, all throughout North America, have their own creation stories that acknowledge and celebrate trans/non-binary community members. Most recently, the pan-tribal term *Two-Spirit*, a translated Anishinaabe word, has been used to reclaim Indigenous trans subjectivities. However, there is pushback both within and beyond academia to the broadness and the perpetuation of the gender binary and colonial understandings of gender. Tribal communities throughout the continent have their own unique understandings and cosmologies that embrace and celebrate such subjectivities. The Winkte of the Lakota, the Mahu of the Kanaka Maoli, the Ihamana of the Zuni and the Nádleeh of the Diné have largely been erased and misinterpreted as our overall understanding and approach to gender have been perverted by colonial interpretations. The idea of universal relations persists throughout many Indigenous lifeways. Everyone is connected to everything and everyone; we are all in relation. Therefore, love was expressed without ownership of another person's body; some societies practiced non-monogamous companionship and approached intimate relations collectively rather than individually. Emphasizing the importance of maintaining universal relations ensured a strong collective of informed individuals, (pg. 6).

Since the arrival of Europeans in North America, settler societies' construction of gender and sexuality have served only to produce decades of unspeakable violence upon Indigenous women, queer, trans, and two-spirit people. We know from historical accounts of early Spanish settlement that women, queer, and trans people were among the first to be brutalized as the settlers attempted to enforce their heteronormative practices of patriarchy—identified here as *settler sexuality*. Settler-colonial schools operated by missionaries served to kidnap and massacre queer and trans children for their *unnatural ways of life* and they helped to force Indigenous peoples to follow settler-colonial binaries of gender and sexuality (K'é Infoshop, 2019). Patriarchy and settler sexuality are violent institutions that are imposed upon Indigenous communities through constructs like the “gender binary, designated gender roles, state-sanctioned marriage, the *nuclear family*, and gendered spaces such as boarding schools, in a larger attempt to culturally eliminate Indigenous people,” (K'é Infoshop, 2019).

Colonial schools played a major role in enforcing standards of heteropatriarchy and settler sexuality upon Indigenous youth. Although we will explore the violence of colonial schools later on this section, it's important for us to note here the role they played in relation to gendered violence:

Boarding schools segregated young children based on the western gender binary and enforced it through the curriculum and teachers. Some boarding schools were run by missions, and some weren't, but all of them forced Christian conceptions of *exceptional* gender and sexuality upon the students. Boarding schools generally excluded Native students from academia and pushed them toward vocations like nursing and carpentry so that they could *successfully* assimilate into mainstream society. Young women were pushed toward the likes of domestic and reproductive labor—traditionally feminine positions. Meanwhile, young men were pushed toward more 'masculine' professions. Throughout their years at boarding school, students were forced to internalize subliminal and more explicit messages of westernized ideas of exceptional citizenship. This all served to *kill the Indian and save the man*, (K'é Infoshop, 2019, p. 8).

Through the many capillary systems of settler-colonialism like boarding schools—patriarchy and settler sexuality functioned to infiltrate the social and cultural sphere of Indigenous communities.

These experiences of brutality were not only unique to Indigenous communities. Through comparative analysis, we can see how enslaved Afrikan women, queer, and trans folks faced a similar fate. In her book, *No Mercy Here*, Sarah Haley crafts a genealogy of Afrikan women's direct confrontation with and resistance to the southern carceral state produced from chattel slavery. Through this excavation, Sarah Haley outlines the ways in which the criminal legal system in the so-called United States was simultaneously crafted and reinforced through both white supremacist racialism and colonial gender violence. The text also works to layout the development of the southern carceral regime following the collapse of the institution of slavery—from convict camps & convict leasing to chain gangs and domestic work sponsored by the carceral regime. Haley makes it clear that

we must understand the southern carceral regime as a system of racialized and gendered exploitation (economic, physical, etc.) that helped to shape colonial gender constructs as we know them today. Put more clearly she writes, “*No Mercy Here* examines the mutually constitutive role of race and gender in constructing subject positions, technologies of violence, understandings of the social order, and the construction and application of the law,” (Haley, 2016, p. 4).

Haley pays particular attention to the construction of gender within the carceral regime. The carceral system enforced and exposed an *otherness* of the Black/Afrikan Women’s experience that queered their existence and, in turn, solidified the white women’s particular gender formation—meaning, the Black/Afrikan women’s subjugation and exploitation within the southern carceral regime allowed for the construction of the colonial gender category of *women* that could and can only be achieved through whiteness. Haley calls this process *carceral gendering*. Carceral gendering unearths the multitude of ways that patriarchal gendered knowledge is produced—it exposes that colonial gendered violence cannot merely be understood through liberal male/female binaries, rather, carceral gendering is a “complex of material and discursive knowledge projects,” (Haley, 2016). These projects are produced through violent cultural and legal constructs that defined Afrikan women by their “deviant motherhood, physical grotesqueness, capacity for hard labor, impossibility of sexual, emotional, and physical injury, mental inferiority, and disposability,” (Haley, 2016). For Haley, Black/Afrikan female queerness was an essential, structuring logic of colonial society in the United States.

Within this carceral regime, Black/Afrikan women’s lives were *profoundly altered* by their experiences of violence and punishment—“they faced violence of an order that is unrepresentable,”

(Haley, 2016). Through her narrative analysis of this history, Haley is able to explain the ways in which violence against Black/Afrikan women within the carceral regime was necessary to the maintenance of white supremacy “as an ideological, economic and political order,” (Haley, 2016). Through the story of Eliza Cobb, we see exactly how the carceral regime viewed Afrikan women as something other than female. Even to her advocates, Eliza Cobb was seen as monstrous and less-than human—through the carceral narrative, she “bore no resemblance to a woman,” (Haley, 2016). Within the confines of colonial logic, Afrikan women are oxymoronic—the modifier Black/Afrikan rejects everything associated with the colonial universal of women. For Afrikan women, Haley argues their subjectivity is paradoxical—an invention of the imagination of white supremacy that is defined, in part, by their subjugation to extreme violence and terror.

Let us be clear here, although we are centering the experiences of women, queer, and trans people under the heel of patriarchal oppression, settler sexuality served to brutalize Indigenous and Afrikan men as well. It would be ignorant for us to assume that Indigenous and Afrikan men are incapable of experiencing gendered violence without further inquiry. Such logic only serves to align with logics of settler sexuality and refuses to acknowledge the disproportionate extermination, incarceration, poverty, unemployment, and suicide of Afrikan and Indigenous men under settler-colonial domination. According to theorists like Tommy J. Curry, Robert Alexander Innes, and Kim Anderson, there is a lack of theoretical and practical knowledge about the gendered experiences of Indigenous and Afrikan (colonized) men and masculinities under colonial society. They argue that theories about patriarchy and gender discrimination are largely centered around the experiences of women—namely, white settler women. Violence experienced by colonized men is rarely examined and

the tropes produced about them often lead to distinct manifestations of racial misandry (Curry, 2014; Anderson & Innes, 2015). Colonized men are boxed within a narrow lens of understanding and possibility—and as a result, there is very little drive to address colonized men’s issues that arise within settler societies. Instead, their experiences of violence are written off as symptoms of the patriarchy they supposedly benefit from. Approaching colonized masculinities through this lens fails to address settler-colonialism’s long-standing inclination towards murdering Indigenous and Afrikan men. As a result, Afrikan and Indigenous men and boys are blamed for the gendered violence they experience because it is assumed that they benefit from colonial constructions of patriarchy (Taylor, 2021).

Speaking particularly about the Afrikan male experience, the negrophobia that drove Euro-Americans to endorse the scalping and lynching of colonized men is the same fear that “now allows the white public to endorse the murder of Afrikan men and boys as *justifiable homicides*. This phobia is a normalized and institutional program used to justify police violence, ostracism, and incarceration,” (Curry, 2014). According to Curry (2014), Black/Afrikan men are racialized, deemed sexually peculiar, and configured as savage and barbaric nonhumans (the rapist, the criminal, the deviant thug). Their mere existence in relation to white supremacist settler-colonialism is what ignites the negrophobia that justifies their genocide (Curry, 2014). Through this analysis of gendered violence, we can begin to understand that the colonized men are not born as inherently patriarchal beings. Curry’s and Haley’s statistical analysis of gendered violence help us to explain how Black/Afrikan death operates as a necessary genocidal function intended to guarantee the safety and security of settler-colonial societies in the so-called United States.

Indigenous men face a similar fate under systems of colonial gendered violence. In comparison to white men and women, Indigenous men die more frequent premature deaths, they are less likely to graduate high school, they are more likely to be incarcerated, and they are murdered at a higher rate (Anderson & Innes, 2015). As we saw with Curry and Haley's analysis of Afrikan men and women, the racialized and gendered perception of both Indigenous men and women lead to a justification for both the access to Indigenous land and the extermination of their people and cultures. White women have admitted that they feel they are in constant danger of succumbing to violence perpetrated by Indigenous men even though statistics show they are less likely to experience gendered violence (Anderson & Innes, 2015). The experiences of colonized men and the performance of their masculinities have been profoundly impacted by settler-colonization and the forced adherence to white supremacist heteronormative patriarchy. Through this lens, systems of patriarchy can be analyzed more appropriately. Rather than getting into endless theoretical discussions about who suffers more, we can identify the ways settler-colonial constructions of gender (due to both white-supremacy and patriarchy) have plagued Afrikan and Indigenous communities as a whole.

Lastly, I think it's relevant to note the ways in which patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity have served to subordinate Afrikan and Indigenous men and women by encouraging them to similarly assert power and control over those who are considered lesser than them—especially those who do not express a heteronormative identity like queer and two-spirit peoples. Because of systems of assimilation and control, colonized men and women both take on patriarchal tendencies in their desperate attempts to achieve and uphold the current ideals of heteronormativity. This pursuit is a result of their

desire to be recipients of settler (European) privilege to its fullest extent (although this can only be fully achieved through the embodiment of the white European male).

So how do we work towards ending gender violence? Many scholars typically end the discussion here but I think it is important for us to explore Indigenous and Afrikan resistance to and sabotage of patriarchal systems and the enforcement of settler sexuality led by Afrikan and Indigenous men, women, queer, and trans communities. If we hope to liberate ourselves from the grips of settler-colonialism, we can start by reclaiming knowledge of the past. From the Akan tribe in Ghana, there is a proverb called *Sankofa*. Sankofa is the process of holding on to knowledge from our ancestors while still moving forward to build the future (Small et al., 2020). Like many Indigenous traditions, it is a reminder that past, present, and future are always interconnected. This also means that it is not enough to simply believe that we can revert back to pre-colonial societies and all gender violence will end. By holding on to knowledge of the past, we can better assess the present and future situations our communities will face—we must simultaneously reclaim the past as we imagine the future. Indigenous Feminist traditions, Black Feminist traditions, and Queer liberation struggles have always transcended the general fight for rights and recognition under settler-colonial occupation (K'è Infoshop, 2019). It was Afrikan and Indigenous trans women who led the struggle at Stonewall and who inspired the entire Queer Liberation Movement (Nothing, 2013). It has been Queer, Afrikan, and Indigenous women, and men who have worked to develop collective power aimed toward ending all forms of gendered violence through the destruction of colonialism and capitalism (Sista II Sista, 2016). Organizations like *Sista II Sista (2016)* have developed organizational blueprints for the working class,

young and adult, Afrikan and Indigenous people who want to work collectively to build a society based on liberation and love. In their own words:

We are committed to fighting injustice and treating alternatives to the systems we live in by making social, cultural, and political change. Our goal is to promote the holistic development of young women of color, ages 13 to 19, and to inspire them to take strong leadership roles in their local communities. We nurture the personal development of young women which incorporates physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual growth, linked to community-based, political action. Sista II Sista remains grounded in its principle of self-determination with respect to young women's personal, spiritual, and political empowerment processes. Self-determination promotes the idea that all groups are able to identify and work toward solving their own problems and treating their own liberation (Sista II Sista, 2016, p. 197).

Through INCITE!, we may come to understand that ending gendered violence cannot end with the theorizations presented here. The path to ending gender violence is a collective struggle. By joining and building principled self-determined organizations interested in the personal, spiritual, and political development of Afrikan and Indigenous people, we can continue to construct a path forward. If we seek justice for the people harmed by gendered violence, “we have to continually imagine, envision, construct, and practice. It is [a struggle] that you have to incorporate into your daily life and interactions with those around you in your home, work, organization, spiritual/religious space, and in all the other aspects of a human being's existence,” (Sista II Sista, 2016, p. 207).

Ableism.

As I am writing this, we are currently living through the fourth year of a global pandemic known as COVID-19. Our collective non-response to the pandemic under settler-colonial society here in the so-called United States have “painfully and chillingly illustrated how people, systems, society,

etc., use purported fitness/health/wellness, as well as age, location, and other factors to make decisions about worthiness and value,” (Lewis, 2022). Put simply, we have decided that some people in our communities are disposable. Throughout the first Omicron wave, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention publicly stated that they were *encouraged* that *those who were unwell to begin with* will make up the majority of deaths (Lewis, 2022; Mingus, 2022). For disabled and colonized people who have seen what the state is willing to do to carry out the extermination of their people, this realization is nothing new. These communities have never been able to rely on the state for safety or development. They have always had to organize outside of the state to secure survival for their masses (Mingus, 2022). On this topic, Mia Mingus writes that disabled people:

know the state has failed us. We are currently witnessing the pandemic state-sanctioned violence of murder, eugenics, abuse and bone-chilling neglect in the face of mass suffering, illness and death. We are the richest nation in the world and we continue to choose greed and comfort over people and life. The state is driving the knife of suffering deeper into the gut of those already collapsed on the ground. The cruelty is sweeping and unapologetic. We know we need systemic change so that our peoples can *literally* survive this pandemic, but we also know that the kind of changes we need are most likely not coming. It is in the interest of those in power to keep people uncared for, sick and dependent on dwindling crumbs. This is one reason why ableism and poverty are so effective and why they are often inseparable. There are many things we cannot control or change right now, even as we desperately wish we could. As we fight for systemic changes, we can also try to change what is happening inside of our communities. We can learn from our mistakes and try to, at the very least, not make things worse than they already are (Mingus, 2022).

Ableism is genocidal. In a book titled, *Skin, Tooth, and Bone—The Basis of Our Movement Is People: A Disability Justice Primer*, long time Disability Justice organizer Patty Bern (2019) argues that white supremacy and ableism are forever intertwined—both built on the terror of settler-colonialism and capitalist domination. “One cannot look at the history of US slavery, the stealing of Indigenous lands,

and US Imperialism without seeing the way that white supremacy leverages ableism to create a subjugated *other* that is deemed less worthy/abled/smart/capable,” (Bern, 2019). Here, Bern reminds us that it would be a mistake for us to try and understand ableism without also addressing the ways it is connected to heteropatriarchy, white supremacy, colonialism, and racial capitalism. Just as Sarah Haley and Tommy Curry argued previously, Bern identifies the many ways settler-colonial violence deems colonized peoples as *dangerous* and *non-normative*. Under these colonial systems, colonized and disabled people are “marked over and over by isolation through material, social, and cultural inaccessibility, stigma, fear, violence, and shame,” (Mingus, 2022).

According to Talila A. Lewis (2022) Ableism is:

A system of assigning value to people’s bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas of normalcy, productivity, desirability, intelligence, excellence, and fitness. These constructed ideas are deeply rooted in eugenics, anti-Blackness, misogyny, colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism. This systemic oppression leads to people and society determining people’s values based on their culture, age, language, appearance, religion, birth or living place, *health/wellness*, and/or their ability to satisfactory re/produce, *excel* and *behave*. You do not have to be disabled to experience ableism.

In her book, *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice*, Leah Lakshmi (2018) provides us with a vision for our struggle against settler-colonialism and white supremacy that centers Disability Justice alongside other liberatory frameworks. She writes that:

When we do disability justice work, it becomes impossible to look at disability and not examine how colonialism created it. It becomes a priority to look at Indigenous ways of perceiving and understanding disability, for example. It becomes a space where we see that disability is all up in Black and brown/queer and trans communities—from Henrietta Lacks to Harriet Tubman, from the Black Panther Party’s active support for disabled organizers’ two-month occupation of the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation to force the passage of Section 504, the law mandating disabled access to public spaces and transportation to the chronic illness and disability stories of

second-wave queer feminists of color like Sylvia Rivera, June Jordan, Gloria Anzaldúa, Audre Lorde, Marsha P. Johnson, and Barbara Cameron, whose lives are marked by bodily difference, trauma-surviving brilliance, and chronic illness but who mostly never used the term “disabled” to refer to themselves. Many of us rely on state funding and services to survive and fight for things like the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to remain protected and expanded. But our focus is less on civil rights legislation as the only solution to ableism and more on a vision of liberation that understands that the state was built on racist, colonialist ableism and will not save us, because it was created to kill us. A movement where, in the words of Sins Invalid, *we move together, with nobody left behind*, (p. 20, 21).

With this framework in our toolkit, I believe that we can better respond to the needs of our community members. As we continue our search for liberatory frameworks and pedagogies that best address the needs of *all* our community members, it is vital that we uplift the struggle being waged within the disability justice movement. As we continue, it will be important for us to consider how community schools can be an active response to ableism within our communities.

Neo-colonialism.

In our analysis of European settler-colonialism in North America, it’s important for us to understand that it is not a system of domination that exists simply for its own sake. There are very specific factors that account for the pursuit, creation, and continuation of a settler-colonial nation state. Systems of terror developed within these colonial societies enabled European powers to rob the Indigenous peoples through the security of cheap land, labor, and resources. Settler-colonies in North America developed an economic system that imported Afrikan colonial subjects through the practice of chattel slavery which offered the colony a source of cheap labor for the rapidly expanding economy. Settler-colonial empires soon realized that the maintenance of their colonies could no longer be

achieved through blatant force. The problem? Their colonial subjects resisted extermination. European colonies soon realized that it was not *profitable* to maintain their reign of terror in this way.

Neocolonialism simply means *new colonialism*. It relies on the use of state-funded Afrikan and Indigenous government officials, businesses, celebrities, and organizations to indirectly control/influence the masses of colonized people. In his book, *Tortured People: the Politics of Colonization*, Howard Adams (1995) defines neocolonialism as:

the use of Natives to control their own people. In general, it means giving some of the benefits of the dominant society to a small, privileged minority, in return for their help in making sure the majority do not cause trouble; the image of successful Aborigines in government [helps] create the myth that all Natives have a place in the dominant society. The change from colonialism to neocolonialism is a change only in how the state controls the colonized people. Colonialism is a system in which the colonized people have no control over their lives economically, socially, politically, or culturally. The power to make decisions in these important areas of daily life are almost totally in the hands of others, either the state or corporations & business. The state is willing to share some of the wealth of a racist system with a few Natives in return for a more effective method of controlling the majority. The most threatening & effective form of neocolonialism devised by the state has been its efforts to intervene & control popular Native organizations which had been previously independent. They began with core grants to help the associations organize; then the elected leaders of the organizations got larger and larger salaries-making them dependent on the state just as the Native bureaucrats in government were. As the years went by more money was provided to organizations-money for housing, economic development & service programs, etc. The most important effect of government funding, or state intervention, is that the state, by manipulating grants, can determine to a large extent what strategy the organizations will use. It is no coincidence that when organizations were independent of government money in the mid-sixties, they followed a militant strategy which confronted government. Now, after twenty years of grants, they are following a strategy that requires subservience to the state, (p. 157).

Through neocolonialism, European colonial societies transferred power to *some* token representation of the Indigenous and Afrikan populations who originally governed the land (Nkrumah, 1966).

Politically, this meant that European officials controlled the parliaments and governments of the

colonies. Although concessions were made to provide limited rights and representation to the colonized people of a territory—political, social, and economic systems were designed to serve the interests of the European settler-society.

Many Afrikan theorists from the Black Liberation Movement draw comparisons between the American neocolonial system and the form of neocolonialism that took place throughout the Global South in the 1950s-80s after countries allegedly obtained their *independence*. European settler-colonial systems still maintained total control of these *independent* nations through “puppet politicians, economic domination and a command structure of petty bourgeois agents, who were willing to barter the freedom of their people for personal gain,” (Kom’boa Ervin, 2021, p. 173). Ervin, a former member of the Black Panther Party, points out that neocolonial agents of the state have no real power to transform the conditions of the masses—they can do nothing without the approval of their European masters—as Malcolm X taught us, they are nothing more than lap dogs of the settler-colonial state (Malcolm X, 1989). In the present moment, the system of neocolonialism is essential to the growth of settler-colonialism, racial capitalism, and imperialism.

Robert L. Allen’s theory of internal colonialism offers us a particular analysis of neocolonialism that is unique to its developments on Turtle Island. He argues that Afrikans in the so-called United States constitute a class of internally colonized people. They are not settlers to the land in any way. Afrikan people were forcibly transported from their native land and brought to another settler-colony as a source of cheap labor for a rapidly expanding racially structured economy. Allen, in line with the writings of DuBois, argues that the foundation of American capitalism was built on the backs of enslaved Afrikans and Afrikan workers. Under these historical conditions, Allen outlines the

ways in which neocolonial alliances between European masters and Afrikan puppets are organized to minimize the odds of the settler-colonial state needing to resort to brute force to preserve its domination over the colonized masses. If colonialism is defined as the direct rule of one group by another, neocolonialism involves “a measure of collaboration between the colonists and certain strata of the indigenous [or colonized] population,” (Allen, 1969).

To make his point clear, Allen (1969) quotes Kwame Ture in his discussion with revolutionaries in Cuba, 1967 where Ture exclaims:

We greet you as comrades because it becomes increasingly clear to us each day that we share with you a common struggle; we have a common enemy. Our enemy is white Western imperialist society. Our struggle is to overthrow this system which feeds itself and expands itself through the economic and cultural exploitation of non-white, non-Western peoples—the THIRD WORLD. Black people in the United States are a part of this Third World. Our people are a colony within the United States; you are colonies outside the United States. It is more than a figure of speech to say that the Black communities in America are the victims of white imperialism and colonial exploitation. This is in practical economic and political terms true. There are over thirty million of us in the United States. For the most part we live in sharply defined areas in the rural black belt areas and shantytowns of the South, and more and more in the slums of the northern and western industrial cities. It is estimated that in another five to ten years, two-thirds of our thirty million will be in the ghettos-in the heart of the cities. Joining us are the hundreds and thousands of Puerto Rican, Mexican-American and American Indian populations. The American city is, in essence, populated by people of the Third World, while the white middle class flee the cities to the suburbs. In these cities we do not control our resources. We do not control the land, the houses or the stores. These are owned by whites who live outside the community. These are very real colonies, as their capital and cheap labor are exploited by those who live outside the cities. White power makes the laws and enforces those laws with guns and nightsticks in the hands of white racist policemen and black mercenaries. The capitalist system gave birth to these black enclaves and formally articulated the terms of their colonial and dependent status as was done, for example, by the apartheid government of Azania [South Afrika], which the U.S. keeps alive by its support (pgs. 6-7).

Here, Ture makes an important conclusion about European settler-colonialism in North America. Afrikan peoples are not simply a tool of colonial expansion that were utilized during slavery for economic expansion and then later forgotten about—the exploitation, control, and attempted eradication of enslaved Afrikans throughout American history is deeply connected to the settler-colonial experiences of other colonized people in North America and throughout the third world.

Both Ture and Allen’s analysis of internal colonialism (or neocolonialism) aligns with the detailed examination provided by Claudia Jones who produced the *Black Belt Nation Thesis*—a Marxist-Leninist framework for the organization of Black workers in the North and South. In it, Jones argues that Black people exist as an oppressed nation under American Imperialism who “are a historically developed community of people with a common language, common territory, and common economic life, all of which are manifest in a common culture,” (Jones, 2011).

We will need to have a clear understanding of neocolonialism and the way it presents itself throughout our social, economic, and political systems if we are to find a framework suitable for analyzing the effectiveness of community schools. When superstars and celebrities like LeBron James and Kanye West (yikes) are praised for developing elite academies in the Afrikan communities they grew up in, we must be careful not to conflate their efforts with the liberation schools formed by colonized communities in resistance to settler-colonialism. Just as Howard Adams (1995) noted in his book, we cannot be fooled by the neocolonial methods who continue to co-opt and sanitize the *militant strategies* developed by revolutionary organizations in the mid-sixties. Without this framework, we risk abandoning the struggle for liberation by settling for handouts divvied up by the settler-colonial government.

Compulsory Education in Settler-colonial Societies

Now that we have a basic understanding of settler-colonialism and its impacts on colonized communities, let's narrow our gaze for just a moment and turn our focus towards the settler-colonial school system. In the settler societies of North America (the so-called United States and Canada), Indigenous and Afrikan people have been subject to forced assimilation, physical violence, emotional violence, and cultural genocide through the implementation of compulsory boarding schools (Adams, 1995; Buti, 2002; Callimachi, 2021; Sabzalian, 2019; Trennert, 1982; Woolford, 2013). For Indigenous youth, these schools operated as internment camps where children were held against their will so their colonial oppressors could *kill the Indian in the child* (Callimachi, 2021). For Afrikan youth, these schools have operated as an institutionalized extension of the police state and prison regime (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Morris, 2016; Sojoyner, 2016; Solorzano and Yosso, 2002; Vaught, 2009; Wayne, 2018; Zimmermann, 2014). For both Afrikan and Indigenous children, settler-colonial schools have only functioned to discipline, criminalize, detain, incarcerate, miseducate, and under-educate them (Vaught, 2019). These schools are the foundation of colonial education on Turtle Island and their violent practices have been adopted and reinforced throughout the educational institutions we send our children to today. As we search for an understanding of the function of colonial schools, it will be important for us to name the deep connection between the violence Indigenous and Afrikan youth have faced within these institutions. How do colonial schools make and unmake citizens throughout time? How do they work to extend the genocidal project of settler-colonialism? How did Indigenous and Afrikan communities build resistance against these compulsory mechanisms?

This section also aims to understand the ways that settler-colonialism continues to impact the educational experiences of Indigenous and Afrikan youth. Today, education in the so-called United States is not simply a benevolent extension of the colonial project set forth 500 years ago—it is a functional mechanism that continues to logically organize colonized students’ learning environments while simultaneously sabotaging any of their attempts to achieve collective self-determination and sovereignty (Sabzalian, 2019; Brayboy, 2005). This section strives to recognize that settler-colonial education is not historic—it is a structuring logic that is “materially, economically, and discursively embedded into the fabric of the US and other nation-states like Canada, Australia, and New Zealand,” (Sabzalian, 2019).

Boarding Schools.

Settler-colonial missionary societies developed the first boarding schools on Abya Yala in the 17th and 18th centuries. During the later period of the 19th century, state-funded and government-run boarding schools on Turtle Island were institutionalized with the goal of addressing the so-called Indian Problem (Woolford, 2015). The Indian Problem, much like the Negro Problem, existed within settler-colonial frameworks because the occupying government could not understand why Afrikan and Indigenous people’s continued to persist in the face of ruthless genocide. As we’ve noted already, the problem was that they resisted extermination and their ways of life continued to flourish in different ways—they were a problem because they continued to exist as an obstacle to settler-colonial domination on the continents of North and South America (DuBois, 2007; Woolford, 2015).

In late May of 2021, a mass grave was found at the Kamloops residential school in so-called Canada that contained the remains of 215 Indigenous children who were stolen from their communities. Not surprisingly, the death of these children were never documented by the school's administrators—some of the children found within the mass grave were as young as three years old. The children within these residential schools were under the *care* of school staff, the church, and the federal government—each of these administrative agencies are responsible for the abuse and murder of Indigenous youth throughout history (oncanadaproject.ca, 2022).

Boarding schools are foundational to the development of colonial education in North America. There are decades of documented histories and oral narratives that outline the physical, emotional, and psychological scarring many Indigenous children suffered inside the walls of these boarding schools (Callimachi, 2021; Woolford, 2013; Trennert, 1982; Adams, 1995; Buti, 2002). Colonial boarding schools sought to address the Indian Problem by *killing the Indian and saving the man*. The secretary of interior of the so-called United States in the 1800s argued that “it costs close to one million dollars to kill a Native American in warfare versus just twelve-hundred dollars to give his child eight years of schooling,” (Callimachi, 2021). Between 1863 and 1996, over 150,000 children were forcibly removed from their families and placed within these boarding schools. That is seven generations of Indigenous people over the course of almost 150 years. The impact of this trauma does not simply disappear following the final school closure in 1996. Many children never returned home with most colonial schools having a 50% mortality rate of children in their custody (Woolford, 2013). Those who did return home experienced unimaginable trauma from severe physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. Settler-colonial education systems were intentionally built to sever any relationship

Indigenous children had with their communities—they operated as mechanisms intended to uplift the development of the colonial empire and speed up the destruction of Indigenous nations in North America.

Boarding schools operated as total institutions. While in custody, Indigenous youth were forbidden to use their own languages or practice their own cultures. Andrew Woolford (2013) briefly summarizes the terror Indigenous youth faced as he writes:

Funding challenges, organizational incompetence, and disregard for the health and happiness of Indigenous children resulted in dreadful conditions within most schools. The school buildings were poorly insulated and not built to withstand the winter. The children were often overcrowded, inadequately clothed, and the food they were fed failed to meet basic nutritional standards. The teaching staff was frequently insufficiently trained, since it was difficult to attract quality teachers into such a dismal environment for such modest pay. Moreover, the conditions at the schools were such that disease spread was often rampant. At some schools, mortality rates were as high as 50%, leading the Chief Medical Officer of the Indian Department, Dr P.H. Bryce, to note in a 1922 follow-up to his 1907 Report, which had decried the state of student health at residential schools, that these schools constituted a *national crime* committed by the [colonial] government and the churches. More well known are the stories of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse from the schools. Cruel beatings often took place when children spoke their Indigenous languages, stole food, ran away, or simply got on the wrong side of a school authority. Children were also humiliated and degraded, such as when their hair was shaved off in retaliation for misbehavior, or they were required to wear soiled bed sheets over their heads as punishment for bed-wetting. The violence of the schools was exacerbated by the violence of the children's removal from community and family life, with children suffering, for example, intense loneliness, anger towards parents who had delivered them to the schools, alienation from opposite sex siblings and cousins with whom they were forbidden to speak, and disconnection from parental and community socialization. Finally, many residential school Survivors have reported sexual victimization at the hands of religious authorities, teachers, and their fellow residential school students. These abuses continued to plague the schools into the 1950s, 1960s, and even later, (p. 67).

The network of colonial schools consisted of boarding schools (both reservation and non-reservation), mission schools, public schools, and day schools. Each of these institutions worked in competition and

cooperation to provide colonial education to Indigenous children (Woolford, 2015). In these schools, children were ripped from their homes and subject to torture, abuse, and unspeakable violence. While many of us are disillusioned into believing that Indigenous communities have an *alcoholic* gene and inflict violence upon their own communities, the reality is—for the ones who were lucky enough to return home—they came back with physical, emotional, and psychological scarring that, for many, could never be healed. The families who had their youth stolen from them lived with trauma and post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD). Research has shown that trauma is genetically stored in our DNA and passed down throughout generations (European Research Council, 2018; Serpeloni et al., 2017). We know that Indigenous youth being born today have had to confront the struggle of post-traumatic stress passed down through the memories of these boarding schools.

Pedagogically, colonial schools served to *cover the tracks* of settler colonialism by making its structures practically invisible even in their most effective manifestations. Through the development of neocolonialism, the violent and forcible process of settler domination grows more subtle overtime. Ojibwe scholar Jean O'Brien identifies this process within colonial schools as *firsting, replacing, and lasting*. The practice of *firsting* serves to erase the experiences of Indigenous and Afrikan people by asserting that Europeans were the *first* societies to establish proper institutions of social order (O'Brien, 2010). There is a great emphasis on *firsts*—the first settlers, the first towns, the first churches, the first schools, the first newspapers, etc. The mythology of *firsts* allows the settlers to *replace* themselves as the modern while relegating Indigenous and Afrikan cultures to *prehistory*, (Sabzalian, 2019). These myths were then reinforced by the process of *lasting*, “a rhetorical strategy

that asserts as fact the claim that [Indigenous peoples] can never be modern,” (O’Brien, 2019 as cited in Sabzalian, 2019). Sabzalian expands on this point by noting that:

Schools have been central in reinforcing colonial narratives of *firsting*, *replacing*, and *lasting*. Firsts are routinely emphasized in social studies education—curriculum that focuses on the Pilgrims who established the first colony in New England or Columbus and his discovery of the Americas are two common examples. Indigenous names are also routinely replaced with settler names—Plymouth has replaced the Indigenous place name Patuxet, and the terms Indians or Native Americans often stand in for specific Indigenous peoples or nations such as Wampanoag or Taíno. The firsting and replacing in this curriculum is also closely coupled with curriculum that emphasizes lasting—Indigenous peoples in the curriculum are framed as vanished or vanishing, a narrative reinforced by the lack of attention to Indigenous peoples in the 20th or 21st century. At a broader level, Indigenous peoples are made to disappear by organizing social studies standards and content into pre contact and contact, an ideological move that positions Indigenous peoples as prehistory, and settler history as the beginning of modernity (Sabzalian, 2019, p. 17).

Knowing this, our analysis of the function of contemporary schools and the development of community schools should begin with the understanding that the “structures, discourse, logics, and practices” of settler colonial domination lie at the heart of compulsory schooling in Afrikan and Indigenous communities. The violence of boarding schools surfaces through the literal presence of police in schools, warden-like administrators, education policies, and the erasure of Indigenous and Afrikan peoples from the modern curricula (Sabzalian, 2019; Shear et al., 2015; Journell, 2009). Colonization is a contemporary feature of settler-colonial schools. Some of its practices might appear more benevolent than past instances of outright violence and genocide, but the outcomes are consistent with the historical practices of extermination (O’Brien, 2010 as cited in Sabzalian, 2019).

Education, Removal, and the Enclosure of Colonized Youth.

White supremacist settler colonial societies target, exploit, and disappear Afrikan and Indigenous youth through violent mechanisms of removal and enclosure. In this section, we will explore how colonial schools mirror the function of other state-run institutions like Black Codes, the child welfare system, the Indian Adoption Project, and the torture of Palestinian children in occupied Palestine.

In conjunction with the growth of state operated boarding schools, the removal of children from their communities became a fully mechanized feature of colonial domination. Sabina Vaught (2019) defines the removal of children as a mechanized system of racial, gender, and material power relations that guide the function of settler-colonialism in the so-called United States. Removal operates in unison with other social systems that regulate and destroy Afrikan and Indigenous families. This terroristic approach to child protection is essential to the white supremacist nation building project that the so-called United States is heavily invested in (Roberts, 2022; see also Kaba, 2021). Systems of removal tend to function in secrecy because the state identifies youth as noncitizens and colonized youth are seen as potential criminal noncitizens—they exist as a threat to the function of the White nation-state. It is the parents of colonized children who are blamed for the impact that race, class, and gender have had on them and their families. Through this framework, the public is led to believe that government removal is a process of *saving* these children from their homes (Roberts, 2022). The removal of colonized youth by and into the mechanical arms of the state is concealed by what Roberts identifies as *benevolent terror*. Each and every day, colonized children disappear in plain sight. When children are removed from their families, they exist in a constant state of panic and stress that wrecks

long-term damage to both the psychological and physical structure of their brain (Wan, 2018). Children are literally taken from their beds in the middle of the night, kidnapped from maternity wards, executed on playgrounds, and stolen off of school buses. Parents are left to spend hours, days, and sometimes weeks without any idea what happened to their child. The very act of removing a child from their family is a moment the child relives repeatedly in their minds. Its effects cause mourning that is compared to the estrangement of a child whose parents had died. They experience guilt, complex post-traumatic stress disorder, isolation, substance abuse, anxiety, low-self esteem, and despair. Child removal is a distorted form of nourishment that maintains the existence of a settler-colonial white supremacist heteropatriarchal society—it reveals to us the morally corrupt forces that organize white supremacist nation-states, (Vaught, 2009; see also Roberts, 2022; Fournier & Crey, 1998; Adams, 1995).

In his book, *First Strike*, Damien Sojoyner employs *enclosures* as a primary tool of analysis to understand the complex relationships between schools and prisons that mirror Roberts' analysis of child removal. While the term enclosure “most readily signifies a physical barrier such as a wall, a fence, or anything that is meant to limit the freedom of movement” Sojoyner also uses the term to describe “unseen forces that are just as powerful as the physical manifestations,” (Sojoyner, 2016). Through this lens, each of the colonial mechanisms that construct western notions of race, gender, class, and sexuality can be identified as *enclosures*. For Sojoyner, enclosure can also be described as the physical and social manifestation of denying resources to communities that are key to survival and self-determination. For our purposes, it's important to understand how enclosures are a critical aspect of settler-colonial domination. On Turtle Island, Afrikan and Indigenous communities have been

enclosed by mechanisms like reservations, plantations, ghettos, chain gangs, prisons, boarding schools, public schools, low-wage jobs, and other systems maintained by settler-colonialism and racial capitalism. Systems of enclosure exemplify what we previously identified as symptoms of settler colonialism. As we develop our understanding of child removal and its various systems, Sojoyner's analysis of enclosures will be incredibly useful in helping us detail the many functions of removal.

Rather than employing a contemporary and commonly understood analysis of the school to prison pipeline (STPP), Sojoyner (2016) argues that the modern practice of policing and building enclosures for children was developed long ago. He writes that,

Some were developed explicitly with the intent to prevent the education of Black people and have had tremendous influence upon the development of prisons. Others were designed solely for the management of the massive prison apparatus and have bled throughout society, including into the realm of education, (p. xiv).

While many of these colonial systems were developed without consideration for schools or prisons, Sojoyner provides us with a method of analysis that inquires how these systems of terror have become key facets of both institutions which play a major role in the management of colonized youth. Understanding the removal and enclosure of colonized youth as a method of analysis enables us to better analyze the *structured dysfunctionality* that plagues our education system and it allows us to envision a future where these structures are non-existent.

Now that we have clarified terms, let us explore why the structured terror of colonized children is an essential function of the settler-colonial state. Vaught (2019) argues that children are exceptionally valuable possessions of the state due to their ability to thrive, carry on culture, and establish political and economic will—all of which are fundamental to the self-determination of any

community of people. Vaught writes that “the ability of guardians to protect their children as property is coupled to their own racially propertied status, which is itself produced alternately by affirmative or resistant, subjective or objective relations with the state,” (p. 98). Children function as property within settler-colonial society and their status as objects of the state is uniquely tied to the property status of their guardians. In this socio-political context, some children are deemed worthy of enormous ideological and material support while others are isolated as targets of state removal, enclosure, and premature death. Along class lines, even white children are targeted by these mechanisms and “their removal [is] both a reminder to Whites of state power and a reminder to good Whites that they were safe,” (Vaught 2019). Individual white families are sacrificed in order for the state to maintain a settler-colonial mirage of benevolence that depicts the removal of children as an issue of morality rather than a function of white supremacist society. These relations of removal and enclosure are structured by frameworks of guardianship. When children are removed from their families and enclosed within various state institutions, their parents are being deemed unfit for the task of child development and possession. Colonized children are consequently committed, detained, incarcerated, enclosed, and made possessions of the state through the multiple systems that serve to remove them from their communities. Systems of removal provide the state with totalitarian control over the private sphere of colonized families (Vaught 2019).

Let’s look more closely at the settler-colonial systems of removal and enclosure we identified at the start of this section. In her book, *Torn Apart* (2022), Dorothy Roberts works to reveal the terroristic reality of the ways in which settler-colonial societies have violently policed colonized families. For Afrikan (Black) families in particular, the practice of child removal is deeply rooted in the

practice of chattel slavery where Afrikan children were frequently stolen, traded, purchased, terrorized, and displaced from their families. After enslaved people emancipated themselves, Black Codes enabled white planters to exploit apprenticeship laws where Afrikan children could be “bound out to work for white planters without their parents approval,” (Roberts 2022). These apprenticeship laws are the original child removal practices that developed into the systemic court-ordered kidnapping of Afrikan children that is known as the Child Welfare System (CWS) today. In 2018, 3.5 million family homes were invaded by the Child Protection Services (CPS). 500,000 children are removed from their homes every year. These government agents terrorize hundreds of thousands of Afrikan, Indigenous, and poor communities “without a warrant or any other kind of judicial authorization,” (Roberts, 2022). Comparatively, foster care rates for U.S. children are nearly the same as incarceration rates for adults. Though often ignored in discussions about settler-colonial systems of control, the child welfare system mirrors the horror of other state institutions that serve to terrorize colonized people. The CWS (or the family policing system) is designed to cause unending harm to the children it separates from their families. According to Roberts (2022),

Because its fundamental design is violent and unjust, family policing produces damaging outcomes for the children it ensnares. On top of inflicting the trauma of separating children from their loved ones, state agencies fail to ensure that the children in their custody receive the care they need, and subject many of them to sexual and physical abuse. The system is set up to interfere with their emotional and physical health, their education, and their social relationships. It forces many of them into poverty, homelessness, and prisons. It drives many of them to suicide. There is a thin line between the state’s treatment of Black children in foster care and its treatment of those in juvenile detention. Foster care criminalizes Black children. The family policing system should be judged against the best our society could offer children and their families. By any ethical measure, it fails abysmally, (p.16).

If we seriously analyze the harm caused by forcibly taking children away from their families, friends, communities, and social networks—we would find that the effects trump all of the harms the child was allegedly experiencing at home. I use the term allegedly because the overwhelming majority of children removed by the family policing system are taken from loving and responsible families who needed material and economic support—a large percentage of children are taken from homes due to the size of the home, not the conditions within it (Roberts, 2002).

Calls for the abolition of US policing and the US prison regime often recommend redistributing funds and resources away from police and prisons and into agencies that handle the protection of children. Roberts pushes us to understand that these proposals work against the formation of an abolitionist future and ignore “how the family-policing system surveils and represses Black and other marginalized communities in ways similar to the law enforcement systems condemned by the protesters.” (Roberts, 2022). Abolitionists should work toward the abolition of all carceral institutions while simultaneously building and creating transformative ways of identifying and solving the problems of all people in our communities. The family policing system is a core mechanism of removal and enclosure that maintains the settler-colonial state—we should work to understand its impacts if we are to seriously build a liberatory educational framework that aligns with this abolitionist vision.

The family policing system that terrorizes Afrikan and Indigenous families is rooted in both settler-colonialism and slavery. The roots of the family policing system that disproportionately targets Afrikan children are deeply intertwined with the system of removal that forced Indigenous children from their homes throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Colonial societies' attempt to *civilize*

Indigenous children did not end with the closure of these boarding schools in the 1970s. Between 1958 and 1976, the US Children's Bureau launched an Indian Adoption project that served to kidnap Indigenous children and place them with white families across the nation (Herman, 2012). This project played a major role in the deconstruction of Indigenous families and communities. According to Dorothy Roberts (2022), one in four Indigenous children in Minnesota under the age of one were taken from their families and put up for adoption—between 1961 and 1976, 12,486 children were removed from their homes by various agencies that worked outside of the Bureau's removal project (p. 97). The capture and removal of Indigenous children was standard practice for private and federal agencies claiming to be interested in the well-being of colonized youth. Afrikan and Indigenous families have had to confront the same overlapping systems of terror controlled by the settler-colonial state. Family policing systems (as a whole) work together to target and destabilize colonized communities—in another example, Indigenous women have often reported acts of forced sterilization that mirrors sexual violations inflicted on Afrikan women throughout the south (Roberts, 2022). The list is disturbingly long and expands far beyond the scope of this project. In hearings conducted by Congress in 1974, 1976, and 1977, “[Indigenous] parents and tribal representatives presented evidence that between one-quarter and one-third of all Native children had been separated from their families,” as a result of the Indian Adoption Project. Historian and Psychologist David Fanshel reported that the results of this family policing program was tragic for Indigenous youth. He reported that a majority of children's experiences were plagued by unsanitary housing, illiteracy, unemployment, and alcoholism (Fanshel, 1972).

The violent practice of child removal is not totally unique to the colonial situation we've outlined in so-called North America. In Zionist Israel, Palestinian children are subject to terroristic practices of administrative detention that removes children from their homes without charge or trial. Throughout occupied Palestine, administrative detention orders are issued by the military for a maximum of six months but the order can be renewed before expiration and continue indefinitely. The practice of kidnapping Palestinian children dates back to the first Intifada of 1987 where Zionist "Israel arrested more than 2 percent of all Palestinian children between the ages of 9 and 17 and held them for varying periods of time," (Cook, et al., 2004). In the book *Stolen Youth* (2004), the authors write that:

Most arrests of Palestinian children are made at checkpoints, on the street, or at their homes by heavily armed Israeli soldiers in the middle of the night. The soldiers take them to detention centers in Israeli settlements or military camps. Often neither they nor their families know where they have been taken, and they are denied lawyer and family visits. In the detention center, the children are interrogated. This almost always involves some form of torture or abuse, including sleep and food deprivation, threatening language, beatings with heavy batons, being punched and kicked, as well as being tied in painful and contorted positions for long periods of time (known as 'position abuse' or in Arabic, shabeh), (p. 5).

Just like with the removal of Indigenous and Afrikan children on Turtle Island, when a Palestinian child is imprisoned by Zionist military forces, their entire family and community is deeply affected. Children who are kidnapped and tortured by the occupying Israeli state often come from large, poor families that live in isolated villages and refugee camps. In these conditions, poor families are forced to pay legal fees, court fines, and monetary support for their imprisoned children—"the life of everyone who knows the child is affected in some way," (Cook et al., 2004). Serious psychological, physical, and financial burden is put on the family and the community of every child taken by Zionist military

forces. Israel and the United States are two distinct settler-colonial situations but if one is to seriously sit down with each of the individual cases presented against them, it is impossible to deny the close relations between their tactics of genocide. In fact, the two occupying governments have been trading terroristic tactics for decades. When one regime finds an effective method for suppressing the colonized population, they share it with their colonizing allies. Since 2002, “hundreds of law enforcement and government agents have been sent to Israel to meet with military and police forces—thousands more have participated in conferences, training and workshops with Israeli officials in the United States,” (Domingos and Khoury, 2020). Tactics of genocide used by occupying forces are strategically similar. If we are to understand and resist the terror that colonized children face, we must have an internationalist understanding of the conditions they face across the globe.

This section attempted to demonstrate how the colonial project of assimilation and cultural genocide was and still is dependent upon the violent removal of Afrikan and Indigenous youth from their families and communities. We’ve outlined how tactics of removal, abduction, and extermination are common practices that permeate the organization of modern day schools and family welfare systems in Afrikan and Indigenous communities within the so-called United States and abroad. The practice of removing children from their families and their community is integral to the organization and maintenance of the European settler-colonial nation and it was carried out through tools like Indian Boarding Schools, juvenile prisons, administrative detention, and modern family policing systems. As we continue our journey toward understanding the formation and impact of community schools in colonized communities, we should center our analysis around the abolition of the violent family policing and education systems outlined above. Now that we’ve gained a broader

understanding of settler-colonialism and compulsory education on Turtle Island, let's turn our attention toward another primary contradiction that shapes the conditions of colonized communities of this land: racial capitalism.

European Civilizations and the Development of Racial Capitalism

The term racial capitalism was coined by Cedric Robinson (2000) in his groundbreaking book *Black Marxism: the Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. Since the overwhelming majority of critical engagement with this text has taken place in the last two decades, many scholars argue that the book did not earn its respect until it was republished in 2000 (Burden-Stelly, 2020; Kelley, 2017). Robinson theorized the term racial capitalism as a way of challenging the “Marxist idea that Capitalism was a revolutionary negation of feudalism,” (Kelley, 2017). He put forth a critical framework that helps us to understand how the seeds of capitalism emerged from within the feudal order of European civilization and “flowered in the cultural soil of a Western civilization already thoroughly infused with racialism,” (Kelley, 2017). While Robinson is often credited for coining the term, Black Studies scholar Joshua Myers argues that he would not “be comfortable with someone asserting that this is his term,” because Robinson did not spend “a great deal of time writing about racial capitalism,” (Myers, 2020). Instead, Myers posits that Robinson’s interrogation of *racial regimes* may be more useful for us as we continue to unpack the difference making projects set forth by European civilizations. We will take a closer look at Robinsons theorization of racial regimes in the second half of this section during our discussion on the logics of white supremacy.

Theorizing Modern Racial Capitalism

Let's start with the term most commonly used: racial capitalism. Racial capitalism is theorized to have developed from within a society that was already riddled with hierarchical racialism (Robinson, 2000; Kelley, 2017). As we noted in the opening of this chapter, the first racialized victims of removal, enclosure, colonialism, and slavery came from within Europe itself (the Irish, the Jews, the Roma people's, the Slavs, etc.) and Robinson proposed that their domination was a settler-colonial process that involved the terroristic tactics of recon, invasion, settlement, expropriation, assimilation, and racial hierarchy that we've discussed throughout this chapter (Robinson, 2000; Kelley, 2017; Burden-Stelly, 2020; Gilmore, 2020; Jackson, 1996). To summarize the impact of Robinson's work in one sentence, Charisse Burden-Stelly (2020) writes that racial capitalism "has arisen as a conceptual framework [used] to understand the mutually constitutive nature of racialization and capitalist exploitation on a global scale, in specific localities, in discrete historical moments, in the entrenchment of the carceral state, and in the era of neoliberalization and permanent war." With this, understanding racial capitalism as a theoretical framework will only serve to enhance our analysis of community schools as they exist within specific localities and particular historical moments birthed from settler colonialism and racist economic domination. "What concerns us is that we understand that racialism and its permutations persisted, rooted not in a particular era but in the civilization itself," (Robinson, 2000).

The violence within communities on Turtle Island is bigger than individual people doing bad things. As we've tried to uncover throughout this entire chapter, the roots of this violence is woven into the fabric of our societies through colonial systems that produce conditions of enclosure and

erasure. Building an understanding of social problems through the lens of systems helps us to see that the world is more complicated than “good guys vs bad guys or victims and oppressors,” (South Chicago ABC Zine Distro, 2020). Social and political systems have an enormous impact on how we think, how we develop rules, and they also determine how and to whom critical resources are distributed throughout a society. Before we can identify how individual instances of violence are produced, we should try to gain an understanding of how social inequality is materially produced through systems (South Chicago ABC Zine Distro, 2020). Let’s now dive into the origins of modern racial capitalism here on Turtle Island.

By function, modern U.S. racial capitalism puts most of the world’s wealth and resources into the hands of a very small group of people. The exploitation of raw materials from the environment and the exploitation of labor from the people is what allows racial capitalism to make profits within the economic and social systems of the world. In the United States, this violent exploitation is supported by laws produced by the state itself. For our purposes here, “a state is a political institution that holds a monopoly violence,” allowing those in power to decide what kind of violence is permitted and what kind of violence is disallowed (South Chicago ABC Zine Distro, 2020). The settler state of the so-called U.S. enforces its monopoly on violence through institutions policing and military warfare—these institutions serve the state with zero accountability to the communities they terrorize and enclose (South Chicago ABC Zine Distro, 2020). Racial capitalism is dependent on the state which enables it to legally own the raw materials of the land and exploit the labor of the masses of people. Just like the capitalism born out of European civilizations, modern capitalism in the U.S. is an inherently racialized system dependent on the differences of people used to justify exploitation and genocide. *All*

capitalism is racial from its beginning. Today, social and economic systems within Turtle Island are built upon a system of racial capitalism that has continued to produce and reproduce itself throughout time—meaning, “it will continue to depend on racial practice, and racial hierarchy. No matter what...we can’t undo racism without undoing capitalism,” (Gilmore, 2020).

Charisse Burden-Stelly defines modern U.S. racial capitalism as a genocidal system made up of “a racially hierarchical political economy constituting war and militarism, imperialist accumulation, expropriation by domination, and labor super exploitation,” (Burden-Stelly, 2020). War and militarism are key elements of racial capitalism that facilitate an endless drive for profit and domination over the colonized people of Turtle Island and all of the Global South. Through war, Imperialist powers manufacture conflict across the globe as a way to legitimate extraordinary violence and the expropriation of resources from the Global South (Burden-Stelly, 2020). The ruling class in America is heavily invested in defending their way of life from the perpetual threat of a racialized majority who stand to benefit most from the redistribution of the world’s wealth and resources—for this, they are willing to wage an eternal war in order to protect their standard of living (South Chicago ABC Zine Distro, 2020). Their greed and domination is fueled by military expansion, the manufacturing of instability throughout the Global South, and the domestic super exploitation of Afrikan and Indigenous workers. In this context, the labor exploitation of Afrikan workers is an economic relationship that differs little from slavery because of its intensity, form, and racial basis (Burden-Stelly, 2020). Throughout her analysis, Burden-Stelly reminds readers that there is an important epistemological distinction between her analysis of modern racial capitalism and Cedric Robinson’s. She writes:

whereas Robinson finds Marxism Leninism to be, at best, inattentive to race, my theory of modern U.S. racial capitalism is rooted in the work of Black freedom fighters who, as Marxist-Leninists, were able to offer potent and enduring analyses and critiques of the conjunctural entanglements of racialism, white supremacy, and anti-Blackness, on the one hand, and capitalist exploitation and class antagonism on the other hand, (p. 6).

Burden-Stelly believes that her analysis of modern U.S. racial capitalism provides an intervention into the theory that draws on knowledge produced by Black anticapitalists who have theorized the integral relationship between capitalist exploitation, racial hegemony, perpetual war, imperialism, and super exploitation. Burden-Stelly's theorization of modern racial capitalism is an important extension of Robinson's work because she works to actively challenge intellectual McCarthyism which serves to erase and discredit the intellectual production of Afrikans who are deemed a threat "to national security for dedicating their lives to challenging these conjectures" and developing theories that hope to put an end to U.S. domination (Burden-Stelly, 2020).

For Burden-Stelly, the word *racial* in the term racial capitalism specifically refers to Blackness and the relationship that Afrikan descendants have to the capitalist system and the conditions, status, and material realities produced from it. Building on the work of sociologist Oliver Cox, she argues that the labor of Afrikan workers has been the *chief human factor* in the wealth production of the so-called United States. Using this framework, she asserts that "anti-Blackness and antiradicalism function as the legitimating architecture of modern U.S. racial capitalism," (Burden-Stelly, 2020, p. 5). While I agree that it is essential to center our analysis of racial capitalism around anti-Blackness and the super-exploitation of Afrikan workers, I find that our theorization will be incomplete if we erase the genocide, removal, and displacement of Indigenous people from the *legitimizing architecture* of racial

capitalism in the so-called United States. Just as we discussed throughout the section outlining the symptoms of settler-colonialism, I argue here that U.S. domination is dependent on both the exploitation of Afrikans and the genocide of Indigenous people to Turtle Island who have been constantly racialized through U.S. systems of control. My analysis aligns more with Cedric Robinson's conception of *racial* as he argues that "the tendency of European civilization through capitalism was not to homogenize but to differentiate-to exaggerate regional, subcultural, and dialectical differences into *racial* ones," (Robinson, 2000). Both Afrikans and the Indigenous people of Turtle Island have been constantly racialized throughout the development of modern racial capitalism in the US. The super exploitation of Afrikan workers was made possible by the extermination and enclosure of Indigenous nations across Turtle Island.

Without land, modern U.S. racial capitalism would have had no foundation for the free movement and expansion of white supremacy and settler societies. Neglecting this fact does not serve our overall analysis and resistance to settler colonialism and racial capitalism. I think it is important for our analysis to expand upon Burden-Stelly's articulation of modern racial capitalism by situating the genocide of Indigenous people alongside the super exploitation of Afrikan workers and antiradicalism as the three primary contradictions developed out of the U.S. regime of racial capitalism. By expanding Burden-Stelly's theorization of modern U.S. racial capitalism and its legitimating architecture in this way, I'm searching for a deeper articulation of its violent manipulation of land and borders. Throughout time, Black radicals, intellectuals, and revolutionaries have drawn internationalist connections between the superexploitation of Afrikan workers, the genocide of Indigenous people, and the destabilization of the Global South—it will be useful for us to do the same. These connections

are historic. If we look closely at the movement of people across this planet throughout the last few hundred years, you'll find an enormous discrepancy between the movement of European settlers and racialized people. Within the constructs of racial capitalism, European settlerism and conquest has been contingent on the forced trafficking, enslavement, displacement, and extermination of millions of racialized people on this planet. As colonized people become increasingly displaced and enclosed, white settlers are allowed access to *free* land that was stolen from Indigenous nations in the name of modern U.S. racial capitalism and engage in the super exploitation of Afrikan and migrant workers (Walia, 2021; Walia, 2020).

Racial Regimes and the Logics of White Supremacy

In an interview on the podcast, *Millennials are Killing Capitalism*, Joshua Myers argues that the term *racial capitalism* is often employed as an empty signifier to lazily show the connection between capitalism and race or “it's kind of a defensive posture to get more leftist to have a racial analysis,” (Myers, 2020). Racial regimes, on the other hand, “speaks to the power dynamics of racist modes of operating connecting them to a political economy through cultural systems, while simultaneously revealing that they are based on fictive foundations,” (Myers, 2020). Meaning that, the concept of racial regimes as an analytical tool allows for us to identify how settler-colonial societies construct social and economic systems that propose race as the primary justification for the relations of power (Robinson, 2007). But, what makes them fictive and mythical? Racial regimes commonly masquerade themselves as being *natural* and *inevitable* creations of collective European anxieties rooted in their threatening encounters with that which is different (Robinson, 2007). Put simply,

racial regimes are forged out of mythical fears developed from European confrontations with societies that they viewed as different and thus, lesser (i.e. the Irish, Afrikans, Indigenous Americans, Queer communities, etc.). An important facet of these white supremacist regimes is their ability to adapt, change, and still remain in power (Myers, 2020). They have a unique ability to actively revise how people understand race. For example, how can police unions both defend their right to murder innocent Black people while simultaneously funding anti-racist Black History Month art that is displayed on their squad cars (Kim, 2023)? How can the FBI both honor the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr. and admit to being involved in his assassination (Lee, 2020)? Racial regimes adapt by convincing the public that social systems rooted in capital expansion, genocide, and exploitation are somehow anti-racist and transformative.

As a way to conclude this section, in his book, *Blood in My Eye*, the revolutionary giant George Jackson (1996) reminds us that our analysis and practice of liberation struggle cannot lose sight of the realities that colonized people face within the larger system of racial capitalism. Although individual experiences vary greatly depending on location, George Jackson challenges us to consider how all colonized people face the threat of premature death no matter where they stand. Jackson (1969) writes that:

Born to a premature death, a menial, subsistence-wage worker, odd-job person, the cleaner, the caught, the person under hatches, without bail—that's me, the colonial victim. Anyone who can pass the civil service examination can kill me tomorrow. I've lived with repression every moment of my life, a repression so formidable that any movement on my part can only bring relief, the respite of a small victory or the release of death. In every sense of the term, in every sense that's real, I'm a slave to, and of, property (p. 7).

As we attempt to understand the function of community schools within Afrikan and Indigenous people's struggle for liberation we have to center the experiences of the colonial victim. Drawing on the analysis provided by George Jackson, the material conditions produced by modern U.S. racial capitalism force us to consider how liberatory educational programs develop and implement methods of survival that may *bring relief* to the colonial victim who is constantly threatened with premature death. My analysis throughout this dissertation will consider how community schools function to resist the *legitimizing architecture* of modern U.S. racial capitalism. If we lose sight of these core contradictions presented by Jackson, our understanding of community schools and liberation struggle will be incomplete. Communities and educators living in resistance to racial capitalism and settler colonialism have been theorizing and organizing towards its demise since its inception—my hope is that this analysis will make a small contribution towards the assertion that Afrikan and Indigenous survival is dependent on a radical break with modern systems of racial capitalism and settler colonialism that have been the principal cause of underdevelopment for Afrikan and Indigenous communities on Turtle Island and across the globe (Rodney, 1972).

Decolonization and the Process of Building Self-Determination

Now that we've developed a base-level understanding of racial regimes and European colonial domination, let's move forward in our discussion by exploring community-developed theories of self-determination and Pedagogies of Resistance. Our mission here is to explore the various ways in which Afrikan, Indigenous, and colonized people have theorized their collective resistance against racial capitalism and settler colonialism. One of my primary goals is to understand how these theories can

help us to *record the noise* and aid us in documenting evidence of the ongoing, uncompromising struggle to end the systematic extermination and oppression of Afrikan and Indigenous peoples (Osuna, 2017; Johnson & Lubin, 2017). This is my attempt to shift our theoretical gaze beyond eurocentrism—beyond theories and pedagogies that serve to maintain the violent domination we explored previously. I will open with a theoretical and practical exploration of decolonization and communal struggles to build self-determination within the heart of the so-called United States before discussing the Black Radical Tradition and Pedagogies of Liberation in the later sections.

Decolonization on Turtle Island

The term decolonization has come to mean many things in mainstream discourse—most of which tend to treat the process as a metaphorical endeavor (Tuck & Yang, 2012; Césaire, 2000; Estes, 2019). According to Tuck and Yang (2012), “decolonization has been superficially adopted into education and other social sciences, supplanting prior ways of talking about social justice, critical methodologies, or approaches which decenter settler perspectives,” (p. 2). What risks do we run by relegating decolonization to a simple metaphor? Take ten minutes of your day to scroll through any social media platform and you’ll find an abundance of non-Indigenous scholars and community organizers throwing around terms like “decolonize your classroom,” “decolonize your organizing space,” “decolonize higher education,” etc. The people who take up these metaphorical phrases rarely, if ever, (1) make any mention of Indigenous people and their nations, (2) recognize their struggle for land back and national sovereignty, and (3) provide any contributions to Indigenous revolutionaries, political prisoners, scholars, and community members who have developed and advanced the theories

of decolonization they're choosing to co-opt. How do you "decolonize" something that was birthed by and serves to exist within a settler-colonial system? The issue with these buzzwords lies in the fact that they have no actual interest in decolonizing anything—on the contrary, packaging decolonization up as a metaphor works to "recenter whiteness; it resettles theory, it extends innocence to the settler, it entertains a settler future," (Tuck & Yang, 2012). In this way, metaphors of decolonization kill any possibility of actual decolonization—they enable the advancement of settler-colonialism by making decolonization digestible to anyone who wants to see face value change and social progress; they airbrush the revolutionary spirit of decolonization and dilute its truths; they work to disappear the possibility of Indigenous futures that have fought for national sovereignty and land back (Recollet, 2016).

Decolonization is a generational process of reversing the social and physical ills of settler-colonialism by revolutionizing society. It is a process of social reconstruction and transformation that is committed to establishing national sovereignty for Indigenous peoples, who are the just caretakers of their land. As a process, decolonization "requires the dismantling of the [settler-colonial] government and its entire social system upon which control and exploitation are based," (Zig-Zag, 2019). We must be weary of dishonest, liberal decolonial frameworks that are not honest about colonial violence and the need to dismantle settler systems—these frameworks are rarely, if ever, serious about the liberation of Indigenous people and their land. As we outlined above, subscribing to these dishonest frameworks actually leads to greater assimilation and control over colonized people by the settler government. This excerpt from a zine created by Warrior Publications provides enormous insight into the process of

decolonization within the context of settler-colonialism that I cannot capture with my own words.

Zig-zag (2019) writes:

Just as colonialism enters and passes through various phases, beginning first with recon missions and then the application of military force, so too does decolonization. It would be a mistake to conceive of decolonization as a single event. Instead, it is a process that begins with individuals & small groups. The primary focus in the first phase of decolonization is on disengaging from the colonial system and re-learning one's history, culture, etc. This phase places a heavy emphasis on rejecting European society & embracing all that is Indigenous as good and positive. Some common steps in this phase include returning to one's community, re-establishing family relations, [and] re-learning culture (inc. art, language, songs, ceremonies, hunting, fishing, etc.). This not only counters the destructive effects of colonialism, but also instills in the Indigenous person a greater respect and appreciation for their own culture and way of life. In many ways it is a struggle for identity and purpose (p. 20).

Both Indigenous and Afrikan knowledge keepers and intellectuals describe the process of decolonization through the lens of five distinct phases. (1) Development of Culture & Spirit, (2) Identifying the Enemy, (3) Liberation of Mind and Spirit, (4) Disengaging from the Colonial System, and (5) Reoccupation of Indigenous Territories. The initial development of culture & spirit is a principle that has driven Afrikan and Indigenous liberation movements for decolonization across the global south and will be essential to our analysis of the role of community schools (Assensoh, 1998; Fanon, 1963; Nyerere, 1968; Zig-zag, 2019).

Under settler-colonial domination on Turtle Island, the reclamation of culture and spirit are closely tied to the liberation of mind and spirit. These aspects of colonized people have been withered away and warped through systems of removal, isolation, and violence. As a result, Indigenous and Afrikan people suffer from a variety of symptoms like post-traumatic stress disorder, identity crisis, and feelings of inferiority—these are all symptoms of a people who have been disconnected from their

culture; the effects are reflected in our/their communities high rates of alcoholism, drug addiction, along with intercommunal and interpersonal violence (Zig-zag, 2019). Worst of all, Indigenous and Afrikan children have the highest rates of suicide within the so-called United States (Ramchand et. al., 2021). None of these violences were present before settler-colonialism. As Fanon wrote, “the poverty of the people, national oppression and the inhibition of culture are one and the same thing,” (Fanon, 1963). Reclamation of culture is a primary step in the process of decolonization. When presented with the truth about their history and cultures, Afrikan and Indigenous people’s are introduced to the generational spirit of resistance. The reclamation of culture involves the reclaiming of their languages, ceremonies, organizational methods, songs, crests, regalia, and so much more. It also means continuing the legacy of our ancestors, relatives, and siblings who have engaged in decolonial struggle throughout the modern era (Black Panther Party for Self Defense, American Indian Movement, S.T.A.R., Young Lords, Standing Rock, Water Defenders, etc.).

Identifying the enemy involves a collective effort to raise colonized people’s consciousness. It is idealistic to simply assume that *all* white or European people are the enemy of colonized people. This common employment of reductionism does not account for the internal divisions within a society that concern economic class, gender, sexuality, and ableism. Blindly aligning with groups of people based on identity alone is counterproductive and leaves colonized people vulnerable to continued cooptation and exploitation. If we understand settler-colonial society as a slave system rooted in apartheid logic, then we know there are rulers and those who are enslaved within a lower class (Haley, 2016; Rodriguez, 2006; Zig-zag, 2019). Class, in this context, is not and has never been divorced from gender, race, nationality, location, age, etc.—all these things are closely intertwined. To be a worker is

to be *enslaved* in a class that has been segregated from other factions of your class—one that is exploited in a compound fashion through systemic racism that impacts the workplace, wages, what access to shelter you have, what access to transportation you have, what access to safety do you have, how have you been psychologically traumatized, etc. (Kelley, 2021). Each of these outcomes disproportionately impacts Afrikan and Indigenous workers in comparison to White workers. For this reason, the common enemy of all workers is the ruling class and all decolonial struggle should center the political sovereignty of the most oppressed factions of the working class: Afrikan and Indigenous communities.

Alas, let's discuss what it looks like to begin physically disengaging from the settler-colonial system and begin reoccupying Indigenous territories. For Indigenous peoples, the land not only provides us with food, water, shelter, clothing, tools, etc., but it also serves as the foundation of our culture. Our mind and spirit are affected by the surroundings we live in (Zig-zag, 2019). Breaking free from the settler-colonial system depends on the collective development of food co-ops, tenant strike groups, community patrol systems, free holistic health clinics, community daycare centers, transportation services, community schools, and other community programs that can help us disengage from colonial powers and start building essential programs for decolonization (Muntaqim, 2000). This requires access to land and space. Community programs providing essential services that are rooted in Afrikan and Indigenous cultural knowledge will allow for communities to begin disengaging from settler-colonial systems that have penetrated virtually all aspects of their daily lives—including their relationships, value systems, and belief systems. Participating in cultural activities and ceremonies, learning songs and dances, creating art and crafts, learning traditional skills such as

hunting and fishing, and, lastly, physically living on/with the land are all processes that are key to decolonization. A primary goal of reoccupying Indigenous territories is to establish self-sufficient communities beyond the range and influence of colonial society. Within these territories, sovereign and free communities/nations can be reconstructed, ultimately liberating our/their people from colonial society and achieving self-determination (Zig-zag, 2019).

At the end of the day, decolonization is a violent process. Just as Kwame Ture wrote, “in order for nonviolence to work, your opponent must have a conscience. The United States has none,” (Ture, 1992). Oppressed people across the globe have attempted to gain independence and liberation through nonviolent action for decades—we witnessed this on Turtle Island with Dr. Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement. Even in response to nonviolent action, the oppressor, in this case, the United States, responded with violence. In Palestine, its people have also attempted to gain their freedom through nonviolent means. For example, the 1976 Land Day strikes; the First Intifada from 1987-1993; the 2018-2019 Great March of Return; the 2021 protests in Sheikh Jarrah; and the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement are all examples of which the Palestinian people have responded to genocidal violence with non-violent action. In each instance, the people of Palestine were met with continued violence by the Zionist state. Time and time again throughout history, we are reminded that the primary language of the oppressor is violence. For this reason, we have seen liberation movements from different time periods take up arms to win their freedom. In the face of European settler-colonialism, imperialism, and militarism, history has demonstrated to us that decolonization requires violence. The Axis of Resistance in Gaza and throughout West Asia is reminding us of this truth as I write this. Even with all of the global protests throughout the past six

months, the genocidal bombardment of Gaza has continued. While the mass movements have surely had their impact, it has been the fierce steadfastness of the resistance in Gaza and their allies that has forced the Zionists and the U.S. to the negotiation table. What was expected from the Palestinian people after 75 years of violence and terror? Should they keep waiting on the powers of the world to negotiate their livelihood? Or should they take it upon themselves to defend the Palestinian people, their lands, and their rights—knowing that the right to defend themselves is backed by international law? Violence, in the case of decolonization, is a necessary and logical step toward confronting the aggression of settler-colonial states like Israel and the United States. With this, we should keep Assata Shakur’s words in the forefront of our minds: “r/evolution is not about bloodshed or about going to the mountains and fighting; we will fight if we are forced to, but the fundamental goal of r/evolution must be peace,” (McGowan, 2021).

Black Liberation, Pan-Afrikanism, and the Struggle for Self-Determination

According to Afrikan and Indigenous theorists, the decolonization of North America is dependent upon the collective liberation of both Afrikan and Indigenous internally colonized peoples throughout the land of Abya Yala (Malcolm X, 1989; Malcolm X, 1992; Newton 2004; Shakur, 1988). The Black Liberation Movement of the 60s and 70s relied heavily on an analysis of self-determination that was famously put forth by El Hajj Malik El Shabazz, most commonly known as Malcolm X. I will refer to him as Malcolm X throughout this section because he himself stated that he would continue to honor that name for as long as the conditions which produced it exist (Malcolm X, 1989; Malcolm X, 1992). In the year leading up to his assassination, Malcolm X made it publicly known that he

planned to take the issue of Black self-determination and U.S. genocide to the floor of the United Nations. Various organizations across the country adopted Malcolm X's understanding of self-determination as the thread connecting the Afrikan and Indigenous struggle against the U.S. to struggles against imperialism in countries like Vietnam, Cuba, Palestine, and Algeria (Haiphong, 2015). Decolonial movements for self-determination across the globe shed light on the fact that the same guns, courts, and militaries used to terrorize Afrikan and Indigenous people in America were the same ones destroying nations abroad (Haiphong, 2015; Newton, 2004). The latter portion of this section will discuss the political and revolutionary ideology of Pan-Afrikanism which developed out of the Revolutionary Era of the 1960s and 70s. The All Afrikan People's Revolutionary Party (AAPRP) was formed by Kwame Ture and invoked the ideologies of Osagyefo Kwame Nkrumah and Ahmed Sekou Toure—two Afrikan giants who secured liberation for their respective nations and spearheaded the movement for the complete unification of Afrika under scientific socialism.

Let us start first with self-determination. Self-determination, by definition, is rooted in the idea that peoples, communities, and entire nations live under oppression and have the justified right to lift themselves out of those conditions by any means necessary. Malcolm X and Huey P. Newton define self-determination as the power of a nation or community of people to independently develop their cultural, political, and economic systems free from foreign domination and outside influence (Malcolm X, 1992; Newton, 2004). It is a struggle for independent power led by and for oppressed people within a given territory or nation—it is a struggle against racial regimes, white supremacy, and settler-colonialism and its fight is synonymous with movements for decolonization. Self-determination on Turtle Island looks a lot like the fourth step of decolonization that we outlined previously. It is a

struggle for power that aims to break free from colonial systems and allow colonized people to forge their own path of development through the formation of community-led social programs. Without this struggle for power, self-determination cannot be realized (Newton, 2004). The right to self-determination for all people is recognized within the spirit of international law and is clearly defined by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) which was developed and signed into law by 173 different countries. According to Article 2 of the Covenant, self-determination is achieved when a national territory: “(1) Is governed according to the will of the people; (2) Is [absent] of internal or external domination; (3) [Has] free pursuit of economic, social, and cultural development; (4) [Enjoys] the fundamental human right to equality before the law; and (5) Is [absent] of discrimination based upon race, color, class, caste, creed, or political conviction,” (General Assembly, 1966). As we have outlined throughout this chapter, the so-called United States and its settler-colonial government has fundamentally failed to preserve each of these five points.

Let us shift our discussion toward the defining of Pan-Africanism as an ideology and as a practice. Pan-Africanism was fully realized during the 5th Pan-African Congress of 1945. In an essay detailing the ideologies of Osagyefo Kwame Nkrumah and Ahmed Sekou Toure, the AAPRP defines Pan-Africanism as an ideology that:

Provides the masses of African People with a program of human transformation turning individual defects into qualities by living the ideology. It is a Pan-African ideology that breaks the web of complexes put on us by the dominant culture and enables us to reclaim our humanity, reassert our dignity, and develop a new Revolutionary African Personality. It provides a revolutionary view of Africa and the world applying the universal principles of scientific socialism in the context of African history, tradition, and aspirations. It gives us a set of analytical tools which enable the masses of Africa People to correctly interpret, understand, redeem African culture and reconstruct Africa by way of the Cultural Revolution. [Pan-Africanism] provides a

complete social, political, philosophical and economic theory which constitute a comprehensive network of principles, beliefs, values, morals and rules which guide our behavior, determines the form which our institutions and organizations will take; and acts as a cohesive force to bind us together, guide and channel our revolutionary action towards the achievement of Pan-Africanism and the inevitable triumph of socialism worldwide (AAPRP, 2022).

For our purposes, I will define Pan-Africanism utilizing five of its core principles: (1) the unity of Afrika under scientific socialism, (2) the development of the revolutionary Afrikan personality, (3) the humanist ideals of egalitarianism and collectivism, (4) dialectical and historical materialism, and (5) the harmony between religion/spirituality and revolution.

(1) The unity of Afrika is essential to Pan-Africanism because “the core of the black revolution is in Afrika and until Afrika is united under a socialist government, the black man throughout the world lacks a national home. All people of Afrikan descent, whether they live in North or South America, the Caribbean or in any other part of the world, are Afrikans and belong to the Afrikan nation,” (Nkrumah, 1970). (2) By developing the revolutionary Afrikan personality, Afrikan individuals within a territory or nation can more easily identify with Afrika’s historical past and the struggle of Afrikan people to liberate and unify the continent to build a just society—for Pan-Africanists, this can only be achieved through a cultural revolution that reshapes the individual Afrikan personality. (3) Employing principles of humanism, egalitarianism, and collectivism allow for Pan-Africanism to emphasize the importance of social solidarity, justice, and the cooperation between all people of a society. (4) Pan-Africanists believe that liberation movements must study the science of revolution. Dialectical and historical materialism is “the essence of revolutionary science,” (AAPRP, 2022). According to Ahmed Sekou Toure, dialectical materialism is the study of “the general

connections between the elements of nature, the laws of evolution of the objective world and the action that these laws exercise on human consciousness,” (Toure, 1977). Dialectical and historical materialism does not just simply list the evolutionary stages of society throughout time, it scientifically analyzes society to show the “specific origin of every stage of its evolution, how every qualitative change originates and the specific characteristics of every stage,” (AAPRP, 2022). The final principle (5) harmony between religion/spirituality and revolution, is a core tenant of Pan-Africanism because both religion and revolution share common values which they want people to embody—even more, religion and revolution “want People to become the uncompromising and faithful advocates,” (AAPRP, 2022). In this way, the two cannot be separated. As an internationalist revolutionary ideology capable of shaping and developing a people’s revolutionary consciousness, Pan-Africanism helps advance our understanding of decolonization and self-determination for Afrikan and Indigenous people across the globe.

While we continue to analyze the role and function of community schools, this study will benefit from understanding the relationship between liberation schools and theories of decolonization, self-determination, and Pan-Africanism. The struggle for political, social, and economic independence starts at the hyper-local level and community schools sit within the heart of any community. Oftentimes, they are hubs for a variety of social programs and decolonization projects rooted in self-determination. Without this lens, we will not be able to fully capture the struggle being waged by oppressed communities on Turtle Island and abroad.

The Black Radical Tradition, Maroonage, and Collective Resistance

The Black Radical Tradition (BRT) is both the historical and modern day legacy of diasporic Afrikan resistance to white supremacist settler-colonial social, political, economic, and cultural domination. Cedric Robinson (2000) himself defines it as, “the continuing development of a collective consciousness informed by the historical struggles for liberation and motivated by the shared sense of obligation to preserve the collective being, the ontological totality,” (p. 171). In essence, a deep study of the Black Radical Tradition allows us to ask the question, what does it mean to be ontologically total? For Josh Myers, a Black Studies expert and student of Cedric Robinson, he argues that ontological totality is the reality of Afrikan people both resisting and continuing to perpetuate who they are in the making of that resistance (Myers, 2020). When a group of people resist with full knowledge of themselves and their ancestors, they are demonstrating ontological totality. To resist means to be ontologically total—this, for Robinson, is the only way for Afrikan people to make their struggle meaningful. Rather than buying into historical legends and myths that assume and expect Afrikan people to participate in mass retaliatory violence against Europeans, Robinson’s theorization of the BRT tries to uncover the reality that Afrikan people resisted based on who they were before the advent of European domination. He deconstructs backward logic which assumes Afrikan resistance will take a solely violent form that is legible to the colonial society that is oppressing them (Myers, 2020). While the colonizer is quick to hurl accusations of terrorism and violence against resistance and liberation movements, these projections are almost always confessions of the horrific things they themselves as done to the oppressed people they are accusing—rarely, if ever, are these accusations an accurate portrayal of resistance movements carried out by the oppressed.

The Black Radical Tradition is a culture of opposition committed to uncovering political systems and pedagogies that work to directly uplift the struggle for Afrikan liberation across the diaspora. Invoking the words of Robin D.G. Kelley, Joshua Myer (2020) argues that the Black Radical Tradition is a historical practice—it is a particular way of living in resistance to the terror of racial capitalism. Furthering this logic, Myer reminds us that the Black Radical Tradition is not a list of names, figureheads, and historical events—it is a collective mechanism used to resist the reduction of Afrikan people to chattel, and beyond that, it is a mode of living otherwise in the face of racial capitalism, settler colonialism, and communal extinction. It is the process of building communities that exists in constant opposition to racial regimes and settler-colonial empires developed out of European difference making projects. It is a form of resistance that emerges directly from Afrikan culture, languages, beliefs, and enslavement—it is the physical demonstration of powerful impulses to escape enslavement and return to a society they once knew. Robinson (2017) writes that,

The first impulse of these Afrikans was to remove themselves from the slave system. Rather than going after slavery, they wanted to recreate their Afrikan homelands. Rather than confront the system as the system, they removed themselves from it. They created maroon communities which in some instances became so massive and so powerful that, as in Palmares in seventeenth-century Brazil, they became republics themselves. Palmares persisted for ninety years or so. And there were similar kinds of adventures (you might call them) in the West Indies, in Jamaica, and elsewhere. In the North American colonial situation, one area that became famous for maroonage was the Great Dismal Swamp (Robinson, 2017).

This impulse to escape enslavement—to escape the domination of racial regimes—manifests differently based on historical context. In the 16th century, as Robinson notes, the BRT might have manifested itself as maroonage, but in 2020, it manifested itself as mass demonstrations and

organization against police terrorism. “The context is important, but it does not determine the nature of the Black Radical Tradition,” (Myers, 2020).

If we want to understand the nature of the BRT, we have to develop an understanding of how diasporic Afrikan communities are born out of pre-existing cultural traditions and ways of being. These traditions determine the nature of their resistance—the nature of the Black Radical Tradition—and these traditions “determine the meaning of how it is to live, how it is to practice good conduct, how it is to be in line with a particular ancestral, and cultural logic that then manifests how people want to be in the world,” (Myers, 2020). With this being said, the Black Radical Tradition is not a road map, it does not provide us with step by step directions—it does not answer the question, what do we do now? What the Black Radical Tradition does is provide us with a method that guides us towards understanding ourselves in relation to an intellectual and cultural genealogy that may allow us to determine who we are as Afrikans. It provides us with a practical way to place ourselves within the historical tradition of Afrikan resistance throughout time.

In his work, Cedric Robinson believed that communities who resisted European settler-colonialism, whether they were Afrikan or not, served as our teachers and our compatriots. Through the Black Radical Tradition, Robinson’s project was to explore forms of rebellion unique to the Afrikan struggle that drew upon “cultural resources taught to slaves by their ancestors in Afrika,” (Johnson & Lubin, 2017). Robinson’s study of the BRT grants historical and revolutionary agency to Afrikan communities who resisted European domination by acknowledging that the roots of their liberation struggle were grounded in knowledge systems that developed long before the expansion of imperialism and racial capitalism. His work provides our study with a new way to deepen our

understanding of the limitations of settler ideologies. To more fully understand the dynamic nature of Afrikan resistance across the Diaspora, Robinson insists that we look outside of the orbit of Eurocentric logic; a challenge to go beyond the limitations of European thought whose theoretical and epistemological groundings are rooted in colonial extraction and exploitation; whose social order is maintained and rationalized by authority and genocide (Robinson, 2000; Thomas, 2005). Instead of leaning into linear timelines of colonial history that erase colonized peoples struggle to resist settler dominance, the Black Radical Tradition acknowledges the complexities of individuals and communities; it relies on the individual experiences of people within communities and honors the fact that each individual carries with them a unique worldview and philosophical notion about life, death, possession, community, and so forth.

This study is committed to understanding systems of resistance through particular experiences within particular contexts. It is through these particulars that I believe we can continue to formulate a collective identity informed by the history of colonized people's struggle; one that is committed to honoring the fact that our present situation is entirely structured both by our collective pasts and our potential futures (Estes, 2019; Rodney, 1972). The educators, families, and community members of Malcolm X Academy in Oak Park, Sacramento—by nature—are struggling to carry on the struggle of the Black Radical Tradition. My goal is to uncover the particular ways they continue to move the tradition forward. How is their work aligned with the historical and ongoing struggle against racial regimes? Cedric Robinson's work challenges us to recuperate, recover, and enliven the BRT within the community and the academy. That is my goal. How can the story of a small school in Sacramento “produce new questions and answers that offer generative critiques and project new visions of justice

and democracy?” (Johnson & Lubin, 2017). This is the challenge presented to us through a deep study of the Black Radical Tradition.

Pedagogies of Resistance and Liberation

Across the Global South, in regions like Latin America, the Caribbean, Afrika, along with West and East Asia, social movements have developed a complex understanding of the power that education has to structurally transform a society's social and economic institutions (Shenker, 2012; Mariano & Tarlau, 2019; Tarlau, 2015; Tarlau, 2017). These education systems implemented across the Global South, particularly in Latin America, have been identified by scholars as *Pedagogies of Resistance* and they offer a great framework towards understanding the function of liberatory educational institutions in our own context (Jaramillo & Carreon, 2014). In this section, we will also take a closer look at concepts of militant education and unschooling as a way of situating them within the larger network of pedagogies of resistance.

Pedagogies of Resistance are rooted in revolutionary principles (Grande, 2004; McLaren, 2000; McLaren, 20004). Advocates for Pedagogies of Resistance insist on putting forth a theory and practice of education filled with liberatory intent and centers the struggles of colonized people. Resistance pedagogies are forged *with* not *for* the masses of colonized people and they are situated squarely within the people's struggle for liberation. Through deep reflection and practice, this pedagogy reveals the need for colonized communities to engage in the struggle for their liberation—within this process, Pedagogies of Resistance are constantly made and remade as the struggle waxes and wanes (Freire, 1972; Hernandez, 2012). Utilizing methods of reflection, Freire urges us to ask the

following question: if the implementation of a liberating education requires political power and the oppressed have none, how then is it possible to carry out the pedagogy of the oppressed prior to the revolution? In his answer he makes a distinction between “systemic education” and “educational projects.” The former refers to the overarching system of education that is implemented by a state or autonomous government. The latter, educational projects, relates more to our present situation here in the so-called United States—while, at the present moment, we may not have the political power to transform the entire system of education, we do have the capacity to build educational projects that utilize Pedagogies of Resistance (Freire, 1972). In its early stages, resistance pedagogy set out to deal with the problem of political consciousness within a community. It recognizes the fact that oppressed people are a group of people who live with many contradictions and divisions—they’ve been shaped by and exist within a society rot with terroristic violence, economic turmoil, and white supremacy—the educational projects we develop must reflect this reality and work to combat the ills of settler-colonial education and western mythmaking propaganda (Freire, 1968; Hernandez, 2012; Robinson, 2000).

Within this pedagogical framework, there must be genuine dialogue and reciprocity between the educator and the learner (Freire, 1972; Freire, 1973; hooks, 1994). The purpose of resistance pedagogies is to build-up people. We want to establish educational projects and community programs that build-up people’s skills, heighten their abilities to work inside a community, and boost their participation in collective survival (Spade, 2020). We are interested in developing independent people—and thus, independent communities—who are interested in the survival of their people. We want learners to see themselves as being engaged in the historical struggle of revolutionizing their

community. Through this lens, community educators must learn to trust their learners' ability to think and reason—as Freire writes, “whoever lacks this trust will fail to initiate (or will abandon) dialogue, reflection, and communication, and will fall into using slogans, communiques, monologues, and instructions,” (Freire, 1972).

This commitment to resistance pedagogies is a complete divorce from what Freire calls the “banking system” of education—a system which suffers from a deep narration sickness. Within this colonial model of educating, the task of the teacher is to “fill” the students with knowledge only the teacher possesses. The task of the student is to record, memorize, and repeat without ever having to perceive or analyze what they’re actually thinking about. This model turns learners into empty receptacles that are to be filled with petrified knowledge provided by the teacher. Learners are limited to actions of receiving, filing, and storing deposits made by the teacher—there exists no trace of communication and dialogue between the teacher and student (Freire, 1972). Success and achievement within this model is determined by how meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled with useless information—the more passive the better (Grande, 2004).

According to Freire (1972), community educators committed to liberation must reject the banking concept of education in its entirety. He argues that the banking model of education must be abandoned and replaced with a model focused on the “posing of the problems of human beings in their relations with the world,” (Freire, 1972). This speaks directly to theories of decolonization and self-determination. Through historical analysis, Freire’s concept of problem-posing education challenges educators to guide learners through a process of problem-solving that is grounded in collective communication and dialogue about the problems people face in the real world. Problem-

posing education models like Pedagogies of Resistance immediately resolve the teacher-student contradiction by bringing the educator and the learner into a relationship that respects the expert knowledge of all people involved. It emphasizes the need for educators to see themselves in partnership with their learners. Through this relationship, Freire argues that educators should center the fact that their learners possess knowledge and solutions critical to the learning environment. This process allows educators and the learned to more fully engage in a process of communication, dialogue, and problem solving in both structured and unstructured learning situations (Freire, 1972; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). Much like the scientific method, problem posing resistance pedagogies is a process that has five stages:

1. Identify a problem.
2. Analyze the problem.
3. Create a plan of action to address the problem.
4. Implement the plan of action.
5. Analyze and evaluate the action.

These stages play out in a cyclical fashion and they encourage learners to become sources of change within their community by “developing their capacity to confront real-world problems that face them and their community,” and they help educational projects to produce “a cycle of awareness, action, and reflection whereby people are empowered constantly to analyze and act upon the material conditions of their own lives,” (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008).

In short, resistance pedagogies attempt to gain an understanding of the everyday lives of the people in their communities. It is not the role of the educator or the academic to be the primary ones to reflect on the everyday lives of the people. Antonio Faundez (1989) reminds educators of this as he says:

Our contribution to the people is that we and they together engage in reflection on their and our everyday life. And then they will discover for themselves their moments of resistance, how they express their resistance, the foundations they have on which to build and ideology; and they will discover that it is they themselves who have to build it, in a process in which we of course participate. As Gramsci said: “The people have feelings, they feel and act: intellectuals understand but they do not feel.” What we must do is bring together feeling and understanding in order to arrive at truth, (p. 215).

Education from the Bottom-Up

In a speech at Portland State University, Kwame Ture (1973) provided a remarkable analysis of how the American education system and its media outlets work to confuse the masses of people. He said:

Most of our history was written by the enemy. We know that. It was written by our oppressors. That’s understood. But even, let’s take an example of their history which they write. Like John F. Kennedy. When you read about John F. Kennedy, (whistles) you say, that’s not the one I knew about. They make Kennedy sound like such a liberal. They make him sound as if he was the white hope coming to free all the oppressed peoples of the world, ya know. Kennedy was a fascist. He was! It was Kennedy who invaded the sovereign territory of the peoples of Cuba under the Bay of Pigs invasion. It was Kennedy, yeah! And I remember, he came before the American public and lied, he said, ‘I didn’t know nothing about it.’ Then Castro put a whooping on him that he would never forget. Castro came out and threw some documents on him and he came before the American public and he said, ‘I’m sorry, I lied. I knew about it!’ Interpretation of history is important! If you don’t have it correctly, it will warp everything for you. It will put it out of focus. When we read about our people, there’s nothing significant, it’s all negative. But their people are all positive. We have a responsibility to correctly interpret our history so that it can inspire our people. You must inspire them (Ture, 1973, pg. 13).

Ture’s comments highlight what I’ve tried to note throughout this chapter—one of the greatest mechanisms of sabotage used by colonial propaganda is the lies, contradictions, and myths of history produced by the so-called United States. Before we even think about building educational projects and institutions, theorists of resistance pedagogies argue that we must first have a proper interpretation of

the cultural history of those we wish to educate (Ture, 1992). Without this understanding, we will have a warped vision of the decolonial, self-determined futures we hope to forge.

Settler-colonial education systems are infected with a narration sickness that is stuck expounding on topics completely foreign or contradictory to our students' lived experiences (Freire, 1972). Unfortunately, as we've proven time and time again, settler logic cannot escape these contradictions (Delgado, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Morris, 2016; Solorzano and Yosso, 2002; Ture, 1992; Zimmermann, 2014). So, how do we retell our history from the bottom, up? We should start by mapping stories that push us to shift our attention towards particular educational frameworks offering us a more legitimate revolutionary blueprint working to dismantle, transform, and rebuild systems of education (Bajaj, 2015; Kaba, 2021; Smith et al., 2019). I propose that the lessons throughout this project will highlight why we should develop social systems designed to serve the interests of our communities. As colonized people, we come from generations of struggle that have resisted oppressive conditions through mutual struggle and collective practices of community safety (Shoatz, 2012). These histories of resistance have been and continue to be stolen from our communities and repackaged to us through linear timelines of history that erase the genocidal actions of colonial empires. Because of this, any path towards self-determination requires that we construct a proper analysis of our history so that our students and communities can properly understand their interconnected experiences. (Shakur, 1988; Shoatz, 2012). They show us why any legitimate framework of liberatory education will uplift bottom-up history as one of its primary tools for ideological transformation.

Militant Education

Militant Education is a term coined by the Afrikan Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (Partido Afrikanu para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde or PAIGC). Sonia Vaz Borges elaborates on the use of this term in her book, *Militant Education, Liberation Struggle and Consciousness: the PAIGC education in Guinea Bissau 1963-1978*, where she details a brilliant history of the revolutionary militant education project developed in the heart of Guinea Bissau's struggle for independence. The idea and implementation of militant education by the PAIGC was greatly impacted by the unique historical context in which it originated and the practice was molded by several elements:

Afrikan liberation struggles and their anti-colonial positions; pan-Afrikan movements and the Afrikan unity principle; the Cold War and socialist ideological blocs; the Non-Aligned Movement and international solidarity; the period of internal armed conflict in the Guinean territory; and the international human rights struggle of the liberation movement in the realm of the United Nations (Borges, 2022, pg. 22).

Militant education is an ongoing practice that emerged within a particular historical moment of the mid 20th Century and was informed by the political movements and ideologies developed during the time (Borges, 2019; see also Borges, 2022). It assumes a complete break from the colonial education system. Through pedagogies of militant education, students and citizens are guided to fully develop themselves and they are encouraged to make deliberate contributions to the sustainable development of the decolonial liberation struggle. In Guinea Bissau, three groups were trained and formed through militant or political education: the militant student, the militant combatant, and the militant teacher. Each of these groups of militants were educated toward the development of the individual as a freed Afrikan citizen, whose mission it was to consciously contribute to the long-term, sustainable growth of

the recently liberated nation, integrated into an internationalist global perspective (Borges & César, 2022). By this definition, militant education is a “committed, engaged, and conscious education” that is grounded in “anti-colonial and decolonial principles” and it concentrates its efforts towards the objectives of the liberation movement (Borges, 2019, pg. 106).

Militant education schools oscillate between a commitment to the core tenants of the particular liberation movement and the material conditions which are dictated by the localized sociopolitical context (Borges, 2019). In other words, militant education projects are tasked with developing a curriculum centered around the revolutionary politics taken on by the masses of people in their community while remaining conscious of the ways in which their regional and historical context dictates the employment of said methods and practices of resistance. The term itself is directly linked to concepts of political education, political freedom, and liberation. Within the framework of militant education, developing a decolonial consciousness throughout the community is dependent upon the construction of a community school or a network of schools that are situated within the context of liberation struggle and war. The aim of militant education is for the youth, civil population, and military personnel to receive a holistic education that incorporates political development, technical training, and the shaping of individual and collective behaviors that guide people through the processes of liberation struggle (Borges, 2019). Borges' work is critical to us understanding the important work of creating militant education projects within the heart of communities struggling to survive the terror of settler-colonial regimes.

Unschooling

In her book, *Raising Free People: Unschooling as Liberation and Healing Work*, Akhila Richards provides an exceptional thesis about unschooling, liberatory education, and the deconstruction of colonial education systems. She defines unschooling as “a child-trusting, anti-oppression, liberatory, love-centered approach to parenting and caregiving,” (Richards, 2020). With a unique focus on the autonomy and power of children, its methods and principles are directly linked with resistance pedagogies that urge educators to trust the knowledge and skills that people bring into the learning environment. Unschooling is a process of unlearning the habits we’ve gained from colonial schools resulting from random strangers having complete agency over our time, bodies, thoughts, and/or actions (Richards, 2020). As we’ve noted throughout this entire chapter, colonized people in the so-called United States struggle against various systems of violence and oppression that cause severely damaged relationship dynamics between us and the people we love and/or spend time around. Unschooling is an attempt to heal these broken bonds in our communities. Whereas colonial schools are focused on standardized learning and banking systems of education, unschooling prioritizes everyone’s capacity to thrive, be happy, and experience safety in all its forms (physical, emotional, economic, spiritual, etc.). As educators, unschooling serves to broaden our focus beyond learning and challenges us to tap into the whole ecology of living and thriving in community (Richards, 2020).

Unschooling is a process of transformation for both the learner and the educator—it helps community members build life skills. It is a reciprocal process that calls all members of the learning community to consciously and logistically remove colonial schools and classrooms as the primary

space for learning and socializing people (Richards, 2020). Unschooling practices provide learners and educators with “tools for having a healthy relationship to boundaries, to conflict, to communication, to life,” and it helps people build and “sustain a lifestyle of trust and respect-based communication,” (Richards, 2020). Throughout the process of unschooling, Richards (2020) writes that:

You might get turned around, triggered, riled up, or experience any one of a myriad of emotions in between. Don't worry, 'cause this isn't the unraveling like the thread on your favorite sweater; it's more like the unraveling of a mystery, like resolving something, like losing the obscurity, like making plain what once was experienced as hidden or beyond reach. To embrace a new lens— a new paradigm, actually—of daily, loosely planned, lived experiences that see and serve learning, a learning that happens when human wisdom is nurtured by people with the skill to understand how learning works, people who have experience with how to lean into self-directedness as a channel for fulfillment, joy, learning, and sustainable relationships with ourselves, each other, and our planet. Here is our chance to act together to resolve a vile situation whereby education and learning got confused for each other and children and childhood got colonized, (p. 5).

In an attempt to transform our learning processes, unschooling challenges learners and educators to build trust and respect—to build a mutual understanding of each other's wants, needs, and abilities. With this foundation, we can build learning environments centered around self-determination, self-knowledge, safe relationships, liberatory leadership, skills, collaboration, curiosity, and joy.

Conclusion

This project is about schooling—it is a discussion about the sustained development of a schooling system that may serve to uplift Afrikan and Indigenous communities fighting for liberation on Turtle Island. It is about the complete rejection of settler-colonial schooling. Why? Well, like Dead Prez (2000) once reflected:

[These] schools ain't teachin' us nothin. They ain't teachin' us nothin but how to be slaves and hard workers for white people to build up they shit—make they businesses successful while it's exploitin' us. Know what I'm sayin'? They ain't teachin' us nothin related to solvin' our own problems. Ain't teachin' us how to get crack out the ghetto. They ain't teachin' us how to stop the police from murdering us and brutalizing us. They ain't teachin' us how to get our rent paid. They ain't teachin' our families how to interact better with each other. They just teachin' us how to build they shit up. That's why my n****s got a problem with this shit.

Throughout its history, “white state schooling in the United States has never, ever produced positive educational and material outcomes for [colonized] students,” (Vaught, 2019). Communities have spent decades and a countless number of resources attempting to reform colonial school systems that bring harm and violence into the lives of Afrikan and Indigenous children. We must move beyond this form of struggle. The development of a liberatory education system is a set of processes that cannot happen overnight, but history tells us it can start with the formation of a single educational project. Anywhere you find a revolution for decolonization, you'll find a small group of people working on the development of a political education system (Zibechi, 2012). For generations, liberation movements across the globe have taken on the task of educating and training their people on their own terms. From small community schools to large networks of public education, movements for decolonization have long understood the importance of community-run education systems (Zibechi, 2012). They build our capacity to tear down the many barriers that exist within the racist, capitalist systems that limit our ability to connect with neighbors and support vulnerable people in our communities. Living in community is one of the primary goals of decolonization and self-determination and, by putting collectivism at the forefront, this project aims to demonstrate the ways in which educators can begin to develop community schools built on foundations of love, self-determination, and decolonial praxis.

It is the job of educators, students, and community members to *organize* our people into practical formations that address the contradictions we've outlined above. We've recounted numerous times about how colonial education systems are incapable of teaching us anything related to solving the problems Dead Prez notes above. What are they doing instead? *They just teaching us how to build they shit up.* They manipulate us into reinforcing the logic of settler colonialism within our own communities. *That's why my n***** got a problem with this shit.* That urge to resist? To drop out? That urge is our ancestors speaking through us and into the future; reminding us of the power in collectivism that has informed our communities for decades. So, how can we utilize decolonial practices of resistance and reciprocity in this struggle? How can we implement pedagogies of resistance through our daily struggle? I've learned that we can start by looking inward at ourselves and at the conditions within our communities. We can start by killing the colonizer in our own heads that relegates our thinking to logics of settler-colonialism and domination. Afrikan and Indigenous people engaged in liberation struggle have long called for us to get on with the urgent task of providing our communities with education systems aimed at transforming conditions and providing people with the practical skills they need to struggle for self-determination.

Chapter Three—Documenting Liberation Struggle: Methodology, Methods, and Praxis

Rendering the Black Radical Tradition meant shifting the scholarly gaze beyond Eurocentrism, but it also meant forging new methodologies for writing about communities of struggle that might focus on intellectuals but only insofar as the intellectual was part of a larger collective. While Black Marxism focused on radical thinkers and activists like W. E. B. Du Bois, C. L. R. James, and Richard Wright, it did so to offer neither purely intellectual history nor hagiography but rather an enactment of the Black Radical Tradition that viewed individuals as products of historical forces and radical social movements.

—*Johnson & Lubin*

The real-life struggles of the people, Fanon argues, provide the colonized intellectual with better knowledge of real-world struggles than the *falsity* of the theories, values, perceptions, and cultural preoccupations taught to them by Western civilization.

—*Steven Osuna*

This project is an offering to the community. It is a story about twenty-first-century Afrikan and Indigenous-centered community schools forged in the heart of liberation struggle. How should I go about *recording the noise* I hear in the community around me? Within the frameworks of Black Studies, the Black Radical Tradition, and Indigenous Decolonial Methodologies, the process of documentation and storytelling cannot come before the storyteller has examined themselves and their role within the community. As I look for evidence of an Afrikan and Indigenous resistance to settler-colonialism in the world around me, Black Studies challenges me to consider my individual moment of awakening. The seeds for this project were planted by my father and my older sister. At a young age, they both introduced me to Tupac Shakur and the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. They highlighted the importance of studying Black culture, Black resistance, Black intellectual traditions, and the legacy of our ancestors across the diaspora. They helped me to shift my gaze from the personal and pushed me to understand how my life is connected to the political, historical, and social reality of

Black resistance across time (Robinson, 2017). As a high school and college student, I began to make connections between the experiences of enslaved Afrikan people in the United States and the Indigenous peoples who had their land stolen from them. I was able to connect with Indigenous elders in the community who invited me to attend sweat lodge ceremonies, Danza ceremonies, and community Pow Wows. This was the first time I was able to explicitly listen, read, participate, and study the particular ways that settler-colonial domination impacted the lives of both Afrikan and Indigenous people. This fueled my love for learning, discovery, and problem-solving. Through their connected experiences, what solutions did colonized people develop in the face of genocide and enslavement? My love for learning, educating, and building educational spaces was formed during my time in college.

During and after college, it was important for me to develop deep connections with the communities that I lived in. My time as a middle school teacher and community educator in Southern California allowed me to build connections with families and other members of the community. Through these connections and my direct work on the ground, I became a part of a core group that was organizing to transform their neighborhoods through community education programs. Many of these groups expanded their work to include programs that offered food, safety, medical care, shelter, and jobs. We developed rich relationships with the youth, our unhoused neighbors, and workers in our communities. Through this work, we engaged in coalition building and attempted to expand our work by building relationships with like-minded organizations across the state of California. The move toward coalition-building is what allowed us to rebuild meaningful connections with people in Sacramento, my hometown, who were carrying out a similar project of developing community

education programs. This is how I found my way back home. The community members, parents, and workers that I connected with invited me to join their team as a curriculum coordinator and community educator. How could I pass up an opportunity to use the skills I've gained to come back home and build-up my community? For me, this work is like the work of the farmer who tends to their soil. We cannot just plant seeds and hope for something to grow from it—just as the farmer implements methods to build up their soil each season, our community work should strive to build the conditions that will allow for decolonization, self-determination, and liberation struggle to thrive in our communities.

Methodologically, Black Studies challenges us to shift our gaze beyond Eurocentrism by forging new methodologies of writing about liberation struggle that focuses on the community at large, rather than particular individuals. These *great men* versions of history serve us little. Black Studies is interested in a people's history—it attempts to understand individuals, communities, and systems as products of particular historical forces and radical social movements (Robinson, 2017). Whereas most academic disciplines work to distance scholars from the people and communities forging liberation struggle, Black Studies is a complete *return to the source* (Cabral, 1973). For Amilcar Cabral, this meant developing an ability to tie the people's everyday struggle into his theoretical analysis. As Black Radical Scholars, we are accomplices to the struggle. Black Studies is an attempt to engage and build with liberation struggles “that are seeking solutions and strategies to combat the ravages of racial capitalism,” (Osuna, 2017). Through this methodological lens, my scholarship needs to be rooted alongside the people struggling against racist domination and economic exploitation. My work is an attempt to develop scholarship where my inquiries, arguments, solutions, and conclusions

are focused on developing alternatives to racial capitalism that are “informed by the sounds and visions emerging from the trenches” of liberation struggle (Osuna, 2017). Understanding the complex relations that govern colonial societies requires a unique understanding of the social formations that emerge within particular communities and only emerges when our scholarship is connected to the struggle of the people (Cabral, 1973; Rodney, 1969). Black Studies challenges me to recognize that my work should be guided by perspectives that sit at the heart of liberation struggle—one that is rooted in the goals and aspirations of the people who are leading the fight against settler-colonialism, white supremacy, and genocidal domination—it would be ignorant to assume this knowledge is produced from within the confines of academic institutions.

In addition to Black Studies, my work rely heavily on the methods developed by scholars and practitioners of Indigenous Research Methodologies. The idea of research, from an Indigenous perspective, is a word that is inextricably linked to European settler-colonialism and Imperialism (Munoz, 2019). According to Linda Tuhiwai Smith, it is “one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world’s vocabulary,” (Smith, 2012). This collective memory, Smith (2012) writes,

has been perpetuated through the ways in which knowledge about Indigenous peoples was collected, classified and then represented in various ways back to the West, and then, through the eyes of the West, back to those who have been colonized (p. 1).

This hatred for research comes from a place of trauma. Through so-called research, European intellectuals once developed conclusions about the intellect of Indigenous people by filling their ancestors’ skulls with seeds and comparing the amount of seeds to their capacity for mental thought (Smith, 2012). These forms of research have been used by European intellectuals to extract and claim ownership over Indigenous knowledge and technology while simultaneously erasing any trace of

actual Indigenous people. Colonial research is extractive. It regurgitates knowledge already known, suggests solutions that would not work, and makes careers for people who already have jobs (Deloria, 1988). As Vine Deloria Jr. outlines, many European researchers have traveled to Indigenous lands and spent tens of millions of dollars studying tribes of less than a thousand people. He challenges readers to think about how that money could have been used to invest in buildings and community infrastructure. “There would have been no problems to study!” (Deloria, 1988).

Divorcing itself from these European research traditions, Indigenous Research Methodologies teach us that Indigenous people across the world have stories, knowledge systems, and methods that both question and resist the European intellectual tradition. Within this framework, Indigenous scholars make no distinction between *proper* scientific research and other forms of intellectual research that take the form of journalism, poetry, photography, documentary filmmaking, community exhibits, etc. Through the implementation of Indigenous Research Methodologies, I hope to demonstrate the need to center Indigenous perspectives and ways of knowing. This is a process that goes beyond simply “retelling or sharing Indigenous horror stories about research,” (Smith, 2012). Research that simply provides some words and insights about certain people’s experiences does not serve to prevent someone from dying—it does not help to improve the current conditions with which they live. Indigenous Research Methodologies challenge us to unearth methods of resistance that seek to guarantee the survival of colonized people. They challenge us to unearth spaces of resistance, longevity, and hope. Indigenous scholarship is a recognition of the fact that the past, present, and future realities of our communities are the basis for liberation struggle. Through this framework research is transformed. It is no longer “an innocent or distant academic exercise” facilitated by

European colonizers, it is “an activity that has something at stake and [it] occurs within a set of political and social conditions,” (Smith, 2012).

With these methodologies in my toolkit, this dissertation is a qualitative, self-ethnographic study of a community school in Oak Park, Sacramento that has taken place over the course of 22 months beginning in March of 2020. At its most basic level, qualitative research centers how people make meaning of the world around them and allows for people to interpret their own experiences. Rather than discovering meaning, qualitative research aims to understand how people construct meaning within their own environments. I am not just a researcher and storyteller. I am an educator and member of the community organization I am writing about. My official title as a member of Neighbor Program is the Minister of Curriculum and Pedagogy. That’s what makes this work a self-ethnography. The first five months of this time period I was limited to zoom meetings with the community leaders of the organization who had just landed a physical headquarters (the Shakur Center) within the heart of the Oak Park community. This location has a deep history and rests just blocks away from the headquarters of the Black Panther Party chapter in Sacramento.

Anthropologist Kamala Visweswaran (1994) argues that researchers should view their positionality within communities as “homework” rather than “fieldwork.” Other anthropologists define this viewpoint as “anthropology in reverse,” (Davies, 1994; Perry, 2013; Rose, 1997; Visweswaran, 1994). Anthropology in reverse challenges the researcher to speak from within the place they are located; it urges them to specify their “field” sites as home and situate themselves within it. In August of 2020, my wife and I picked up our lives and moved (back home for me) to Sacramento with the goal of working alongside members of Neighbor Program to build a community school. Although

we were not able to find housing directly in Oak Park, we spent almost everyday in the community building relationships with families, unhoused neighbors, community organizers, workers, and elders. We didn't have a physical shelter in Oak Park but we have found a home at the Shakur Center which allowed for us to fit into the flow of the community. Our collective brainstorming about the Shakur Center, our collective work in the community programs, and our rough outlines of what a community school could look like led to the development of this project and my research questions. It's important for me to note that this work in the community existed before this project and it will exist after it. I am grateful to be documenting the work of Neighbor Program but their struggle for self-determination for Afrikan and Indigenous people in Oak Park, Sacramento will continue with or without my contributions.

To answer the questions presented in the opening of the introduction, this critical case study utilizes historical analysis and qualitative methods. Meaning, my study does not attempt to discover its own forms of meaning, rather, it attempts to center how people construct meaning in their own lives. As a qualitative researcher, I will be the primary instrument for collecting data and providing inductive analysis (Bishop, 2018; Merriam, 2017; Niesz et al., 2018; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Since I am utilizing methods developed by Black Studies scholars and Indigenous Methodologies, I am called to center Afrikan and Indigenous people's meaning making to understand our topic of interest: liberation struggle and the development of community schools. Communities engaged in liberation struggle are engaged in a war. Because of this reality, my project will be forced to draw upon oral history interviews, documentaries, personal archives, organizational records, newspapers and pamphlets, social media posts, podcasts, and other sources from the community-curated archive we are forging—oral

histories will be integral to the construction of these vibrant narratives and living histories. Invoking the words of Orisanmi Burton (2023), this is my attempt to “decenter these duly noted, juridically mediated, and scholastically authorized sources of evidence, focusing instead on ‘discredited,’ ‘inadmissible,’ and ‘untrustworthy’ modes of knowledge, analysis and narration. I construct my argument by thinking and theorizing with Black rebels, both living and dead.”

This work is a construction of what Sonia Vaz Borges called: walking archives (Borges, 2019). The walking archive is a collection of memories that can not be kept in one location, house, or historical site—its information is not “constant or fixed in time,” and its memories are continuously revived by the “questions and curiosity” of those who are interested (Borges, 2022). The contents of the walking archive are brought to life by the questions and curiosity of those who are interested in accessing them. A central feature of the walking archives is the process of interviewing, storytelling, and oral history. Before libraries, we had culture keepers and community griots who held onto the knowledge and history of a given community. The walking archives are a continuation of this historical tradition. This project relies heavily on oral histories and the storytelling of community members to understand the past, present, and future situation that the people of the Oak Park community face. These interviews took place in a variety of locations around the community. They happened at the community school, car side on 4th Ave., inside of homes, inside of workplaces, on the front porch, in the middle of the garden, etc. Within this context, background noise is an integral part of the process. In a beautiful reflection about the process of building walking archives, Borges writes about the ways children and members of the community would often stop to hear the stories of the past, listen, and even ask questions. The interview happens organically within the community and

each member is welcomed into the space as a person with agency to ask questions or even tell a story of their own. The walking archive is dictated by the community itself.

I have been working with the Malcolm X Academy team to develop their walking archive that documents the totality of the work our community has accomplished over the past three years and into the future. The goal of this archive is to document the blueprint MXA learning guides are trying to leave for future generations. A blueprint that, in reality, is just a bridge from the past, into the future. Afrikan and Indigenous people have been at war with European settler colonialism for over 500 years. How is our struggle connected to that history? How can our struggle ensure that future generations will be free from pain and suffering? How can we properly document and connect these past, present, and future struggles?

In a slam poem for Button Poetry called, *Oral Traditions*, William Nuutupu Giles & Travis T. emphasize the importance of culture keepers, storytellers, and community archives:

In ancient Polynesia children with the best memory skills were chosen to be the culture keepers, storytellers—handpicked to be poets weaving today's events into yesterday's lore. Practicing immortality in breath. Adding generations to the genealogies—until foreign diseases interrupted entire bloodlines with death. Just over 100 years of the arrival of the West, nearly 90% of our native population was dead, and our language was banned. Only 1 in 10 survived. So, a knowledgeable person's death was the same as a library burning down (Giles & T., 2015).

Before libraries, Afrikan and Indigenous communities passed down the knowledge and culture of their people through the practice of culture keepers and community griots. The oral history interviews I recorded with MXA's founders, families, community members, and partner organizations provide this project with its narrative heart and methodological backbone (Davies, 2013). While I have brought in my own analysis and have attempted to draw my own conclusions, the oral histories have deeply

shaped the questions I asked, how I answered them, and what sections of the story I chose to emphasize. It was an honor being able to document the oral narratives of the people who imagined, created, and maintained the school throughout its first two years of life. This historical project is uniquely interested in both what happened and how the people experienced it. Because of this, oral history methodologies were essential to the project. The subjectivity of the narratives serve to strengthen my dissertation by providing readers with a more humanized, intimate understanding of MXAs development. For Afrikan and Indigenous peoples, oral history is an especially powerful tool for documenting the experiences of oppressed communities who have been functionally erased from colonial historical record (Davies, 2013).

At Malcolm X Academy, when the learning guides talk about “culture,” they mean culture as it was defined by Afrikan revolutionary theorists like Walter Rodney and Amilcar Cabral. For Cabral, culture describes a community's total way of life. He wrote that, “culture is an essential element of the history of a people. Culture is, perhaps, the product of this history just as the flower is the product of a plant.” Cabral continues:

Just as happens with the flower in a plant, in culture there lies the capacity (or the responsibility) for forming and fertilizing the seedling which will assure the continuity of history, at the same time assuring the prospects for evolution and progress of the society in question (Cabral, 1970).

Afrikan and Indigenous people have had their cultural and historical development decimated by the terroristic practices of European settler-colonialism. Understanding this, revolutionary organizations have struggled to highlight the importance of developing culture, reclaiming history, and combating the lies and myths developed by European versions of history.

A central feature of the walking archive at MXA is the process of interviewing, storytelling, photographing, and videotaping the development of the school throughout time. I want to tell the oral and visual history of the school from the perspective of the people that built and participated in the programs. These oral and visual histories are developed in a variety of locations around the community. The walking archive is dictated by the community itself and I hope the stories it tells will serve the people for generations to come. The walking archives at MXA are a continuation of the historical tradition our ancestors practiced. MXA learning guides rely heavily on oral histories and the storytelling of community members to understand the past, present, and future situation of their people in so-called Sacramento, Turtle Island, and across the Diaspora.

I conducted interviews and focus groups with the core organizing team of Neighbor Program and Malcolm X Academy, multiple generations of Afrikan and Indigenous community members in Oak Park, and various community educators from across Turtle Island. For the interviews and focus groups, my study was guided by the following criteria: (1) identify as Black, Afrikan, or Indigenous, and; (2) identify as a community member of the Oak Park neighborhood or a member of a community organization. Each interview was conducted in person or online and they were audio recorded and transcribed. As the interviewer, I utilized a semi-structured technique—meaning, I had certain questions and topics I wanted to discuss but the core of the conversation was guided by the stories of the interviewer and the walking archives they're unpacking (Merriam, 2017). In this light, our interviews became more of a dialogue that allowed community members to explore, highlight, and focus on experiences and topics they determined to be more significant. All interview protocols had questions covering the following topics: (a) educational history in colonial schools; (b) them and their

families experiences living in Oak Park; (c) perspectives on Oak Park as a hub for the Black community in Sacramento; (d) the role of white supremacy and colonialism in their community context, and; (e) ideas and recommendations for alternative educational pathways. The protocol was adapted overtime to meet the needs of the community members I was in conversation with (Bishop, 2018). I am interested in uncovering their experiences with living, learning, and being educated within colonial systems of education and I wanted to develop an understanding about their belief systems and the ways they view the world around them.

These conversations happened with people who saturate the lives of the students at our community school. Educators, Parents, Grandparents, Neighbors, Aunts, Uncles, Cousins, and everyone in between. In the interviews, I asked community members connected to our students about their growing up in Oak Park, the educational history of their family, and I wanted to understand why they chose to become an active participant in the community school. Based on their unique stories, I asked additional questions and raised various inquiries. I concluded each interview or focus group with a broader discussion of education in general. What are the primary issues in education they see their family and community members face? What are possible solutions to these problems? Do they believe community schools can be a sustainable method for liberation struggle on Turtle Island moving forward? In total, I conducted 25 interviews and 9 focus group sessions. The focus group sessions occurred monthly and consisted of the organizing members of Neighbor Program and the team of educators that helped build the community school. These sessions provided me with stories, insights, and analysis of both the development of the school, the struggles along the way, and the everyday life at the school. These conversations were filled with stories of love and relationship

building. They were central to me developing an understanding of liberation struggle and community schools within this particular context. Following each interview, I utilized a journal to keep detailed notes filled with my own personal reflections, interpretations, and personal contradictions. These interviews made up the bulk of my oral histories for the project.

The methodologies described throughout this chapter guided me as I attempted to write a historical description of a predominantly Afrikan neighborhood on Turtle Island. Focusing on one neighborhood provided me with the opportunity to analyze specific context, cite original insights, and provide a thorough description of the particular conditions of the community. This approach allowed me to provide readers with vivid imagery and narratives that are grounded in the historical reality of the people in the Oak Park community. I wanted readers to feel as if they themselves have been to Oak Park and experienced that magnitude of the community's history and their struggle against white supremacy and settler colonialism. For the sociohistorical context, my main source of data comes from guerilla scholars and intellectuals who have long documented the struggle for liberation in North America. I also rely on the family histories and lived experiences of community members whose relatives were active members of revolutionary organizations like the Black Panther Party. I allow their knowledge and oral histories to set the stage for the contemporary organizational context of Neighbor Program in Oak Park, Sacramento. For the description of the community school and the neighborhood itself, I examined Malcolm X Academies personal walking archives, the transcripts from my interviews, and the reflections from my personal journal that will document my daily experiences in Oak Park. In the MXA archives, I coded and analyzed 17 organizational documents, 1030 photos and videos, 49 weekly newsletters, 12 curricular documents, 42 newspaper volumes, 21 progress

reports and student portfolios, 3 transcribed podcast episodes, and 3 feature articles. Together, the archives provided a detailed landscape of the development of community decolonization programs and the formation of educational projects in Oak Park, Sacramento.

Once all of the data was gathered, I utilized a descriptive analysis to write a historical narrative that documents the development of Malcolm X Academy in the neighborhood of Oak Park, Sacramento. I used a constant comparative method to code the data (field notes, interview transcripts, organizational documents, etc.) through a step-by-step analysis. This was more of a back-and-forth process rather than a linear one. First, I organized all the relevant data sources from both my historical analysis and my critical ethnography and read them for comprehension and understanding. Once I completed an initial read of all the data sources, I then organized them into categories on a secure drive and conducted an open coding process by highlighting and typing descriptions next to data points that related to my primary research questions. I started with coding the historical documents before engaging with my own data sources so that my eventual themes were shaped by the history that grounded my critical ethnography. I wanted to assure that, as I developed categories and thematic trends, they were directly aligned with the historical documents I was working with. Within each historical document and ethnographic data source, I conducted an axial coding process that helped me to merge the various codes into a list of categories that served as a reference source. As the lists developed, I constantly compared the lists for each historical document and data source to find the common and divergent categories. Constant comparative analysis allowed me to form a master list of categories and thematic codes that continued to narrow as I analyzed the historical documents and ethnographic data. I arrived at four thematic codes that would organize my descriptive analysis of the

historical development militant education projects and my narrative ethnography of MXA: (1) Organizational history, (2) Political Struggle for Space, (3) Curriculum and Pedagogy, and (4) School Structure and Daily Practice. These categories shaped the main chapters of this study and the themes were reported and analyzed within each chapter.

I utilized Yvonna Lincoln and Egon Guba's four measures to guide my check for trustworthiness and to help me identify the limitations of my work. These four measures are listed as: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). *Credibility* recognizes that the community members are the only ones who can accurately assess if their stories have been represented accurately (Bishop, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Through this work I have developed strong relationships with families, organizers, and community members. At the Shakur Center, we hosted family events, community gatherings, and community learning sessions that allowed me to engage in a deep discussion with community members about this project. Our discussions gave me space for self-critique and challenged me to re-organize my findings according to the wants and needs of the people. *Transferability* asks whether or not the researcher has developed a project with results that can be transferable to other contexts or settings (Bishop, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I attempted to provide a detailed description of the historical and contemporary context of Oak Park that allows readers to make connections and transfer findings elsewhere. *Dependability* is the documentation that examines the research process which produced my findings. *Confirmability* challenges me to consider whether or not I took into account contradictory or alternative evidence and explanations that may impact my findings. I considered several interpretations and perspectives on the project's findings by using my analytical journals, feedback from colleagues and comrades who saw

early manuscripts of my chapters, and the conversations I had with community members. I utilized the comparison of data from several sources to support, modify, or contradict the interpretations and arguments made throughout each section of the study (Bishop, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

My role in all of this is not authoritarian. I hold no authority over the theories and stories discussed throughout the project. As a community member operating within the colonial academic system, my goal is to simply be a storyteller and a guide. This dissertation is an attempt to break away from extractive practices of analysis and position my work alongside the lives of my relatives; the lives of colonized people finding ways to resist power and discover solutions at the center of our own lives and the lives of our community members. The stories themselves are shaped by the community, my comrades, our ancestors, and my own observations. As I write, my personal experiences illuminate the theoretical points being made and I work to intentionally position myself within the work (Grosz, 1994). I am Afro-Indigenous. I am a husband, an educator, a rugby player, and a storyteller. At the end of the day, our subjectivities are gendered, sexualized, colored, racialized, and signified. I cannot and will not separate these material realities from my analysis, critique, and intellectual offerings (Mingus, 2014). Keeping this in mind, you should not trust me or anything I write. This statement is not to say that you should completely disregard the stories, claims, and questions to follow—rather, it is important for you to carry healthy levels of skepticism and critique towards anything you read and/or engage with. Decide for yourself whether or not you trust me. Just as Sabina Vaught (2017) penned in the introduction to her book:

“Vet me as the teller of this story. And then, be sure that you remember this story is more important and more real than I, that my failures and shortcomings and weaknesses do not cast a full shadow on the story, just as my strengths do not make it valuable or true.” (p. 13)

Chapter Four—History is a Weapon: a Transnational Study on Militant Education Schools

The only place where Negroes did not revolt is in the pages of capitalist historians.

—*C.L.R. James*

In human history, there is always something beyond the reach of dominating systems, no matter how deeply they saturate society.

—*Edward Said*

The schools we go to are reflections of the society that created them. Nobody is going to teach you your true history, teach you your true heroes—if they know that that knowledge will help set you free.

—*Assata Shakur*

While many scholars have studied the development of particular militant education projects throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, few have offered us a broad study that directly connects the different practices, pedagogies, and methods of various community schools developed within the heart of localized liberation struggles (Borges, 2019). That is precisely the purpose of this chapter—a brief analytical overview of a select group of liberation schools that served to inspire the community school that is the object of our study, Malcolm X Academy for Afrikan Education in Sacramento, CA. We will narrow our focus onto three particular militant education projects—some that are ongoing today and others that offer us a historical blueprint for implementation. This chapter will focus on the Black Panther Party’s Oakland Community School, the Zapatistas True Education system, and the PAIGC’s militant education schools in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde. My hope is that these conversations will help us to build a connected understanding of how Afrikan and Indigenous communities today are carrying on the struggle to develop these militant community schools.

This chapter is a brief dive into the historical development of these particular community schools and I’ve organized each section around five different thematic points of focus: (1) History of

the Organization(s), (2) The Political Struggle of Space, (3) Organizational Capacity, (4) Curriculum and Pedagogy, and (5) School Structure and Daily Practice. As we explore the history of each organization, the goal will be to gain an understanding of the varying conditions in each community that prompted their organizations to develop community schools for their people. How did the different organizations each come to the conclusion that militant education projects were a necessity for their liberation struggle? We will then seek to understand the political struggle for space within each movement. What sorts of obstacles and challenges did each organization face as they worked to build systems of localized community schools that served *all* the children in their community. How did space deter certain organizations from ultimately achieving their goals? For the section on curriculum and pedagogy, we will work to understand the different educational methods, practices, and curriculum topics that structured the learning for scholars at each different school. How did each organization choose to employ Pedagogies of Resistance within their education frameworks? Lastly, we will piece together what a day in the life at each of these schools looked like for both students, educators, and families. How were their lives shaped by the growing capacities of each militant education project?

Before we get to the different histories of these militant education projects, I want us to ground ourselves in the question: Why is it important for us to explore Afrikan and Indigenous histories of resistance? Whose voices should we center in this discussion? Who should we allow to frame our understanding of these histories? At its core, the purpose of this section is to reclaim, retell, and uplift stories of Afrikan and Indigenous resistance. *History is our weapon*. There are valuable lessons for us to gain from each insurrection, each prison rebellion, and each revolutionary movement

waged by oppressed people across the globe (Nothing, 2013). The lessons they hold can provide us with great insight into the strategies and tactics that would best serve particular struggles as they exist today. Narratives of resistance provide us with a lineage of knowledge and practice to take inspiration from and they supply us with blueprints that “may keep us warm when we feel broken” beneath the weight of settler-colonial violence and exploitation (Nothing, 2013). The colonized communities of Turtle Island are confronted daily with various forms of genocidal violence, harm, and abuse that derives from euro-American settler-colonialism; oftentimes, their experiences are completely erased from historical memory. Imagine, for centuries, witnessing the physical and psychological torture of your diasporic relatives at the hands of European settlers—imagine being told their suffering was self-inflicted. Settlers to Turtle Island use to distribute postcards that pictured their families and their children celebrating the ceremonial dismembering of Afrikans before and after lynching them by their necks (Umoja, 2013). These same settlers filled open graves with the bodies of Indigenous children who did not survive the horrors of their colonial boarding schools (On Canada Project, 2022). Haven’t you ever wondered why these barbaric stories of so-called America have mostly disappeared from the knowledgebase of most “Americans?” We never learned of these stories in school because colonial societies spend decades reproducing propaganda campaigns to generate myths that make their existence appear legitimate to its citizens and the countries of the world. No matter how hard they work to erase these histories, our bones know the truth and they will continue to hold the memories of our ancestors close.

As we begin, I want us to try and understand the importance of centering cultural knowledge and strategies of struggle waged by the oppressed. In an essay titled, *Birth of a (Zionist) Nation: Black*

Radicalism and the Future of Palestine, Greg Burris works to unpack the relationship between white settler-colonial states and the colonized people of the land they occupy. He opens by explaining how the realities of Afrikan and Indigenous people in America are closely tied to the experiences of Indigenous people in occupied Palestine. Burris argues that the so-called US and “Israel” are ideologically bonded to each other through their collaborative effort to uphold white settler-colonialism by genocidal means (Burris, 2017). We’ve seen clear evidence of this ideological and economic bond throughout the recent Al-Aqsa Flood war being waged by the Axis of Resistance in Palestine, Lebanon, and Yemen. While the occupation government of so-called Israel has martyred over 35,000 Palestinians and over 13,000 children in Gaza, the American empire has continued to supply funding, weapons of destruction, and intelligence that has directly aided “Israel’s” genocidal assault of the citizens of Gaza (Al Mayadeen English, 2024). Oftentimes, when we tell these stories, we make the error of only providing agency to the white settler state. Even with good intentions, we produce narratives that reinforce the myth that colonized resistance only exists in response to settler-colonial domination. This is not true. While the resistance of colonized people cannot be removed from its relation to white genocidal violence, the roots of resistance are buried far beneath the soil of their current colonial relationship. From the perspective and myths produced by the settler-colonial state, “[Afrikan, Indigenous, and Palestinian] Liberation Struggle is nothing more than a belated, jealous response to [the settler state’s] victories,” (Burris, 2017). When we incorrectly locate the seeds of resistance within institutions of domination (i.e.. slavery, displacement, genocide, land theft, etc.) we unintentionally mimic the slave masters’ delusion and we effectively eliminate colonized people’s

most valuable resource: their collective past (Burris, 2017). Utilizing the political theories of Cedric Robinson, Burris (2017) writes that:

The Slave masters' attempts to brainwash the Afrikans did not generate a rebellious Afrikan consciousness. Rather, Robinson argues that the opposite was the case, and a rebellious Afrikan consciousness generated the slave masters' need to brainwash the Afrikans.

In our analysis, we are working to understand that the pasts of colonized people know of a life beyond colonial domination. This is why they revolt. Local, Indigenous, and community based ways of knowing, existing, creating, and imagining existed long before any European set foot on Afrikan and Indigenous lands—the cultures and thought processes that preceded colonial domination shape the way colonized people have responded to genocidal violence, not the other way around. Survived knowledge of the past is proof that settler-colonial terror is unable to fully paralyze their spirits. The struggles of colonized people “have roots older than the occupation itself. However oppressive [settler colonialism] is, it can never fully determine the shape that [Afrikan, Indigenous, and Palestinian] resistance takes,” (Burris, 2017). Throughout this section, I want to avoid reproducing the myths outlined above. This is an attempt to continue our escape from dominant ways of thinking, being, and imaging—I want us to proceed with the understanding that resistance was birthed from the knowledge of our ancestors who knew another world was possible. Who benefits from the knowledge held within these tales of resistance? Who *wins* when they are washed away?

When talking about the importance of reclaiming stories of Black Radicalism, Elizabeth P. Robinson writes that:

It is difficult to keep feelings of depression and defeat at bay, but our histories—perceived in all their dynamism, their resistance and resilience—can give us heart and

direction. Our pasts are not dead; why else are there repeated attempts to bury them to erase or forget them? Why does generation after generation have to rediscover W.E. B. Du Bois, Pauline Hopkins, Oliver Cox, and so many others? How is it that the Indigenous people at Standing Rock, North Dakota, are telling us about massacres we've never heard of? Why don't we know about Black and white workers who made common cause for mutual benefit? Beyond US borders, why is it not common parlance that peoples' movements from Vietnam, Algeria, Iran, Lebanon, South Afrika, Zimbabwe, Chile, Guatemala, to name but a few, were undermined or simply destroyed by Western capitalist greed and militarism? Perhaps it is simply too painful to remember these assaults; but burying them also buries the rich histories of resistance. While slavery and emancipation are part of our official histories, maroons and maroonage, Palmares, quilombos, and the Great Dismal Swamp are unknown or little known when they should be the bedrock of contemporary struggles (Robinson, 2017).

Just as Burris does, Elizabeth Robinson proposes here that the settler-colonial empire is well aware of the power held within our collective pasts. When we have access to these stories of resistance, we can more clearly imagine a path forward. Our bones hold the memories, and our stories hold the blueprints. *History is our compass.*

To advance Afrikan and Indigenous struggle for liberation as it exists today, it requires some degree of analysis into the present situation and its relationship to the past. As we study these histories, let's hold the words of Dhoruba Bin-Wahad (2017) close:

The [so-called United States] government has records and keeps records. They have archives and all of this stuff. They have institutional memory. They know where they failed at a particular historical moment; plus they know what worked and what didn't. On the other hand, those of us who are on the front lines fighting for radical and revolutionary change—we don't know the radical histories that went before us. If we don't understand the histories of those who resisted we are going to reinvent failure (Bin-Wahad, 2017).

My exploration of these histories will only be brief—and while they are not the central story of this study, they are important to the development of my work as we build towards analyzing the

effectiveness of militant education—for, the past should have profound influence on how we collectively construct the future.

The BPP's Oakland Community School

“We Want Education for Our People That Exposes The True Nature Of This Decadent American Society. We Want Education That Teaches Us Our True History And Our Role in the Present-Day Society.”

- *The Black Panther Party 10 Point Program (1969)*

Organizational History & the Necessity for Liberatory Education

In the midst of their own version of a pandemic, the Black Panther Party for Self Defense (BPP) was established in Oakland, California, in October 1966. Afrikan people of Oakland created the party as a way to express their opposition to police terrorism in their city. A small group of young Afrikans, namely Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale, were the founding members of the BPP who voiced their opposition to the state's repression of Afrikans in their city and across the country. Instead of depending on the legal system, protesting, or the electoral process, the BPP decided to set up armed patrols to confront police and ensure that Afrikans being terrorized were aware of their *legal* rights. Naturally, the BPP expanded into a national and eventually an international organization that taught many valuable lessons about liberation struggle and self-determination (Umi, 2021). When the Black Panthers emerged onto the historical scene, their ascent signaled a shift from civil rights activism to a revolutionary cause that called for a complete overhaul of American society, including its institutions, laws, and economic structure. The party—whose goal was the revolutionary establishment of true economic, social, and political equality across gendered and racialized lines—was among the first in

American history to wage an armed struggle for the liberation of working-class and ethnic minorities (Newton, 1973; see also Seale, 1991). The Black Panther Party's theoretical underpinnings were inspired by the late Malcolm X, Marxism, and Maoism. The Panthers allied with numerous minority and white revolutionary groups because they shared Malcolm's vision of global working class unity across racial and gender divides. From Marxism, they addressed the capitalist economic system, embraced the theory of dialectical materialism, and represented the need for all workers to take over the means of production with force. From Maoism, they set the role of their Party as the vanguard of the revolution and worked to establish a united front (Newton, 1973; see also Seale, 1991).

For Panther Veteran of the New York Chapter, Sundiata Acoli (2017), there are five key contributions the BPP made towards the greater Black Liberation Movement on Turtle Island: (1) tactics for self-defense, (2) a revolutionary Nationalist Ideology, (3) mass organizing techniques, (4) strategies for practicing gender equality, and (5) revolutionary propaganda techniques. First, it is still important for Afrikan organizations to investigate the BPP's self-defense policies. History has demonstrated beyond doubt that the U.S. government will use its military and police forces against any group that genuinely aims to liberate Afrikans on Turtle Island—knowing this, any organization dedicated to the liberation of Afrikans that disregards the need for self-defense does so at its own risk (Acoli, 2017). Second, the BPP's primary objective was the national liberation of Afrikans in America. At the national level, the party extensively spread socialist-based policies among the Afrikan populace and on a global level, it gave Afrikans in America a deeper comprehension of our ties to the Afrikan continent, newly independent Afrikan nations, Global South nations, socialist nations, and all the liberation movements connected to these territories. All things considered, the nationalist ideology of

the party gave Afrikaans living here a more tangible perspective on and method of understanding the world (Acoli, 2017). Third, the BPPs mass organizing techniques taught Afrikans how to serve the people. This approach involved living among the people, reaching out to them, bearing their burdens, and “organizing the masses to implement their own solutions to the day-to-day problems that were of great concern to them,” (Acoli, 2017). Fourth, the BPP made a significant contribution to society at large by promoting and upholding women's equality throughout all of its organizational levels. This happened during a period when women's liberation was the subject of intense national debate, and when the majority of Black nationalist organizations demanded that women should stay at home and/or follow men everywhere they went (Acoli, 2017). Lastly, “the BPP made significant contributions to the art of propaganda,” (Acoli, 2017). The party was extremely skilled at using a variety of media to disseminate its message, including its newspaper *The Black Panther* and other mediums such as: speaking engagements, large-scale rallies, posters, leaflets, cartoons, buttons, political trials, graffiti, and even funerals. Additionally, the BPP disseminated its ideas through skillful use of print, radio, and television outlets owned by the establishment. With this synopsis of the BPPs impact, there is no doubt that the Party had, and continues to have, a tremendous impact on the development of liberatory organizations and their community programs. In fact, in response to the BPPs legacy and the effective programs they developed, the government was forced to establish similar programs such as free school lunch, expanded Medicare programs, and state sponsored daycare facilities which helped to erase the memory of earlier BPP programs and the idea of community self-sufficiency (Acoli, 2017).

In 1971, the party began an extensive range of free services known as survival programs that offered tens of thousands of Afrikans countrywide access to basic services like groceries, healthcare,

legal advice, and dozens of other essential services (Newton, 1973). The development of a community school was a core piece of these survival programs. In its early stages, the liberation school was just one of sixty-five survival programs operated by the BPP for self-defense. The list includes but is not limited to: Community Pantry (Free Food Program), Disabled Persons Services/Transportation and Attendant, Drug/Alcohol Abuse Awareness Program, Free Breakfast for Children Programs, Free Bussing to Prisons Program, Free Clothing Program, Free Dental Program, Free Health Clinics, and the Free Housing Cooperative Program. The development of such programs was mandatory if one was interested in opening a chapter of the Party. While the BPP originated with Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale in Oakland, CA, by 1970, the BPP became the center of the revolutionary Black Liberation Movement throughout the United States. By that time, the BPP had opened a headquarters in sixty-eight cities across occupied Turtle Island (Bloom, 2013). In his 2013 book, *Black Against Empire: the History and Politics of the Black Panther Party*, Joshua Bloom notes that “readers today may have difficulty imagining a revolution in the United States. But in the late 1960s, many thousands of young black people, despite the potentially fatal outcome of their actions, joined the Black Panther Party and dedicated their lives to revolutionary struggle,” (Brown, 2013, pg. 2) In fact, according to the FBI’s own intelligence, “43 percent of blacks under 21 years of age [have] . . . a great respect for the [Black Panther Party],” (Bloom, 2013). As the Party grew in its membership, there was a deliberate focus on political education and critical pedagogies for members of all ages. In 1969, the BPP began to develop liberation schools that were housed in storefronts, churches, and homes—these educational projects stood proudly as a part of the BPP’s commitment to developing the Black community through revolutionary programs. Led by volunteers, these early schools recognized the failure of public

schools to provide an adequate education to Black youth that prepares them for a life of self-determination (Choi, n.d.).

These projects for political and militant education developed incrementally—starting with adults and eventually leading to the formation of small community schools across the different chapters (Robinson, 2020). Aligned with other liberation struggles during the Revolutionary Era, each party chapter had their own version of a liberation school that sought to educate its members through practices of militant education where students learned *how* to think about the problems Afrikan and Indigenous people in their communities faced. Robinson (2020) notes that,

From San Francisco, California to Staten Island, New York, Panther chapters boasted the development of liberation schools that engaged youth in the process of political advocacy with an anti-oppressive conceptual framework. Most liberation schools that operated during the summer lasted half of the day. Those schools that started earlier in the day began with a Panther provided breakfast, which depending on location, ranged from donuts and juice to eggs and bacon. Students would transition to study at roughly 10 am. In Queens, NY, students began at 11am and had lunch before they continued with the rest of their instructional period that ended at 3pm. Some sites operated as adjuncts or extra-curricular spaces to schools during the academic year. (pg. 183)

While there are clearly a number of liberation schools that could be the focus in this section on the BPP, none were as successful as the Oakland Community School developed by the Oakland chapter of the party. At its peak, The Oakland Community School (OCS) received visits from well known activists, artists, and politicians such as Rosa Parks, Maya Angelou, and Jerry Brown. The school was widely recognized as an elite educational institution that was transforming the ways in which our communities understood the function of schools as a mechanism of change within the Black Liberation Movement on Turtle Island.

The OCS did not start as a large institution with celebrity support and hundreds of thousands of dollars in grant funding from the state of California. As the Black Panther Party evolved, so too did its militant education programs. While many scholars credit the origin of the OCS to the Intercommunal Youth Institute (IYI) in 1971, former OCS Director Ericka Huggins places the school's origin back to the Children's House in 1970 (Robinson, 2020). The students of the Children's House and the IYI were primarily composed of children whose parents were core members of the Black Panther Party. As noted in Point Five of the BPP's Ten Point Platform, Party members understood the true nature of public schools in the United States and they were vocal about the it's genocidal origins. They understood the many ways in which schools served as extensions to the colonial system of occupation and removal in Indigenous and Afrikan communities. Because of this, the Children's House and the IYI functioned as places of "refuge for children whose parents feared reprisals from public school educators and for families that were disillusioned by the criminalizing effects of public schools," (Robinson, 2020, pg. 186). The school began to grow and evolve rapidly. Within a year, by 1972, the early militant structure of the Institute began to fade as it expanded to involve neighborhood children alongside the party members' children who were already in attendance. This shift is evident in historical footage of the school where you can see "images of students and teachers in everyday clothing instead of the stan-dard Panther uniform. The focus on education and the mission of the Party are still apparent in these images but are now supplemented with ideas of fun and play," (Choi, n.d.). As the school evolved beyond the Children's House, we can begin to see the pedagogical shift within the structure of the school that will be discussed in more detail later in this section.

The Political Struggle for Space

Across the different BPP chapters, there was a constant struggle for space. Many chapters struggled to find a *home* for their community schools because of the political conditions each community was confronted with. In some instances, schools were limited by funding and access to space. In other examples, the schools were forcibly pushed out of certain spaces because of the political ideologies being taught by the educators. With this being said, the BPP liberation schools were housed in a variety of facilities—church buildings, recreation centers, or open rooms in schools served as the primary locations for liberation schools throughout the different chapters. Locations were often hard to find. In some cases, it was a matter of finances or availability. According to Robinson, space was difficult to acquire "because of the explicit political orientation of the liberation schools," (Robinson, 2020). Robinson adds that many of "the places that housed them were wary of their stakeholders' responses to a militant organization's presence," (Robinson, 2020, pg. 184). For example, due to expulsion from a church and an elementary school, the San Jose Liberation School had to close and relocate twice. According to the church, their reasons were more related to space and the start of their summer Head Start program, while the elementary school was concerned about the militant, Black radical curriculum (Robinson, 2020).

Organizational Capacity

When the school was still recognized as the Children's House and the Intercommunal Youth Institute, eight members of the party—all women—"maintained the school for approximately two

years and set some of the ideology and structure that would survive in the [later] Oakland Community School years.” (Robinson, 2020). Each educator played a different role within the smaller *homeschool esque* community. Although the educators and families never identified the formation as a homeschool, I believe this model mirrors many of the homeschool cooperatives and learning pods that have been formed since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. For the IYI, some of the educators were the lead teachers for different age levels while some managed the logistical, day-to-day needs of the school by handling everything from, “transportation, food, and clothing to living accommodations and expensive telephone bills.” (Robinson, 2020). It was a total team effort. Each member of the community had to share the labor of maintaining the school grounds and the day to day practices of the scholars. Even at a smaller scale, the school needed eight different educators to help operate the logistical needs of the school. At an organizational level, this tracks with what many guerilla scholars and veterans of different liberation movements have proposed as a necessity for organizational capacity. Without a small group of dedicated organizers, even small community programs can be very hard to develop, grow, and sustain (Bilal, 2021).

On the topic of developing team capacity, the educators of the first iterations of the liberation school in Oakland coordinated staff development opportunities to help grow the skills of the various educators who operated the school. While a majority of the curriculum was centered around basic literacy and arithmetic, the students also engaged in a curriculum that went far beyond the colonial standards—they learned about Afrikan cultural history, the history of colonized people, and they directly studied the parties’ ideologies. (Robinson, 2020). This required the team to study and develop new and improved ways for scholars to engage with different curriculum topics. The organizational

capacity and the quality of the schools education was dependent upon the team's ability to grow, learn, and adapt to the needs of the entire school and the families they served. Leaders of the school engaged in continuous reflection and study of themselves as educators, and the students as learners. Through the scientific method of trial and error, the use of critical reflection and group feedback helped guide the ways in which they trained each other to build a strong educational environment for the students. Team development was clearly an important part of building capacity and sustaining the educational project that was being formed over the years.

Curriculum & Pedagogy

Early formations of the Black Panther Party's liberation schools (the Oakland House and the IYI) employed a variety of methods and practices that align closely with the methods and practices of Pedagogies of Resistance outlined by Freire and other scholars—which we discussed in Chapter 2. When summed up into a single statement, the goals of their curriculum was simple: “orient the students to the party philosophy and forge a sense of political self-efficacy through community interaction,” (Robinson, 2020). A key facet of resistance pedagogies is the curriculum's ability to provide learners with an education that builds skills focused on community self-determination and liberation. How can we both identify the problems and develop solutions to the obstacles we face within Afrikan and Indigenous communities? For the BPP, they answered this question by engaging their students in a consistent study of class struggle. Students engaged with readings and writings about “important Panther leaders” and they frequently “read about the 10-Point Platform” developed by the Party's founders (Robinson, 2020). Aligned with the practices of resistance pedagogies, the

physical neighborhood and community environment became an important learning tool within the curriculum as well. Students “took field trips around the neighborhood to learn about the importance of the [Afrikan Families] and its oppositional relationship to state sponsored capitalism,” (Robinson, 2020). These pedagogical practices provided students with “extensive freedom to explore and experience their environment,” (Robinson, 2020). Within the curriculum, there was a clear dedication to helping students understand, analyze, and develop solutions to the real-world problems their people faced within the community. Beyond that, this practical experience allowed students to conceptualize what critiques of racial capitalism looked like in practice. The educators within the BPP liberation schools were able to articulate and demonstrate complex theory for young, elementary aged scholars that was typically reserved for college curricula (Robinson, 2020).

The educators who designed the curriculum at the Children’s House and the IYI were well versed in resistance pedagogies that centered student voice and uplifted the knowledge scholars brought with them into the classroom. Students were often given time to share what they learned through self-expression and art that focused on drawings, paintings, or other art which was related to the concepts they were learning. According to the educators and scholars themselves, early formations of the school BPP liberation school in Oakland were incredibly successful at transmitting revolutionary content into language and rhetoric the children could understand and share what they’ve learned. Using the knowledge they’ve learned, students were able to identify contradictions that exist within the capitalist society they lived in. In one example, a student created a drawing of a grocery store they said was *robbing* the people of the community—this was their way of explaining consumerism and exploitation in their art (Robinson, 2020).

Through these pedagogies, students were able to analyze the conditions and implement strategic solutions within their community through the programs operated by the BPP. In another instance, a student wrote a letter to political prisoners of the Black Panther party where they stated:

Dear Black Panthers, I think it isn't right for you to be in jail. Well, you and I know there are bad people in the world, and the cops and the judge are the same. You didn't think for one minute I believed all this hogwash did you? About bombing Macy's etc. I'm giving 10¢ and I'll contribute more too. They'll keep you in jail for life over my dead body. I'll raise over \$10,000 someday, somehow but don't you worry I'll do it... P.S. I'll be a Panther when I grow up. Please write me (Robinson, 2020, pg. 186).

From these accounts, it becomes clear that the youth of the Children's House and the Intercommunal Youth Institute had fully internalized the party teachings—young scholars were able to name their enemies and they began to stretch their concept of family in the same way that Black Panther Party members did with their cadre and comrades. Gone were the European conceptions of self and family that isolated Afrikan and Indigenous people since the start of colonization. Students viewed their neighbors, community members, and revolutionaries like Ericka Huggins, Bobby Seale, and Kwame Ture as kinfolk and relatives who they worked in unity with. With the pedagogical foundations in place, the first full-time liberation school was born.

At the Oakland Community School, educators developed a robust curriculum that included “science, social science, environmental studies, Spanish, language arts, performing arts, visual arts, physical education, mathematics, and other [curriculum topics],” (Robinson, 2020, pg. 186; Newton, 1978). If one was to look through the math or language arts section of the OCS curriculum design, they would find a typical list of core subjects that would align with the core standards offered by state and national curricula. According to Robinson:

In math, students in the early levels learned counting, basic geometric shapes, and addition/subtraction. By levels six and seven, students were practicing decimals, complex fraction problems, and early algebraic expressions (Oakland Community School, n.d.-a). Language courses were a combination of spelling, handwriting, composition, and reading. Early levels practiced basic motor skills associated with using a writing instrument while the older students practiced the structure of paragraphs in order to compose narrative, descriptive, and expository essays, (Robinson, 2020, pg. 194).

For science and history, one would find a curriculum more aligned with the pedagogies of resistance offered in the early formations of the school. Science units encompassed studies of typical scientific topics but worked to provide tangible experiments relevant to the students immediate environment. The use of a science curriculum was employed to help develop students' critical thinking and their understanding of scientific method that is essential to identifying and developing solutions in the real world (Robinson, 2020). In history, students received an introduction into rebellion while also critically analyzing traditional western teachings that pacify the colonizer and make savages out of Afrikan and Indigenous peoples. The curriculum was designed to help foster the students' connections to a strong sense of racial pride that is non-existent in typical colonial curricula. At the lower levels, history began with "an understanding of themselves, their families, and their neighborhood," (Robinson, 2020). Black history, rebellion, and a strong sense of self was a core tenant of the history curriculum developed by educators at OCS. According to students, "We knew the map of Afrika just as well as we knew the United States," (Robinson, 2020).

The Oakland Community School successfully implemented pedagogies of resistance that merged traditional curriculum standards with hands-on activities that placed scholars in direct contact

with “the mission of the BPP and the systems of racial and class inequities that led to the civil rights and Black Power struggles,” (Robinson, 2020). According to Erika Huggins, former Director of OCS:

I think that the school’s principles came from the socialist principles we tried to live in the Black Panther Party. One of them being critical thinking—that children should learn not what to think but how to think ... the school was an expression of the collective wisdom of the people who envisioned it. And it was ... a living thing [that] changed every year, (Choi, n.d.).

At OCS, they believed that the development and growth of the individuals participating in the creation of this community school was dependent upon their ability to critically analyze and shift their methods to the needs of the people in the community. Their educational practices strictly mirrored their political ideologies and it was evident in the ways in which they approached the pedagogical nature of the school and the educators. (Robinson, 2020). Their goal was to develop their collective ability to think in a dialectical manner. They never considered the development of the students and the educators as a separate endeavor—this is an important facet of liberation pedagogies identified by Freire and many other scholars. “The eventual goal was to give the youth [a] way of thinking out of their problem on their own,” (Robinson, 2020, pg. 187). Through the lens of resistance pedagogies and practices of unschooling discussed in Chapter 2 of this project, the OCS school offered students a real chance at participating in a holistic approach to education. There was a large emphasis on learning through engagement with the community—even just a simple walk through the community could be utilized as an exercise in phonics and decoding which helps build literacy. As a way to reinforce primary math skills, “teachers had students count off in a line or practice numeracy in local grocery stores through transactions,” (Robinson, 2020). Within these stores, teachers would also have scholars

read food labels and store signs—the neighborhood and its various markets became a consistent educational space for students.

When employing methods of resistance pedagogies and unschooling, the role of the educator is to create opportunities for students to find themselves and their communities throughout the process. While young scholars of course need structure, these pedagogies create space for both highly-structured environments and a variety of self-chosen tasks. With collective goals and principles set, the learning environment becomes a space where scholars can build collaborative skills while practicing accountability amongst their peers. Interactions within the classroom were not solely dependent on teacher imposed standards—the students themselves were important decision makers within the collective space. Students were given “extensive freedom to explore and experience their environment, (Robinson, 2020). An important part of these curriculum methods is providing space for scholars to always be learning from one another. This collectivist learning paradigm, in which students build each other’s learning in a reciprocal way, is similar to the “Each One Teach One” model. By actively participating, they co-create learning experiences, especially with peers.

School Structure & Daily Practice

The daily schedule at the Oakland Community School was an expanded version of the early structure developed at the Children’s House and the Intercommunal Youth Institute—this section will focus mostly on the daily practices implemented at OCS in particular. For all students, regardless of age, a normal weekday started at 7:30 am and ended in the early evening. To start the day, students worked out during the morning block before eating a communal breakfast. After completing their

allotted duties around campus (each scholar had a shared responsibility of taking on a role and completing tasks), pupils started their coursework by 10 a.m. Typically, science and math were the first courses taught in the morning followed by a one-hour history lesson. In the afternoon, students engaged in field work and special projects for the Black Panther Party. The primary tasks of field labor was distributing The Black Panther newspaper, going to jails, interacting with local youth, and attending court proceedings involving fellow Panthers. A 1979 copy of the OCS schedule showed that course times for students varied based on their level grouping. Compared to intermediate skills students, primary skills students had an earlier lunch and break. After all scholars finished their classes by 3:30, students had free time, dinner at 4 p.m., and concluded the day at 4:30 (Robinson, 2020).

As noted above, the OCS used levels rather than grades to classify students, just like the early Children's House and the Intercommunal Youth Institute. The guidebook states that the twelve instruction levels are arranged as follows: Primary Skills, Levels 1-3; Intermediates, Levels 4-9; Secondary Skills, Levels 10-12. These levels arranged scholars based on their strengths rather than placing them in accordance with standard grade levels provided by colonial academic constructs. In order to assign pupils to the proper level, they continuously assessed their performance across the different aspects of the program. It was also made plain by staff members that kids should always learn from one another. These levels put students in a better position to support one another in reciprocal learning since they were divided in a way that closely positioned them within each other's zone of proximal development (Robinson, 2020).

One of the places in this daily routine where students' voices were most noticeable was in the Justice Court. When students made mistakes at school, they were required to appear before the Justice

Court which is made up of a committee of their peers who probe questions in an effort to identify the source of the issue. The Justice Court was used to address mistakes where students misbehaved or acted in a way that went against the collectivist concept of the school family. Students on the Justice Court asked probing questions regarding the actions of their peers and quoted back the specifics of the negative behavior. To bargain with the student whose behavior was in issue as well as the court members, introspective questioning, critical thinking, and active listening were necessary skills of the court. Following this thorough investigation and discussion, the court would recommend a course of action for correction, which was essentially the intervention or consequence for the behavior. The handbook's emphasis on student-driven accountability and a dialectical relationship is reflected in this kind of responsibility and sophisticated social engagement. Although this method is far from flawless, it departs from the conventional belief that educators serve as the ultimate arbiters of truth; in this model, students are challenged to hold one another accountable for their actions. A staff member observed that although mistakes would be made by the students during the process, this was also a necessary part of learning (Robinson, 2020).

The OCS and the other militant education projects developed by the BPP served as a vital source of inspiration for Malcolm X Academy. Our team actually sat down with former president of the school Erika Huggins a few months before the doors to our school opened. Not only did she give us her blessing to open the school in the memory of OCS, she challenged us to consider the ways in which we can expand upon the successes of the OCS to better fit the current needs of students, families, and community members in our city.

The True Education of the Zapatistas

Here we live worse than dogs. We had to choose: to live like animals or die like dignified people. Dignity, Miguel, is the only thing that one should never lose...never.

— *Subcomandante Marcos*

Zapatismo is not a new political ideology, or a rehash of old ideologies. Zapatismo is nothing, it does not exist. It only serves as a bridge, to cross from one side to the other. So everyone fits within Zapatismo, everyone who wants to cross from one side to the other. There are no universal recipes, lines, strategies, tactics, laws, rules, or slogans. There is only a desire – to build a better world, that is, a new world.

— *Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee, Zapatista Army of National Liberation*

Our education is about having a dignified struggle and one heart, so that we can walk together in the same direction. We believe that education is not only about teaching literacy and numeracy, but also about solving problems between our peoples, how to defend ourselves, about our history and how to keep on fighting.

— *Hortencia, Tseltal promoter of True Education*

Organizational History & the Necessity for Liberatory Education

On New Year's Day, 1994—the same day the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was operationalized—the faceless people of the Zapatistas (predominantly Indigenous Ch'ol, Tzeltal, Tzotzil, Tojolobal, Mam, and Zoque Indigenous peoples) proudly introduced themselves to the world through an armed people's rebellion in Chiapas, Mexico. Much like their relatives from across the continent of Abya Yala, the Indigenous communities of the region have resisted and survived centuries of settler colonial terror carried out by the Spanish conquistadors and

now, the established state of Mexico. Their Indigenous way of life appeared to be under greater threat with every year that passed (Gahman, n.d.). The Zapatista people felt that the Mexican government—an extension of the Spanish settler-colonial project—was gradually eradicating them. *We cover our faces so that you can see us.* This famous Zapatista saying rang true on this day in particular—for a group of people often erased by politicians and exploited by global economies, the masked rebels of the EZLN made their previously invisible faces visible to the entire world (Gottesdiener, 2014). Their demands were simple. They wanted work, land, shelter, food, health, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice, and peace for their people. While the signing of the NAFTA was a significant threat to the main crops being produced by Indigenous farmworkers in Chiapas, this armed insurrection at its core was a direct response to over 500 years of settler-colonial terror inflicted upon the Indigenous peoples of the region (Gahman, n.d.).

As the sun broke over the mountains of Chiapas on that morning of January 1st, 1994, the Zapatistas and their fearless National Liberation Army (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, EZLN) descended upon six different cities within the state of Chiapas by occupying government buildings, liberating political prisoners from San Cristóbal de Las Casas prison camp, evicting landlords from haciendas, and bravely exchanging fire with the fortified Mexican military. In response to the many losses it was taking from the EZLN's tactical offensive, the colonial Mexican army began dropping bombs upon the mountains of Chiapas over a multi-day period. This reckless bombardment ignited riots throughout the streets and cities across Mexico that pushed the state to cease its assault—but, in the end, it was the offensive carried out by EZLN that forced the Mexican Government to approach the valiant rebel army in peace talks. The San Andrés Accords “peace” agreement was finally

signed by the two sides in February 1996 that, to this day, has never been fully honored by the colonial government (Gottesdiener, 2014; see also Gahman, n.d.). Even with the San Andrés Accords in place, the Mexican government's response to the 1994 uprising has resulted in years of retaliation and repression. In the face of a great defeat to the small but mighty army of the EZLN, Mexican President Ernesto Zedillo dispatched thousands of troops into Zapatista territory in an attempt to locate the immortal Subcomandante Marcos—the movement's well-known spokesperson. Unsurprisingly, they failed to locate him. Throughout this assault on the Indigenous people, small, collectively owned businesses were destroyed and homes and fields were set on fire by the army, police, and its hired goons. Dozens of Indigenous civilians were captured and taken as political prisoners. The operation signaled the start of a decades-long covert campaign against the Zapatista communities who wholly uplifted the efforts of the EZLN rebel army. (Gottesdiener, 2014).

As I write this in 2023, the Mexican Government continues to engage in a war of extermination on the Indigenous people of the Zapatistas. This is a war that the Spanish Conquistadors first waged over 500 years ago. In November of 2023, spokesperson and Insurgent Subcomandante Moisés of the EZLN wrote a letter to the world, breaking a seemingly decades long silence of the rebel army's representatives. Subcomandante Moises acknowledges this gap in communication with the world as he writes,

Our silence in these years was not, nor is it, a sign of respect or endorsement of anything, but rather that we strive to see further and seek what everyone, everyone, everyone is looking for: a way out of the nightmare. As you learn from subsequent writings what we have been doing, perhaps you will understand that our attention has been elsewhere (Moisés, 2023).

In the subsequent writings mentioned above, Subcomandante Moisés outlines the Mexican

Government's ongoing war with the Zapatista people that is being driven by the increased militarization of Chiapas—a direct response to what Subcomandante Moisés identifies as a “order that came from the North American government,” (Moisés, 2023). He lets the world know that the Zapatistas have reshaped their governmental structure—a process that took nearly an entire decade—and are preparing to celebrate the 30th anniversary of their uprising in 1994—an insurrection the Subcomandante calls “the war against oblivion,” (Moisés, 2023). He reports to the world that the state of Chiapas is in “complete chaos,” where the people have been resisting “blockades, assaults, kidnappings, rent collection, forced recruitment, and shootings” being carried out by what he calls the government’s “legal hitmen” or “disorganized crime” units which are all connected to the colonial power structure in one way or another, (Moisés, 2023).

According to the Subcomandante, the purpose of the federal, state, and local armed forces and law enforcement in Chiapas is not to defend the general populace. Rather, their one and only goal is to halt migration and please the warmongering government of the so-called United States who has issued said directive. They have made forced migration into a business, as is their custom. “Human smuggling and trafficking is a business of the authorities who, through extortion, kidnapping and buying and selling of migrants, shamelessly enrich themselves,” (Moises, 2023). This letter was distributed to the world in November of 2023, just over a month before I sat down to finish editing this section. The Zapatistas are resisting a long term war being waged by a colonial government—a war that they themselves directly connect to the liberation struggle being bravely fought by the Palestinian Resistance Axis in Gaza. The Zapatistas are insistent about connecting their struggle to the struggle of all colonized people who are the target of western imperialism. Knowing this, everything that follows

within this section is increasingly relevant to our struggle here in the so-called United States.

Before we talk about the militant education project developed by the Zapatistas, it's important that we first gain an understanding of who they are and what they stand for. Why are they struggling? Why do they resist? In his brilliant essay titled, *The Southeast in Two Winds A Storm and a Prophecy*, the immortal Subcomandante Marcos (1994) summarizes some of the many reasons the Zapatistas took up arms and decided to build their own autonomous government system. He writes:

The health conditions of the people of Chiapas are a clear example of the capitalist imprint: one-and-a-half million people have no medical services at their disposal. There are 0.2 clinics for every 1,000 inhabitants, one-fifth of the national average. There are 0.3 hospital beds for every 1,000 Chiapanecos, one third the amount in the rest of Mexico. There is one operating room per 100,000 inhabitants, one half of the amount in the rest of Mexico. There are 0.5 doctors and 0.4 nurses per 1,000 people, one-half of the national average... Health and nutrition go hand in hand in poverty. Fifty-four percent of the population of Chiapas suffer from malnutrition, and in the highlands and forest this percentage increases to 80%. A campesino's average diet consists of coffee, corn, tortillas, and beans. This is what capitalism leaves as payment for everything that it takes away," (pg. 4).

Subcomandante Marcos is clear about the material conditions his people face and he presents quantitative data to help summarize his main points. Building on this, in a letter written to the children of Guadalajara (1994), the Indigenous people of Chiapas brilliantly capture their revolutionary context and the purpose of their movement in a way that most anyone could grasp:

We are the heirs to the real creators of our nationality, we are millions of dispossessed... The commands and troop elements from EZLN are mostly indigenous people from Chiapas, it is like this because the indigenous people represent the most humiliated and dispossessed sector in Mexico, but also, the most praiseworthy, we are thousands of natives who have taken up arms, behind us there are dozens of thousands relatives of ours. That's the thing, dozens of thousands of indigenous people are in the struggle... We do not take up arms for the pleasure of killing and dying... For our boys and girls there are no schools or medicines, there are no clothes or food, there is no decent roof above our heads. For our kids there is only work, ignorance and death. The land we

have is useless. Our kids have to go to work since very young so they can get some food, clothes and medicines... they eat the same food we eat: corn, beans and chili. They cannot go to school to learn Spanish because work kills all day, and illness kills all night. That is how our kids have lived and died since 501 years ago. Us, their fathers, their mothers, their brothers and their sisters, we didn't want to carry the guilt for doing nothing about our boys and girls. We searched for peaceful ways to obtain justice and we found death; we found pain and sorrow every time. And then we had to find the way of the war, because what we asked for with voice was not listened to... We do not beg or ask for charity, we ask for justice: a fair salary, a piece of good land, a decent house, a school of truth, medicine that cures, bread on our tables, respect, freedom to say what comes up to our mind and opens the mouth so the words unite us to others in peace and without death. That is what we always ask for, boys and girls in Jalisco, and they did not listen what our voice cried for... Our problems, and the problems of our entire homeland, can only be solved through a national revolutionary movement around three main demands: freedom, democracy and justice... The situation we are going through happens not only in one state or only in some towns but in other states too, we know that our brothers and sisters are suffering in other towns and other states, as much as we are suffering where we live (Marcos, 2002).

This is the colonial situation the Indigenous people of Chiapas have been faced with for generations. As their organization formed throughout the early 1990s—family by family within the shadows of Chiapas—the Zapatistas knew they only had two choices: to live in death or to live with dignity.

Almost three decades after this revolutionary insurgency, the Zapatistas have concentrated their efforts on leading a life of decolonial, anti-capitalist, collective resistance centered upon reclaiming land, providing for one another, and exercising autonomy—despite the ongoing counter-insurgency being led by the Mexican government and its various paramilitary units. In order to maintain their autonomy, the Zapatistas prioritize Indigenous customs and practices of agro-ecological food sovereignty, egalitarian gender relations, anti-systemic health care, grassroots education, and horizontal governance (Gahman, n.d.). For the last 29 years, the majority of the movement's efforts was devoted to gradually constructing autonomous structures for current and future generations of

Zapatista youth. Today, the children have grown up “in a community with its own Zapatista schools; communal businesses; banks; hospitals; clinics; judicial processes; birth, death, and marriage certificates; annual censuses; transportation systems; sports teams; musical bands; art collectives; and a multi-tiered system of government, (Gottesdiener, 2014; see also, Moisés, 2023). Prisons do not exist. In school, students study both Spanish and their native tongue. An autonomous hospital's operation may cost a tenth of what it would in a formal hospital. Elected by their town assemblies, members of the Zapatista government are not paid for their services (Gottesdiener, 2014).

For the Zapatista people, collective autonomy of a people requires economic independence—particularly for a movement that challenges the prevailing global model of neoliberal capitalism. One of the core pillars of Zapatista autonomy is collective work. It sustains the hospitals, clinics, elementary and secondary education, municipalities, and Local Autonomous Government boards. Without the mutual efforts of men, women, boys, girls, and the elderly, they would not have been able to achieve economic independence (Zibeche, 2013). The Zapatista families in each of the caracoles throughout the region have set up small economic cooperatives which include coffee farms, bakeries, animal farms, shared agricultural fields, art collectives, and so much more. The Caracoles are the organizational regions that make up the autonomous Zapatista communities. Within each Caracoles there is a specific organizational structure—which as I noted above, has recently shifted to provide even more control over decision making to the Indigenous workers who make up the localized zones (Moisés, 2023). I will not go into great detail here since our focus for this study is on the formation and development of community schools in the region, but I feel it is necessary for us to gain a basic grasp of who the Zapatistas are and how they operate.

According to the update provided by Insurgent Subcomandante Moisés, there are now thousands of Local Autonomous Government Boards (formerly known as Good Government Boards) in the region that control their own institutions for Health, Education, Agroecology, Justice, Commerce, and more. They are coordinated by autonomous assemblies of the “town, ranchería, community, area, neighborhood, ejido, colony, or however each population calls itself,” (Moisés, 2023). Within this community-based decision making model, the specific needs identified by each autonomous zone are proposed, discussed, and resolved through direct democratic assemblies that center the voices of those who sustain the community.

This demonstration of Zapatista Autonomy is a reminder to the oppressed people of the world that freedom will not come from the outside—and it most definitely will not come from terroristic colonial governments. For the Zapatistas, the freedom offered to oppressed people by colonial powers is a false freedom. “By governing themselves autonomously the Zapatistas experience the freedom to propose, study, analyze, discuss and decide,” (Alonso, 2014). This manifestation of freedom is the result of practiced self-determination. The Zapatistas have successfully been able to neutralize the social policies implemented by the Mexican government. Their freedom was attained with a “militant firmness” and “political clarity” that is sustained by an eternal capacity for sacrifice (Zibechi, 2013).

The Zapatistas are making freedom. They are actively building the structures necessary for them to autonomously govern themselves without colonial influence and domination. A concept that has emerged from within this rebellion is term referred to as Zapatismo. Zapatismo, according to many scholars, is that feeling “in the chest and compels one to say ‘enough’ in the face of injustice and the suffering of others,” (Gahman, n.d.). Within Zapatismo there is a deep desire to build a better world—

a new world. There are no universal strategies, tactics, laws, or slogans that govern the foundations of Zapatismo. “It only serves as a bridge, to cross from one side, to the other,” (Gahman, n.d.). It is a metaphorical bridge built by the revolutionary hope of Indigenous people from around the globe who are conscious of a world that existed before domination.

There are seven guiding principles of Zapatismo which include: Obedecer y No Mandar (To Obey, Not Command), Proponer y No Imponer (To Propose, Not Impose), Representar y No Suplantar (To Represent, Not Supplant), Convencer y No Vencer (To Convince, Not Conquer), Construir y No Destruir (To Construct, Not Destroy), Servir y No Servirse (To Serve Others, Not Serve Oneself), Bajar y No Subir (To Work From Below, Not Seek To Rise) (Gahman, n.d.). The thousands of local autonomous governments within the caracoles are guided by these seven principles of Zapatismo. Their primary tenets of governance are to promote membership in the collective government and to rule by obeying the wants and needs of the people who make up each local autonomous zone. Since these are the laws that the Indigenous people of the region have agreed upon, the government follows them instead of acting in a way that is contrary to these ideals. Through the community assemblies led by the local autonomous governments, they are able to maintain their demands of work, land, shelter, food, health, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice, and peace for their people. Throughout the past 30 years, the Zapatistas have been experimenting with their autonomous government structures and have implemented step-by-step improvements. The number of women serving on the Local Autonomous Government Boards has been rising. Like any organized group of people, certain proposals have unfavorable outcomes because their effects were not well considered. Through collective decision making structures, the Zapatistas have embraced and

implemented a unique process of trial, error, and correction (Alonso, 2014).

Now, let's focus on a key part of their autonomous government structure—and the object of our study: Zapatista True Education. Before the uprising, there weren't many state schools in these remote areas of Mexico, but the Zapatista communities have created new ones, trained instructors from inside, and expanded the types of education available to their kids. Prior to the Zapatistas establishing their own educational system, some children attended government schools that were poorly administered and funded, with few, if any, instructors. Lessons were not based on local customs and traditions, nor were they taught in the Indigenous languages of the region (Davies, 2011). According to other accounts, “some teachers openly criticized the EZLN and Zapatista families during class, punishing and harshly beating the children, shaming them for being Indigenous peasants,” (Rico, 2014). Seeing that their children continued to face elements of colonial violence within the government schools, the Zapatistas decided to establish autonomous schools through a militant education project called True Education—a revolutionary educational system where both children and teachers are treated with dignity (Howard, 2007; see also Davies, 2011; Rico, 2014).

Education was a central demand within the Zapatistas project of political and social autonomy. According to Angélica Rico (2014), the Zapatista schools “reproduces culture, practices and discourses; but [they] also generate change and resistance, not only in the form of education, but in the subjects themselves, in their forms of community organization and their family relationships.” While the schools within the different zones certainly differ, Zapatista autonomous education is meant to be a university of life (Rico, 2014). The goals and contents of the Zapatista Education system are derived from “experienced problems, and the possible solutions, through reflection and collective

participation,” (Rico, 2014).

We find evidence of the school as a socializing space in Raúl Zibechi’s (2013) reflection on his experiences visiting the Zapatista communities. For Zibechi, the entire political culture he witnessed was:

Rooted in family relations [that] permeates all of Zapatista society. Men collaborate in the domestic work that continues falling on the women; they take care of their children when the women leave the community for their work as authorities. The father-son relationships are affectionate and respectful, within a general climate of harmony and good humor. I did not observe a single gesture of violence or aggressiveness in the home, (Zibechi, 2013, pg. 4).

This is a stark contrast to the culture and temperament you would find in the typical American household where we see the violent repercussions of colonial society. According to a report by Stanford Medicine Children’s Health, “more than half of U.S. high school students (55%) reported they experienced emotional abuse by a parent or other adult in the home,” (Chen, 2022). Emotional abuse involves but is not limited to actions intended to frighten, control, or isolate a child through behavior like criticism, name-calling, shaming, manipulation, rejection and invalidation. In contrast to the society most people in the United States are familiar with, it becomes clear what type of society the Zapatista people are forging and its foundations are being solidified in each of the Zapatista community schools.

Through the True Education system, Indigenous children of the community can identify with the Zapatista project of autonomy. They align their daily lives with the movement’s values—which they learn in school—and they are strengthened by their participation in the social and political activities within Zapatista territory. The youth are completely engrossed in the creation of a social and

political reality. Children can express their thoughts and feelings while creating their own independent identities in the reflective environment of the autonomous school (Marcos, 1999; see also Rico, 2014). With autonomous education, children are invited to develop a distinct kind of socialization that arises “out of different ideas and practices of gender relations and collective identity,” (Rico, 2014). True Education of the Zapatistas transcends many domains of alternative knowledge and being and is not restricted to the political, social, or cultural spheres implemented by colonial powers.

For the Zapatistas, True Education is an institution within the community that is compulsory for both children and adults who engage in the process of learning together. Education throughout the caracoles is anchored in the daily struggle being waged by the Indigenous people of the region—it is an essential function of daily life in the community. “Within all the four municipalities, the main aim is one of sharing, of learning together, of learning from everyone,” (Autonomous Education, 2010). The power of the True Education system lies within the heart of the community—it is driven by a reimagined, collective way of living and working that is rooted in Indigenous processes.

The Organizational History of the Zapatistas is essential to our study of their educational project. Their systems provide us with a unique blueprint for what collective autonomy can look like as we attempt to understand liberation struggles working towards decolonizing, transforming, and revolutionizing colonial society on Turtle Island. “Insurgents do not always finish a movement they start, but they remain in history as actors of founding processes,” (Navarro, 2004). This study is an attempt to hold onto this truth by demonstrating the many ways we can engage, analyze, and implement effective revolutionary systems. Whether or not our movements sustain themselves overtime, nothing will remain as before. As I write this, we are in an unprecedented revolutionary

moment that is reverberating from Palestine, to the Afrikan Sahel, and across the Global South. People's perspectives have shifted, walls have been torn down, and many of our community members are suddenly aware of realities that they were previously unaware of. The Zapatista movement has and will continue to be a significant point of reference for us as we work to understand the importance of militant education for colonized communities (Navarro, 2004).

The Political Struggle for Space

Long before the Zapatistas decided to pull all of their children from the government schools in Chiapas, local assemblies within each zone gathered to discuss the most urgent necessity for their True Education system. Many of the zones knew that their first priority was the construction of schools throughout the various towns and municipalities. Throughout this section, we are going to survey a variety of Zapatista municipalities in an attempt to understand the ways in which their workers struggled with the politics of space and land in regards to schooling. As we engage in this process, we should remember that the True Education system was born within a warzone. For almost thirty years, the Zapatista communities in resistance have been fighting a war of aggression, repression, violence, intimidation, theft, land eviction, and provocation meant to end their movement. In 2011, the Observation and Solidarity Brigade reported that government paramilitaries and counterinsurgents attempted to sabotage and destroy the development of Zapatista autonomy by attacking their infrastructure within the sectors of “education, healthcare, justice, government, community work, co-operatives, the participation of women, appropriate technology, and other social and economic projects,” (Davies, 2011). Immediately after the call was made to build autonomous schools in all the

Zapatista communities, the violent attacks intensified. The Brigade's report focuses primarily on communities in the highland region within the caracol of Oventik. Keep in mind, each caracol now operates as its own municipality with dozens, and in some cases, hundreds of smaller communities identified as towns, rancherías, neighborhoods, etc., that each have different collective decision making structures (Moises, 2023). This section will focus primarily on the Brigade's report as it provides us with a substantive analysis—from interviews with Zapatista families—about the political struggle for space regarding a variety of schools built within the Zapatista-controlled caracol of Oventik.

The Zapatista people have built everything within the True Education system, even the tin-and-straw roofed schools. True Education is sustained by the community's commitment to the autonomous project. For their children to have the food they need while at school, parents send rations of beans, corn, and firewood. Numerous international organizations, including those from Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Greece, and the United States, among others, have supported the Zapatista movement and provided them with a means of funding to establish additional schools (Howard, 2007). Reading about how these schools were forged within a war-zone, it becomes clear why the infrastructure supporting Zapatista education is a focus point for the movement; many of the classrooms, benches, desks, and other resources are either built or repurposed items from the colonial system. Grand structures are not necessary for the Zapatistas to establish their systems of resistance—this is also the case for the True Education.

When they first started, schools in many of the municipalities were located in small homes or make-shift structures with roofs but no walls. The organization lacked the ability to construct proper buildings. To this day, their infrastructure is modest. Their people have never required a lavish

location or salary (Alonso, 2014). Knowing this, we should keep in mind that—for both children and adults within the Zapatista movement—the physical school is only one part of the education process. True Education starts with the practice of sharing and working in the community. So, while this section may focus on the physical structure of the various Zapatista schools highlighted, True Education does not place the same level of emphasis on the physical classroom space as most colonial education systems do (EZLN, 2014).

In the community of San Marcos Avilés, community members faced violent repression from local authorities for pulling their children out of the colonial schools. On August 24th, 2010, the Mexican paramilitaries eventually made good on their threats to violently take Zapatista land when they took “over 29 hectares of liberated land, 8500 coffee plants (equivalent to 360 sacks of coffee), 10 hectares of corn and beans, a hectare of bananas, seven cows, six horses and three humble dwelling-houses,” (Davies, 2011). They attacked and destroyed key infrastructure for the San Marcos Aviles community that helps its people survive. After their land and homes were raided, 47 men, 50 women, and 77 children sought safety in the surrounding mountainous area and wild bush, leaving them without food or possessions. People within the community reported that they “[endured] the cold and rain, without a roof to protect them, with very young children and two pregnant women who had to give birth on the mountain,” (Davies, 2011). This is just one of the many examples that demonstrate how modern governments continue to reproduce colonial relationships through the use of genocidal violence. After suffering for thirty-three days, they returned to their land only to discover their homes and belongings pillaged, their lands seized, their fences destroyed, their livestock murdered, and their crops set on fire. The community of San Marcos Avilés experiences these attacks by the colonial

entities because they are simply trying to exercise their right to self-determination by opening their own school. The primary school is still not operating as a result of the ongoing threats and acts of aggression. As a result, between 60 and 80 kids are deprived of their education (Davies, 2011). Not only are their children without proper education, they have no food because their crops have been stolen and their land has been plundered. They face continued threats if they even attempt to work on their lands. For asserting their dignity, the Indigenous people of San Marcos Avilés are being denied their fundamental right to food, safety, and education (Davies, 2011).

The community of Tentic—also situated within the Caracol of Oventik—is another township that has been targeted in response to the demand that all Zapatista autonomous communities construct primary schools. On May 10, 2011, government paramilitaries made their way towards the communities singular autonomous school and “broke down walls, put chains and padlocks on the school doors to prevent access, and stole the hoops from the basketball court,” (Davies, 2011). Ever since that day, the children of Tentic have gone without education because their school doors have remained padlocked. Two other communities within Caracol Oventik—Las Mercedes and San Juan Cancuc—have found themselves in danger of being uprooted and having their lands taken away following the call to pull their children from schools and develop the autonomous education project of True Education. Families in these communities who identify with the Zapatista movement have had their infrastructure attacked, they’ve had their roads blockaded, and any attempt to build their children’s schools has been met with severe, violent repression.

From each of these testimonies, it is possible to understand the level of violence Zapatista families and children have faced since the call was made to build their own schools. The Zapatista’s

political struggle for space has been dominated by over a decade of paramilitary attacks on their attempts to form a True Education system for the Indigenous people of the region. Through all of this, they have been able to maintain the True Education system. In order for us to understand the True Education system—its curriculum, and its daily methods—it is important for us to understand the spatial context within which these schools were built.

Organizational Capacity

Prior to the 1994 uprising, the members of the Zapatista movement spent an entire decade underground building the foundational structures of their revolutionary movement in preparation for their uprising (Gahman, n.d.). For Raul Zibechi (2013), acknowledging the methods and work that goes into building an organization is important. He writes that:

the EZLN was born in the countryside with a concentration that represented vertical and violent relations imposed by the plantation owners. They learned to work family by family and in secret, innovating the mode of work of the anti-systemic movements. When the world seems more like a concentration camp every day, their methods can be very useful for those of us who continue engaged in creating a new world (Zibechi, 2013).

The organizational capacity within the Zapatista movement was demonstrated by their ability to construct autonomous systems that sustained tens of thousands of Indigenous people within their community. As we'll see throughout this section, each movement we discuss has drastically different levels of organizational capacities that were determined by the conditions of war within each colonial situation—each movement can only respond to their particular historical context. Understanding the different levels of organization within a liberation struggle is essential to our study of revolutionary

movements and their militant education projects. If we are to use these histories for our own struggle, then we must be damningly honest about the level of organization required to develop true collective autonomy.

The True Education system is sustained by the entire community. While there are specific coordinating roles within the schools of each community, the teachers and students would have no infrastructure for their learning without the support of the community at large. Teachers in the True Education system are known as “education promoters” because everyone within the Zapatista schools work and learn within a reciprocal environment—the educators are working alongside students to promote their education, not control it entirely (Autonomous Education, 2010). The people who educate the children of each Zapatista family are chosen by the community. Education promoters live and work in the communities they teach in—they are able to directly relate to the students that they teach because “they speak their language and are their equals,” (Zibeche, 2013). As a result, they are able to teach their students about their native language, culture, and history because it is a part of who they are. Rather than simply teaching, Zapatista education promoters are tasked with infusing education into all aspects of the child's life—aligned with bell hooks and Paolo Freire’s theories of reciprocity in education—their job is to guide the children through their learning, not impose knowledge unto them like a bank depository (Howard, 2007).

Education promoters are not paid. The collective assemblies within each community work to select, house, and feed each promoter—it is seen as an honorable job within the community. The role of a promoter—like the role of an educator in any community—is particularly taxing because of the extreme poverty of the communities. Even though there is a severe shortage of school supplies due to

the fact that they are living in resistance to colonial occupation, the Education Promoters are still able to organize their True Education system (Autonomous Education, 2010). After receiving professional training, these promoters mentor the next generation of regional promoters in their communities. In terms of structure and period of time, each Caracol has a different training process for its education promoters. According to their self-published textbook, the training was made for the system to be equal, “for it to be taught the same to all the children,” (EZLN, 2013). Across the region, you can find promoters being trained by professional journalists, engineers, agro-ecologists, biologists, and university students in its various training centers. Professionals from across Mexico volunteer their time to help develop the educators that are tasked with organizing the True Education system (Rico, 2014). It’s crucial to remember that the promoters are engaging in the education process alongside the children in every way. The educators are community members who are dedicated to advancing various forms of labor and knowledge; they truly are promoters of learning (Howard, 2007). For example, twenty educational promoters have been trained and seventy two new autonomous schools have been established in one of the Caracoles in Chiapas. The first generation of their autonomous education was formed by these twenty promoters, who were then tasked with training eighty more promoters. By 2007, they had 147 promoters working with 1,726 students, and were in the process of training their third generation of promoters (Howard, 2007). It is important to our study that we understand the organizational strength needed to house, feed, and train an entire workforce of educators who will eventually reach each child in the community. This level of organization capacity “draws attention to the fact that light is born and grows from below and isn’t the product of a leader, boss, caudillo or sage, but of common people.” (Alonso, 2014).

While the Zapatistas understand their educators and students are facing issues unique to their geographical location and historical context, they attempt to draw comparisons between their situation and different colonial contexts from both within Mexico and the broader Global South. For Subcomandante Marcos (1999), there is a clear bridge that joins the Indigenous education promoter with a primary or secondary school teacher in cities and countries across Mexico and other parts of North America. Educators within settler-colonial societies face the same nightmare presented by the occupying government:

low salaries, repression as a response to their demands, a lack of union democracy, bad working conditions, absurd and useless curricula, ineffective and oppressive pedagogical methods, students who do not have the minimal conditions that would allow them to devote themselves to school as it is and as needs to be (Marcos, 1999, pg. 2).

No matter how much reform and research we do within the field of education, the Zapatistas, according to Subcomandante Marcos, do not believe that the core issues facing students, teachers, and families can be solved:

if bad labor conditions continue—and the low salaries—if education continues to breed oppressed and oppressors, if school continues to be—for millions of [colonized people]—as distant as dignified housing, a fair wage, a piece of land, enough food, full health, freedom of thought and association, popular democracy, authentic independence and true peace (Marcos, 1999, pg. 2).

If these conditions proceed to exist within a colonized community, the problems the people face—especially on the topic of education—can never be solved. These words from the immortal Subcomandante help us to understand the many different ways our particular liberation struggles are inherently connected—this includes the struggles of educators and the organizational capacity of our community schools. All of this is to be done in the face of what appears to be insurmountable odds:

extreme poverty, a lack of supplies or tools, and direct assaults carried out with complete impunity by settler-colonial paramilitaries. Indeed, all of this in the face of an enemy who has every intention of crushing Indigenous and Afrikan resistance and destroying the movement as a whole (Davies, 2013).

Curriculum and Pedagogy

The primary goal of the True Education system is to teach young people about the history, language, and culture of their people while simultaneously equipping them with the skills necessary to support their communities—something the colonial schools have never been able to accomplish (Howard, 2007). The Zapatistas put a strong emphasis on the value of cultivating critical, analytical, and creative skills in order to gain an understanding of political, economic, and cultural issues they face within the communities. They believe it is crucial for their people to learn about their own history, including their ancestry, traditional culture, way of life, and beliefs, as well as the history of colonization and resistance—a history that is not taught in the government schools (Autonomous Education, 2010). The True Education curriculum was created collaboratively and strives to give students a sense of ownership over the history of their community so they can preserve and pass it down. Transformation and critique are constant elements of building collective knowledge since students work in teams most of the time and spend a large portion of school time outside of the classroom in contact with the same elements that configure their daily lives. In autonomous schools, complementary integration replaces the separation and hierarchy (teacher-student, classroom-playground, knowing-not-knowing) found in state schools (Zibechi, 2013).

Within their self-published textbook, *Autonomous Government II* (2014), which outlines the basic principles, practices, and procedures of the Zapatista Autonomous Government, the EZLN's writers provide us with an excellent detail of the thought processes that the collective assemblies undertook as they developed the True Education systems curriculum and pedagogy. Let's start our discussion here with the Zapatista curriculum. In their earliest meetings, the initial discussion revolved around whether or not they were going to follow the same curriculum standards as the colonial schools—they quickly decided to change the entire curriculum. As the planning continued, they eventually came to the conclusion that there are some things, like mathematics, reading, and writing “which [they] could not change anything, [they] had to teach it just how it is... that was universal,” (EZLN, 2014). On the matter of history, they knew that many things needed to be changed but they felt it was necessary to review standard history textbooks in order to decide which topics were good for their children and which were not. They felt that it was vital to include their own history—that of the Zapatistas and the EZLN—alongside “other social movements which had taken place during history,” (EZLN, 2014).

After collective discussions like these within each of the assemblies across the various Caracoles, the proposed curriculum was “taken to the towns so that the parents would see what other things they needed to be learned in the autonomous school,” (EZLN, 2014). This is how study areas were born within each of the Zapatista zones:

It came out that we were not going to call what was Spanish in the [standard curriculum] ‘Spanish,’ it was called ‘languages.’ History and mathematics stayed with the same name, an area was included which is called ‘Life and Environment’ where it is also seen about nature, about the life of the animals, everything that in the [standard curriculum] was Natural Sciences. Another area was seen which is called ‘Integration,’

in other words all the things that were necessary to study and which did not fit in any of the other areas had to fit there, for example the study of our 13 demands (housing, land, work, health, nutrition, education, independence, democracy, freedom, justice, culture, information, and peace), (EZLN, 2014).

In the True Education's curriculum, the history of the Spanish colonists is taught alongside the history of the Tzeltal people from the perspective of the Indigenous peoples. National and international heroes recognized by the popular education system share space with Indigenous and Revolutionary heroes. The values of individualism, competition, consumerism, and private property are seriously questioned and replaced with values like community and solidarity (EZLN, 2014). The four main areas of study in the True Education are as follows: (1) History: "of the local region, the Zapatista struggle, Mexico and the world," (2) Language: "local languages and Spanish, (3) Math, and (4) Agro-Ecology: "how to take care of the environment through practices of organic agriculture and rejection of trans-genetic seeds, among other methods," (Howard, 2007).

The History curriculum demonstrates how their ancestors took care of the land and the environment. For the EZLN, it is imperative that this legacy be upheld in order to preserve indigenous culture. The curriculum guides learners through historical and contemporary issues that teach "different ways of working, how to save native seeds, and the need to work together to build and strengthen the community and the resistance," (Autonomous Education, 2010). The study of Language begins with the mother tongue; in this region, the four indigenous languages spoken are chol, tojolabal, tzotzil, and tzeltal (the most common). Texts are also studied in Spanish in addition to all these languages. Agro-ecology plays a significant role in the curriculum. This curriculum is structured to teach students how to work the land and take care of the environment, students learn

how to save seeds, they learn how to use and prepare natural remedies, they practice water and forest conservation, and they utilize this curriculum as a way for students to collaborate with the community and the resistance (Davies, 2011). In Math, alongside the standard arithmetic, education promoters design word problems and math topics that allow the “children [to] learn from attacks and the exploitation of Indigenous peoples,” (Autonomous Education, 2010). Through agro-ecology, the students are taught about environmental issues, growing gardens, raising livestock like pigs, sheep, and chickens, and they learn how to produce crops. Through this portion curriculum education promoters teach about natural resources, pollution, and sustainable land management—it allows for children to acquire useful knowledge and, in this way, the curriculum can help the school contribute to the local economy which supports the Education Promoters (Howard, 2007; see also, Autonomous Education, 2010).

Zapatista teaching methods are based on pedagogies of humility, care, and accompaniment. The True Education system strives to develop children's positive self-perceptions in relation to their immediate surroundings. Regaining cultural norms and developing new ways of speaking and understanding each other is one of the most crucial components of True Education's pedagogical practices. Education promoters are challenged to develop new strategies of discipline, assessment, and management that respect the autonomy of students. It is “forbidden to punish or disrespect the children,” and unlike traditional schools, there are “no exams because knowing is proven in the doing,” (Davies, 2011; see also Alonso, 2014). According to the Zapatistas, all it takes to be a disciple in the school is the “desire to look and learn,” (Davies, 2011). The community serves as the setting for instruction and learning. Instead of having teachers as in the previous model, True Education schools

have a collective that instructs, demonstrates, and builds. As a result, one learns in and through the community, and in turn, teaches others. Their pedagogical practices align directly with the methods and systems developed throughout all of their autonomous systems: “to govern and be governed in agreement with one’s ways, within one’s geography and by one’s calendar,” (Alonso, 2014).

All people within the True Education system are taught to view education as intrinsically political; they are taught how to fight, care for the environment, and take pride in defending their Indigenous culture and territory. True Education faces the challenge of transforming the community into a classroom and implementing a formal Tzeltal education system where children learn about traditional ceremonies, planting and harvesting seasons, and the oral tradition of their people. The education promoters demonstrate a unique range of pedagogical practices that assist in sowing the seeds of a critical consciousness in the minds of the young. (Rico, 2014). This is evident in the conversations Angela Rico (2014) had with students as she visited various Zapatista schools:

At the autonomous school, we speak Tzeltal and we can say whatever is on our minds without any punishments (Gloria, 11 years old). I like the autonomous school because they respect my word and the teacher doesn’t say ugly things (Julia, 9 years old)... We can play and learn about our rights, and we know what the government does against our communities (Manuel, 12 years old), (p. 3).

Boys and girls are learning about revolutionary ideals and they are learning how to adopt specific principles that can transform their family and community life. Young women in the community actively participate in Zapatista organizations and they “learn about their rights and how to make decisions,” (Rico, 2014). Girls can choose to become insurgentes, members of political committees, or community promoters of human rights, health, or education. It is evident that the pedagogical practices utilized within the True Education system are successfully fostering revolutionary ideals and

principles into the hearts and minds of Zapatista youth. The foundation of True Education is the creation of a new world based on values of *being* rather than *having*. The Zapatistas advocate for being realistic—which includes identifying the community's actual needs for liberation and teaching students about this realization. “We learn as we walk, side by side with our education,” (Howard, 2007).

School Structure & Daily Practice

For Zapatista children, much like children in Palestine, in the “ghettos” of the United States, and other militarized colonial societies, it is normal for them to be bombarded with questions by armed officers or soldiers while their book bags are searched. This is the life of a child within the Zapatista territories. These are children who are surviving a reality frozen between resistance and death—together, alongside their families, the community, and the education promoters, they are fighting to build up the autonomous education system of True Education (Rico, 2014).

“Change of Activities” refers to school breaks during which children are called to assist with chores around the house or in the community (Howard, 2007; see also *Autonomous Education*, 2010). In this way, class schedules and daily systems are organized according to the needs of the community. On harvest days for example, since children are needed to support their families, schools close to accommodate the daily practices of the community. The yearly calendar for the school is dictated mostly by the communities planting and harvesting seasons—as well as its traditional festivals. This scheduling practice is proof that children attend True Education schools to benefit their community, not for the benefit of capitalist employers. Instead of focusing on some far-off future that

serves the interest of the colonial government, students learn how to produce and feed themselves, giving them jobs in farming, the arts, health, and other areas where the local population is in need (Howard, 2007).

In the day to day operation of the schools, children are not arranged within the schools according to grades, nor are they assessed through exams or given final grades. Instead, the kids are split up according to age and knowledge level if their community has the capacity and there are plenty of education promoters in a certain area. In many communities, there is a limited number of promoters and many do not have the capacity to practice division amongst the children—in this context, children are taught in a multi-level classroom where the older students support the Education Promoter in teaching the younger students (Howard, 2007; see also Autonomous Education, 2010).

The Zapatistas have a variety of schooling models—they have schools for primary aged students (Kindergarten-5th grade in the U.S. system), secondary education (6th-12th grade in the U.S. system), trade schools, and structured educational projects for visitors and members of their various support bases who want to learn more about their project of autonomy (Alonso, 2014). Schools are available to everyone in the community five days a week. Since education is crucial to the development of autonomy, it is required until old age. Even non-Zapatista children are welcomed into the True Education schools and many zones offer adult education classes as well.

There are at least two levels of education within each Zapatista zone and many have worked towards developing a third and fourth level to their education system that would mirror trade schools and university level education. At each level of True Education, there are “no comparisons, no tests, no final scores and no failures,” (Autonomous Education, 2010). Primary school is a compulsory

institution for children and adolescents within the community. Secondary school, on the other hand, is not available for each of the autonomous zones within a Caracol. Remember, each Caracol has dozens, if not hundreds of townships inside a Caracoles territory. Secondary schools are not compulsory and most students have to travel long distances to attend the schools. Because of this, many of the secondary schools have dormitories for students who often return home every two weeks to visit their families and replenish necessary supplies (Howard, 2007; see also *Autonomous Education*, 2010).

In primary school, the students learn the core curriculum of the Zapatistas. Children learn reading, writing, drawing, math, life and environment, languages and history. The youngest students in these schools (typically aged 4-5) engage with the curriculum through songs, games and group activities. Primary education typically lasts around six years but varies depending on which zone the child lives in (Howard, 2007; see also *Autonomous Education*, 2010). . A child's progress within the different levels of True Education takes as long as the student needs and is not determined by age. This means that Zapatista children are not forced to work through each level if they do not demonstrate the capacity to complete the lower levels in Primary Education. Secondary education focuses on “the Zapatista demands, reports, comunicués, denuncias, government strategies, ‘why we fight’, and the construction of autonomy,” and typically lasts an additional three years beyond primary education (*Autonomous Education*, 2010). In zones that have a third and fourth level of education, secondary students will have the option to continue their education or train in a specific trade.

As I noted previously, the entire movement is building towards having the capacity to offer a Secondary school, a Trade, and a university-style education within each caracole—but for now, many

students' education stops after secondary school. Students who graduate from secondary school have the opportunity to work as education promoters. The goal of True Education is to ensure that children who complete secondary school leave with the skills they need to help the community carry on the project of Indigenous autonomy and independence. The Zapatistas are practical and their education system ensures that the next generation of students have the farming, engineering, science, and organizing skills necessary to carry on the organization (Howard, 2007; see also *Autonomous Education*, 2010).

It is obvious that the settler-colonial government's national project is threatened by the Zapatista's autonomous education system. If you were to measure the success of the True Education system using typical metrics like test scores, literacy rates, and graduation rates, one may come to the conclusion the system as a whole has failed. Instead, we are choosing to analyze these schools alongside metrics determined by the success and failures of militant education projects throughout liberation movements across the Global South. In this context, the Zapatista project of True Education is a monumental victory for autonomous, Indigenous lead movements across the globe. Indigenous communities in the Zapatista territories have built more schools and educated more children than ever before all while refusing funding from the colonial government (Howard, 2007). The successes and struggles of the Zapatista schools will be crucial to our understanding of community schools and, most importantly, the object of our study, Malcolm X Academy. I want to conclude this section with words from Subcomandante Marcos. In his essay to the children of Mexico (1994), he beautifully summarizes the purpose of the militant, a crucial actor in the project for educational autonomy. He writes:

I am sure that one day, as I write to you here, you will understand that it is possible that men and women exist like us--faceless and nameless, who have left everything, even life itself, so that others (children like you and those who are not like you) can wake up every morning without words that silence and without masks to face the world. When this day comes we, the faceless and the nameless, will be able to rest, finally, under the ground... quite dead, certainly, but happy. Our profession: Hope. It turns out that yes, we are professionals. But our profession is hope. We decided one fine day to make ourselves soldiers so that one day soldiers would not be needed. That is, we picked a suicidal profession because it is a profession whose objective is to disappear: Soldiers who are soldiers so that one day nobody will need to be a soldier. This is clear, right, (pg. 2)?

This is more than clear, Subcomandante Marcos—and as you continue to wage a war within the occupied territories of Chiapas, your Afrikan and Indigenous relatives from across the globe are working to carry on your profession of hope. By now, nearly the whole world has heard of your organization and the Zapatista people have taught the world how to educate those who educate us—a true process of reciprocity.

The PAIGC's Militant Education Schools

The people struggle and accept the sacrifices demanded by the struggle, but in order to gain material advantages, to be able to live in peace, to see their lives progress, and to ensure their children's future.

—Amilcar Cabral, 1979

The militant is [one] who lives the worries of the organization and who, through the creative application of our line of thought in the detail of everyday life, becomes a model servant of the people for everyone, the builder of the new society. The task entrusted to them is carried out with the sense

that its objective is to serve the people, and in receiving [their] mission from the people, [they] consecrate everything to [the people], including [their] own life.

—Amílcar Cabral, 1979

Organizational History & the Necessity for Liberatory Education

Let us transition into our final critical case study for this chapter. In September 1956, the Afrikan Party for the Independence of Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau (PAIGC) was established. The organization was established by a group of anti-colonial militants, mostly from Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, who many acknowledged as The Cabral Generation—named after the party's emergent leader, Amílcar Cabral (Borges, 2022). The organization began to form within a group of Afrikan students in Lisbon, Portugal—the colonizing government of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde. These students created the Centro de Estudos Afrikanos (Centre of Afrikan Studies) where Afrikan students were able to practice political curiosity and their meetings became “a hub where critical political thought around national independence and liberation began to emerge,” (Borges, 2022). Amílcar Cabral would go on to lead the liberation struggle in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde after learning from these experiences while studying alongside his peers in Lisbon.

In 1961, following multiple attempts to negotiate independence with the Portuguese colonial government, the PAIGC formally launched an armed liberation campaign against their European occupiers with the goal of achieving total independence. The armed guerrilla conflict was orchestrated from within Guinea-Bissau's forest regions and lasted from 1963 to 1974. The PAIGC declared Guinea-Bissau's independence on September 24, 1973, an outright rejection of Portuguese colonial

rule and international diplomacy—although, the Portuguese government did not formally recognize this declaration until September 10, 1974 (Borges, 2022).

The total liberation and independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde was the clear goal of the PAIGC's struggle—these two colonized Afrikan nations were linked politically and culturally by colonialism's historical developments within the region. With high infant mortality rates, cyclical famines, high rates of illiteracy, a dearth of public infrastructure and services, and underdeveloped or nonexistent industrial sectors, the majority of Afrikan people in the region were living in extreme poverty and underdevelopment (Borges, 2022). Indigenous Afrikans of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde did not have access to functional systems of food production, health care, or education. For Amílcar Cabral (1969), these conditions are the precise reason the people of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde took up arms and organized themselves to wage a war for liberation. Cabral wrote that:

The people struggle and accept the sacrifices demanded by the struggle, but in order to gain material advantages, to be able to live in peace, to see their lives progress, and to ensure their children's future. National liberation, the struggle against colonialism, working for peace and progress – independence – all these are empty words without meaning for the people unless they are translated into a real improvement in standards of living. It is useless to liberate an area if the people of that area are left without the basic necessities of life, (pg. 14).

According to Cabral, the people struggle to regain the basic necessities of life—to regain their dignity. Within this struggle, Cabral and the PAIGC propose that the duty of the revolutionary party is to establish revolutionary systems capable of providing the people of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde with the material conditions necessary for survival and independence.

To help establish these systems, the PAIGC held their first party congress—the Cassacá Congress—in the southern, liberated region of the Guinean forests from February 13–17, 1964

(Borges, 2022). This congress produced three primary goals for the party's liberation struggle: first, destroy the oppressive and exploitative colonial system; second, to combat the various toxic remnants of colonialism that were left behind in people's bodies and minds; and third, to combat the high rate of ignorance and illiteracy in order to give people back their voice and enable them to participate actively in world history (Borges, 2019). While gaining political independence was the obvious objective of the PAIGCs liberation struggle, it was not the only goal of the party. The construction of a *new* decolonized society and the dismantling of colonial institutions and ideologies were steps toward the larger and more expansive goal of liberating Afrikan society and all oppressed peoples (Cabral, 1979; see also Borges 2019). This process implied knowledge of the ways in which the colonial institutions' dominance system operated and the various forms it could take, as well as an understanding of the type of society one wished to create, how it would be created, and with whom. Within this context—and defined by these clear goals—the PAIGC was the primary instrument “for the construction of freedom, peace, progress and happiness for [the] people of Guinea and Cape Verde,” (Cabral, 1979).

Following the Cassacá Congress, the development of a revolutionary education system became a key component of the liberation movement. Members of the party believed that education was essential on the fronts of armed resistance, politics, economy, and culture. Militants of the PAIGC theorized that education “would become the means through which Afrikan people could begin to reclaim and regain their voices” and would allow for oppressed Afrikan people to “emerge as politically conscious and active members of society, both within their country and in the course of world history,” (Borges, 2022). Addressing the education problem in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde started with the development of schools and investment in the education of adults and youth. For Cabral,

education was key to the process of armed liberation struggle and he believed that victory could not be achieved without a strong revolutionary education system. Cabral (1949) believed that the PAIGC would need to:

Set up schools and develop teaching in all the liberated areas. ... Improve the work in the existing schools, avoid a very high number of pupils which might prejudice the advantage to all. Found schools but bear in mind the real potential at our disposal to avoid our having to later close some schools because of a lack of resources. ... Constantly strengthen the political training of teachers... Set up courses to teach adults to read and write, whether they are combatants or elements of the population. ... Little by little set up simple libraries in the liberated areas, lend others the books we possess, help others to learn to read a book, the newspaper and to understand what is read,” (pg. 242).

Immediately upon return from the Cassacá Congress “the PAIGC developed two simultaneous educational projects, one for adults and another for youth,” (Borges, 2022). Their goal? “To destroy, through our resistance, everything that makes our people like dogs – men or women – to let us advance, grow, and rise up, like flowers on our land, all that can make our people valued human beings,” (Cabral, 1979).

The Political Struggle for Space

Of all the militant education projects we have discussed throughout this section, the PAIGC likely had the largest organization which was able to develop different organizational elements that functioned as interim government ministries. The capacity of their government and their access to land allowed for the PAIGC to develop a number of educational facilities between 1963 and 1972. They were able to develop facilities for youth, adults, and military personnel. While the Black Panther Party and the Zapatistas had similar educational structures within their territories, the PAIGCs

educational system operated on a much larger scale. Since the early years of mobilization work, adult and military personnel had been involved in educational initiatives; however, during this nine year period in the 60s and 70s, schooling and educational infrastructure for youth was established, strengthened and institutionalized (Borges, 2022).

The PAIGC may have had a greater capacity to develop facilities and infrastructure for their militant education system but this did not mean the task was any easier for the militants—they were still organizing within a terrain defined by high-intensity warfare. One of the primary issues facing the jungle schools was addressing the architectural challenges, specifically, how to shield militant educators and students from constant barrages of Portuguese ambushes and airstrikes. Young students needed to be able to walk to the schools but they also needed to be sufficiently hidden so that they wouldn't be attacked by the Portuguese soldiers. Because of the ongoing conflict, schools needed to be built close to villages and in close proximity to a water source. The conditions of the war required the schools to “have a sort of itinerant life and structure,” so the structures were rarely permanent (Borges & César, 2022). The make-shift buildings were constructed using easily transportable materials which enabled them to be reconstructed in a different location. The architecture of the schools was influenced by the conditions of the liberation struggle and the forest environment naturally shielded the school from the terror of Portuguese aircraft (Borges & César, 2022).

A few jungle schools, like the Mutna school, were constructed on top of or inside mangrove trees, making them connective and impenetrable (Borges & César, 2022). According to students who attended school under the shade of the mangrove trees, they:

...studied in the mud. When the water came up to here [gesturing to a bit above the ankle], we would stay there, until we finish the lesson. Then we would go down and walk all through the water to go home. We lived and studied in the mangrove for four years [1966–1969]; it was our refuge against the bombings,” (Borges & César, 2022 pg. 1).

Mangroves thrive in the mud with little to no oxygen. The mangroves themselves are equipped to withstand harsh conditions, safeguarding not only themselves but also other living things such as the students who are in danger from the colonial forces (Borges & César, 2022). In this context there were no tables or desks for students. They were forced to search the nearby landscape for trees and branches that could be used to build tables. The blackboard used to teach class hung from a tree within the makeshift classroom. Depending on the number of pupils, a regular pencil was divided in half or sometimes even in three (Borges & César, 2022). The educators and students were carving space for these schools within the middle of a war-zone that was a much different context from the predicament of the Black Panther Party and the Zapatistas. As we proceed, we must continue to consider how organizations who are at war with their colonial governments must navigate their particular situation depending on the intensity of war-fare they are confronted with.

The mangrove schools are a “very materialistic organism of sharing and producing knowledge” rather than a simple metaphor for a theory of resistance and militant education. The schools evolved out of an anticolonial struggle and they operate as “a place of permanent struggle; attaching roots/detaching roots, learning/unlearning,” (Borges & César, 2022). The PAIGCs political struggle for space is a material and conditional reality of the militant condition that oppressed peoples face inside of colonized territories. Militant education is a condition of living on the edge, much like the mangroves.

Organizational Capacity

The militant education system in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde was coordinated by committee's and institutes that worked to address each of the party's directives that developed out of the Cassacá Congress. They were tasked with carrying out all aspects of the militant education system "from running schools to developing curricula and materials to managing and distributing scholarships abroad," and they functioned as a sort of "Ministry of Education," (Borges, 2022). This interim ministry was also in charge of planning and directing adult seminars, developing cadres, providing professional development for militant teachers, and monitoring the explosive expansion of school life throughout the liberation movement (Borges, 2022). The PAIGC developed such a strong education system that they were "offered scholarships from countries such as Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Cuba, Hungary, Yugoslavia, the German Democratic Republic, Romania, the United States, and the Soviet Union," (Borges, 2022). This is an excellent example of how developed the militant education system was in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde. Schools and Universities from across the world were inviting the militants to come and study and develop the necessary skills for them to return home and continue to develop the liberation struggle. At its peak, the PAIGC's militant education system had 164 primary schools led by 248 teachers who were tasked with educating 14, 531 students. Within a decade, the PAIGC created 36 university cadres, 46 cadres for higher technical education, 241 cadres for professional and specialized education, 174 cadres for trade union and policy, and 410 cadres for healthcare (Borges, 2022).

The driving force behind this broad network of militant education projects was the everyday militants who carried out the process of educating the masses of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde. The term “militant” was used as a catch-all word to describe anyone who actively took part in the liberation struggle—this included teachers, nurses, doctors, armed militants, unit commanders, and civilians (Borges, 2022). Even the armed militants were expected to be actively directing or participating in the political education of party members, young people, adults, and children. According to Borges (2022):

The militant vanguard needed to be the driving force behind politically educating those strategic groups that could be forged into political instruments for the liberation struggle and for national reconstruction after independence, (pg. 22).

The militant was regarded by the party as an essential part in the vanguard of the struggle (Borges, 2022). Many of the militant educators (typically aged 15-25) came from families that were working class and many who came from farmworkers—a few acted as class traitors and came from petty bourgeois professions like primary school teachers, former government employees, and students. Each one of them committed themselves to the militant education system and gave up their regular lives to join the struggle (Borges, 2022).

Militant teachers of the PAIGC utilized resistance pedagogies to help increase the capacity of all militants, students, and workers of the party. A militant teacher's job included more than just setting up lessons, delivering predetermined curriculum, and assigning grades to students. Militant teaching aimed to overcome negative experiences, rethink and generate new knowledge, and adjust to the demands of the liberation struggle. Thus, becoming a militant teacher involved going through two processes at once: producing new curriculum and materials for schools as part of the PAIGC's larger educational work, and decolonizing the educational materials that already existed. Within this

framework, “the militant teacher was both a pedagogical resource and a mirror of the liberation struggle’s ideals,” (Borges, 2022). Militant teachers in the PAIGC community schools were placed in a position where their expertise and abilities could be used to develop learning environments that promoted students’ critical thinking. In order for this to occur, the teachers themselves had to go through a decolonization process in order to dismantle and deconstruct the colonial knowledge that the Portuguese government had forced upon them. Even though the party created training programs for educators that covered topics like pedagogy and the development of pedagogical skills, reinvesting in and reevaluating their own education and knowledge was a key component of the process of becoming a militant teacher within the party’s structure (Borges, 2022). This was a key aspect of building organizational capacity—militant teachers could not carry on with the task of revolutionizing education within Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde without first revolutionizing their own colonized minds.

Militant education was invested in growing the organizational capacity of the entire movement, which included the military. It was crucial that the party’s military adhere to the PAIGC’s instructions and be aware of the political tactics used in the liberation struggle. The party believed that the militant combatants needed to first be aware of the purpose of the liberation struggle and its intended results so that they could mount a successful military campaign. Thus, a crucial component of their training included political instruction about colonialism as well as the tenets and objectives of the liberation movement. Understanding that Guinea-Bissau had high rates of illiteracy, the party also encouraged literacy classes for militant combatants so that they could become proficient in their study of both settler-colonialism and military strategy. Teaching reading and writing skills was an important

part of the military because these skills were needed not only for participating in and understanding party materials, but also for military logistics development, attack preparation, front-to-party communication, party headquarters understanding, and military coordinates and technology (Borges, 2022).

Whether we are discussing the education of the militant teacher, the militant combatant, the militant student, or the militant farmer, a lot went into developing the capacity of individuals within the PAIGC's party structure. As we proceed in our study of militant education processes, it will be important for us to understand the different ways community schools can implement the discipline and structure of the PAIGC's militant education system that had the capacity to educate tens of thousands of its party members.

Curriculum and Pedagogy

Although they were fighting for independence and liberation on different fronts of the struggle, the militant teacher and militant combatant within the PAIGC shared a common task: “carrying out daily technical, logistical, and operational functions (such as contributing to running schools and participating in running military operations),” while also “consciously training and politically educating the future generation that would lead the country to liberation and post-independence reconstruction,” (Borges, 2022, pg. 24). Throughout the process of revolutionary struggle, the militant teacher and combatant held themselves accountable to their people by creating the educational strategies and resources—as well as the psychological environments—that would foster the values and objectives established by the party's objectives. Developing curricula and

pedagogical methods that could be useful to the liberation struggle was an essential part of the PAIGCs education system. The party worked to develop a militant education system that functioned to undermine the oppressive, hierarchical, and biased educational system and practices that were carried over from Portuguese colonial education—the new system sought to be militant, anticolonial, and a reflection of Pan-Afrikanism in all of its goals (Borges, 2022).

As they began to develop curriculum materials and school manuals, it was important for the party to incorporate Afrikan and Indigenous ways of knowing into the learning process. The new curriculum worked to emphasize the study of Afrikan people's actual social realities, the historical processes (settler-colonialism) that they were opposing at the time, and the structural and violent relationships that resulted from the colonial situation they faced (Borges, 2022). Teaching and learning methods of resistance to European colonial practices was just as significant as teaching students about Afrikan people's experiences—past, present, and future. The types of knowledge that were present in the local communities needed to be addressed and incorporated into the school curricula. These aspects were key to the foundations of the curriculum being developed by the militants.

The PAIGC aimed to instill in its students a sense of personal responsibility towards themselves, their peers, and their communities through the use of these innovative approaches to learning that centered the Afrikan perspective. They developed an education system that reaffirmed the party's principles such as: a love for the people of Guinea and Cape Verde, reverence for families and educational institutions, and a commitment to struggle for justice, work, progress, and liberty (Borges, 2022). Beyond the textbooks, Amilcar Cabral claimed that knowing how to use the soil sustainably and intentionally increase the benefits we receive from it was one of the best ways to

protect the land. Gaining knowledge and comprehension of the land was a means of protecting the populace and their entitlement to improved living conditions (Borges, 2022). This meant extending their learning outside of the classroom. Students were encouraged to talk with people in the community about everything related to the struggle, militant education, and working the land. They were told to meet with the people of their community—leaders, officials, militants, fighters, foreign friends—to reinforce the importance of political education. In this way, the PAIGC’s curriculum and pedagogical practices were designed to develop the militant student into a revolutionary community member who could advance both the theoretical aspects of liberation struggle and the practical, day to day skills one needs to develop a self-determined nation.

The curricula designed by the PAIGC militant educators included a variety of subjects like mathematics, language arts, gymnastics, science, theater, art, geography, and music. From 1966-1974, they created school manuals for each of the grades that included “one manual on general Afrikan history, one on the history of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, another on political lessons, and, finally, a translation of *A Short History of Pre-Capitalist Society*,” (Borges, 2022, pg. 29). Much like the Black Panther Party did with the writings of its political prisoners, teaching materials for the PAIGC’s militant education were also derived from the transcriptions of the writings and speeches of its leaders like Amilcar Cabral. Utilizing these manuals, the PAIGC curriculum was split into two distinct phases, from first to second grade and from third to fifth grade—each grouping focusing on a different curricular scope. The first and second grade curriculum did not only cover primary skills like reading, writing, and arithmetic—students also learned a great deal about the history of the PAIGCs movement. They studied the development of the party and its organizations; its heroes and heroines;

and also its objectives and program (Borges, 2022). Even for the younger students, teaching about the liberation struggle would require a discussion of colonialism, oppression, and exploitation (in general) as well as Portuguese colonialism (in particular).

The third through fifth grade curricula focused on the PAIGC's commitment to internationalism and their studies went much more in depth than the first and second grade curricula. For example, the PAIGC taught these students about struggles on the Afrikan continent that were directly related to their own like: the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO); the Movement for the Liberation of São Tomé and Príncipe (MLSTP); the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA); and the Conference of Nationalist Organizations of the Portuguese Colonies (CONCP). They also taught about Pan-Afrikanism and the importance of cooperation between the different national liberation movements across the Afrikan continent—especially those also colonized by the Portuguese (Borges, 2022). These national struggles and the topic of Pan-Afrikanism was taught in coordination with other international issues such as:

- Diplomatic struggles such as fighting for international recognition of the colonial occupation of their territories by the Portuguese.
- Gender struggles aiming to advance the rights of women and children in a context in which feudal and colonial patriarchal domination were interlaced (which PAIGC leaders like Carmen Pereira referred to as 'two colonialisms').
- Historical struggles elsewhere such as the socialist revolution in Russia in October 1917 and the labor movement in Afrika.
- Class struggle highlighting the connection between the PAIGC, trade unions such as the National Union of Guinean Workers, and the international working class.
- Racism, freedom, progress, national reconstruction, and Afrikan history (including the slave trade and the great empires that predated colonization), (Borges, 2022, pg. 30).

Alongside the militant students who had already completed primary school, the older students were encouraged to organize events such as “sports competitions, drawing, games competitions, singing, and handwork,” (Borges, 2022). The curricula, learning processes, and pedagogical practices implemented by the PAIGC were designed to be integrated alongside the Indigenous and Afrikan geography, social life, and organization of the territories where the liberation struggle was taking place. This is an important aspect of implementing liberation pedagogies.

Political education for adults within the PAIGC was divided into five different sections and covered the same subjects as youth education but applied a much deeper analysis. The first section covered geography and history of the region and provided a robust introduction into the Portuguese colonial government's exploitation of Afrikan people. The opening section sought to address two key points of the struggle for the PAIGC: first, that fighting people did not always lead to the end of the colonial system; and second, “the Portuguese people were also victims of the oppression perpetrated by an authoritarian regime,” (Borges, 2022). The second section of the adult curriculum covered the history and philosophy of the PAIGC and it largely followed the same guidelines as the curricula for school-age students. Here, key socialist and Leninist ideas were discussed in greater detail, including criticism, self-criticism, democratic centralism, and revolutionary democracy. This helped to clarify the political influences the party received from other ideologies and how it aimed to modify them for the Guinean context (Borges, 2022). International issues was the focus of the third curriculum section for adults. Its goal was to contextualize the PAIGC's liberation struggle within the larger global context of ongoing struggles and drawing parallels between them was the aim here. The fourth section taught students about the sociological and ethnographic characteristics of Guinea-Bissau where they

discussed issues including economics, planning techniques, organizational work, development, religion, ethnicity and race. Lastly, the fifth section of the program was centered on the militant armed forces' civic behavior and training. This included the expectation of combatants acting in a disciplined and comradely manner toward civilians as well as toward one another—especially gender equality (Borges, 2022).

Although this section cannot provide the entire history of the PAIGC and its importance to the global struggle against Imperialism and European settler colonialism, the PAIGC's militant education system offers us a unique demonstration of what a liberatory education curriculum can look like within an occupied war-zone. Its militants and the systems they developed may help us to understand how a militant education system can exist in complete contradiction to the education systems forced upon Indigenous and Afrikan people by their settler-colonial governments.

School Structure & Daily Practice

One of the core missions of the PAIGCs school structure and daily practice was to “persuade parents of the absolute necessity for their sons and daughters to attend school,” (Cabral, 1979). There were typically three reasons parents resisted sending their children to attend primary school: (1) parents were concerned about the school schedule in relation to agricultural labor and domestic tasks; (2) they held various religious beliefs; or (3) they were upholding colonial gender norms in regards to domestic and cultural obligations for young women (Borges, 2019).

In order to address the first issue, the Party scheduled the school days in accordance with the seasons, the community's agricultural activities, and the daily life of the people. According to school

manuals from 1965, the school year could begin in October, but the lessons couldn't begin until November, following the wet season. As a result, schools operated from November 1st through June 30th—from December 15 to January 31, there was a break between the two semesters of instruction. In fact, the school's schedule was so in tune with the community life that one could gain a clear understanding of Guinea Bissau's agricultural calendar's because of its compatibility with the PAIGC's school schedules. For many of the agricultural blocs in the region, the planting occurred in July and August—coinciding with the school holiday—and the harvest took place in December and January—again coinciding with the school's holiday. In this way, the PAIGC school schedule assured parents that their child's learning would not interfere with the agricultural and domestic realities of the community—this was essential because the school's structure acknowledged the need to produce goods to feed the people (Borges, 2019).

On the topic of religion, families typically sent their children to Koranic school or colonial Catholic schools. Knowing this, party members did not align solely with Islam or Catholicism—instead, they constantly reminded the people that they did not dismiss the Quran or the Bible. They acknowledged and accepted each individual's religion as a personal choice. They said, “you can continue practicing [your religion], but please let the kids go to school,” (Borges, 2019). For example, when militant schools held ceremonies, they worked to incorporate the religious practices of their students whether they were Muslim or Catholic. It was very important for the militant schools not to be dismissive of the religious commitments of each individual family (Borges, 2019). This approach allowed for the PAIGC's ideology to be accepted by the people of the community and it was clear that the party had earned the respect of the people.

To address the concern of gender roles, the PAIGC had to first understand that the attempt to incorporate young women into the education system would not be well received by the community. Although Afrikan and Arab countries were some of the first societies in the world to educate women, European settler-colonialism had worked to enforce its own gender norms that—as we discussed in Chapter Two—were intentionally repressive toward colonized women. Party members reminded families frequently that the principles of the militant education system believed that schools were for both young boys and young girls. One way the PAIGC combated the issue of gender was through practice—instead of forcing families to understand the importance of educating women, they demonstrated its importance. After sending a delegation of women to study and train to be nurses in the Soviet Union, many families within the community witnessed the material advantages of education and young women from across the region began attending school more (Borges, 2019). Beyond this, the party also employed strategies such as single-gender classrooms. To do this, the militant schools would create a specific schedule to accommodate girls only classes. This practice was especially effective in allowing young-women to attend the schools. Across each of these examples it becomes clear that the PAIGC was more than willing to negotiate with the community to adapt and transform the school's structure and schedule.

Now that we've addressed the issue of developing a structure that would allow more and more students to attend militant schools, let's discuss the daily routines of these schools. Between 1966 and 1971 the growth of the PAIGC militant schools was a testament to the importance of education to the liberation struggle. As the schools grew, the militant teachers knew they needed to increase the capacity of the schools so that they could meet the needs of each of its students. To do this, the

militant teachers organized a teachers meeting (or conference) where they spent the summer months developing routines, procedures, and regulations that were eventually adopted by all of the schools across the region. All decisions made at this meeting were informed by the lived experiences of the teachers in the community and they centered the needs of their local communities and their students (Borges, 2019). These processes were heavily influenced by the Cuban regulation on education—this is important to note because the party was demonstrating its commitment to internationalism by adopting practices employed by liberation struggles that successfully eliminated illiteracy amongst its people. The regulations developed during the PAIGCs teacher conference addressed themes such as school design, hygiene procedures, the school garden, the daily organization of the school, and the students routines within the school (Borges, 2019).

In the militant boarding schools, a typical school day began at 6:30 am and the students' schedule started with gymnastics, breakfast, and morning classes. From 1 pm to 3 pm students would take a lunch break. Following this rest period, students attended afternoon classes, ate dinner, and participated in various cultural activities. The school day typically ended at 9 pm. Despite this general schedule, the school routines varied from school to school and “class schedules were adapted according to their local situations (Borges, 2019). For example, in the liberated areas, the school day started a bit later and only lasted until 4:30 pm because of the ongoing war with the Portuguese colonial army. In these schools, the routines encouraged students to learn the basics of handling firearms and hunting—students in the liberated areas were often confronted with the risk of military ambush and bomb shelters existed within each of their schools. Outside of the liberated areas, militant students lived in a much safer environment that was for “a more comfortable life and stable school routine” which

allowed students to “concentrate more on their studies,” (Borges, 2019). With these examples we can see how the structure and daily practice of each school was determined by the local context and adjusted to meet the needs of the community (both families and students). Considering this, the PAIGCs militant education system offers us concrete examples related to the tensions and difficulties communities faced within the context of liberation struggle. The lessons learned in this section will be essential for us as we continue to deepen our understanding around the development and practice of militant education projects.

The liberation struggle and militant education system of the PAIGC aimed to instill a militant, anti-colonial, and decolonial consciousness in the bodies and minds of the people of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde. Their struggle was an ongoing process of reflection, organization, and action amongst the people. Although the PAIGC's political education program was only in place for a short time (1963–1974) and in a limited geographic area, it still played a significant role in the greater liberation effort (Borges, 2022). For the PAIGC, militant education and the revolutionary process worked hand in hand to generate political consciousness amongst the people—and together—they enabled the people of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde to wage a successful national liberation struggle. The party's ideology was preserved and fortified through its militant education system and worked to provide the people a means of which they could establish the framework needed to envision and shape the future of these Afrikan nations.

Examining the educational strategies used by the PAIGC during its liberation struggle compels us to move beyond theory and interact with the actual historical processes that took place. Sonia Vas Borges' critical analysis of the PAIGC offers us an excellent blueprint to how we should proceed in our

current study of Malcolm X Academy in Sacramento. Her work urges us to unpack the day to day historical processes that make militant education systems possible. By examining the tangible aspects of how the principles of the struggle were implemented in day-to-day life—and passed on to subsequent generations—we can more accurately honor the revolutionary ideals that drove the liberation struggles which are the object of our study. A key source of inspiration for this study is the PAIGC's groundbreaking approach to political education, their experience constructing schools in the forest, the emancipatory curricula they developed that were tailored to their particular context, and the international networks they established to aid in this educational endeavor (Borges, 2022). As we envision and carry out our current struggles against settler-colonial domination, the PAIGC offers us a liberatory process from which we must study, learn, adapt, and grow.

Conclusion

In each one of the militant education projects we studied throughout this section, the Indigenous and Afrikan people of the land are engaged in a liberation struggle—they are at war with their colonizers, plain and simple. The organizations we have discussed throughout this chapter waged a just liberation struggle against an oppressive, occupying government. Each militant education project we studied was dictated by the social, economic, and cultural context that they emerged from. Looking at the social conditions of today, one could come to the conclusion that the US government is still engaged in a prolonged war against the colonized Afrikan and Indigenous people of Turtle Island. As the Director of Neighbor Program notes in his essay titled, *Fascism is as amerikkkan as Cherry Pie*,

“the U.S. government and all its subsidiaries, agents and officials, globally and locally, are willfully engaged in a war against the people,” (McGowan, 2023).

When you study history and you analyze it alongside the conditions our people face today, this is no secret. The occupation government of the United States has an entire federal program (the 1033 Program) which legally mandates that the Department of Defense provides local law enforcement agencies with access to a variety of military equipment, including supplies and material. This program has transferred surplus weapons of mass destruction, gear, and vehicles to civilian law enforcement organizations from the U.S. Armed Forces for nearly three decades (MacNevin, 2016). Why would local law enforcement agencies (from large metropolitan districts to small rural towns) need billions of dollars in surplus military equipment if they are not at war? Who are they at war with? For McGowan (2023), “the U.S. empire is absolutely at war with the people, and they know it and they are making every decision around that fact.” McGowan makes it clear for us that the U.S. government continues to operate as a “illegitimate European settler-kkkolony” that is “responsible for the genocide of Afrikan and Indigenous peoples worldwide,” (McGowan, 2023)—and our studies up until this point verify this claim.

If we can understand this, we can understand why the U.S. empire is still engaged in a war against the colonized people of Turtle Island. Are all fronts of war the same? Absolutely not. There are stages of war. There are tactics of war which are considered to be “high intensity” and “low intensity.” High Intensity warfare is much more direct and can be represented in the targeted bombing campaigns we saw in Chiapas and Guinea-Bissau. Low intensity warfare is much more disguised and can be seen in the targeted attacks on leaders of the Black Panther Party which worked to completely destabilize

the movement; we can see it in the terror campaign and encampment sweeps our unhoused neighbors face daily; we can see it in the physical and structural attacks on people who voice support for a Free Palestine; we can see it everywhere if we study our contemporary terrain closely. The colonized people of Turtle Island face various forms of warfare in their everyday lives. Much like our relatives who developed the successful militant education projects discussed throughout this chapter, we too are at war. These are the social conditions our children are forced to pursue an education in. In the next chapter, we will discuss the development of Neighbor Program, Malcolm X Academy, and the many different ways they intentionally place themselves within the heart of today's liberation struggle on Turtle Island.

Chapter Five—Neighbor Program and the Origins of Malcolm X Academy

We must unite our efforts and spread our program of self improvement through education to every Afro-American community in America. We must establish schools all over the country, schools of our own to train our own children.

— *Malcolm X* (El Hajj Malik El Shabazz)

As an organization, Neighbor Program is a direct response to the material, economic, and social conditions that Afrikans face within the city of so-called Sacramento—a city that sits on occupied Nisenan Land. According to NP’s founder, Jordan, the demolition of the Black Panther Party office in Oak Park directly contributed to the current state of intercommunal violence in so-called Sacramento. The BPPs collapse was caused by police terror and the party’s absence has “aided the continued divide of neighborhoods and sectional tribalism throughout the city,” (McGowan, 2023). If we study the Hip-hop music coming out of the city today, we can see clear evidence of the tribalism that Jordan describes—notice how he describes the contradictions between Afrikans as *tribal* rather than gang related. We can see how Jordan is very particular with his language when he communicates with the people—every word is rooted in the politics of Pan-Afrikanism. According to McGowan, so-called Sacramento has become known nationally for *murder music* and tribalism within the city is fueled by local hip-hop stars like Mozzy. These feuds between neighborhoods across the city have continued to claim the lives of hundreds of Afrikans every year (McGowan, 2023). Oak Park is a historically Afrikan neighborhood and today it stands as one of the primary neighborhoods impacted by the terroristic conditions produced by settler-colonialism in so-called Sacramento. The people of Oak Park are subject to oppressive conditions that produce “high unemployment, gentrification, food

apartheid, and colonial education models that feed into inter-communal violence and result in crimes of survival,” (McGowan, 2023).

As a way of contextualizing their political platform and organizational goals for the people of so-called Sacramento, Neighbor Program has adopted a version of the 10 Point Program developed by the Black Panther Party. NP adjusted the language to fit what they believe better addresses the political context Afrikan and Indigenous communities face today, as compared to 1967 when it was written by the BPP. The Neighbor Programs 10 Point Program states that:

(1) We will have freedom. We will have the power to determine the destiny of our Afrikan and Indigenous communities. (2) We will have full employment for our people. (3) We will end the robbery by capitalists of our Afrikan and Indigenous communities domestically and globally. (4) We will have decent housing fit for the shelter of human beings. (5) We will have an education that exposes the true nature of this decadent American Society. (6) We will fight for the abolition of the Military Industrial Complex. (7) We will end police brutality and the state-sanctioned murder of our people. (8) We will have freedom for all Afrikan and Indigenous people held in federal, county, and city prisons and jails. (9) We will accomplish abolition. We believe that the carceral system is inherently racist and we believe there are better alternatives to address harm. (10) We will have land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice, and peace. Our major political objective is to see radical love found for all human beings and the land. We will continue this struggle until all land across the globe is given back to its Indigenous peoples (Neighbor Newspaper, 2021).

This evolution of the BPPs 10 point program is a clear extension of the goals developed by many of the different liberation movements we discussed throughout Chapter Four. Members of NP are very precise with their language and attempt to portray their political vision for the people in a way that is comprehensive and easily digestible. NP understands that they need to find the correct formula for mobilizing their people instead of simply using terms that the people in their communities can not yet understand and define for others. Using big words developed by academics and revolutionary

intellectuals who've studied the terrain of settler-colonialism for decades would not be enough to convince their people of the fight against European domination. The members of NP understand the need to use direct language, analogies, and comparisons that all people can understand. Neighbor Program's adaptation of the BPPs 10 Point Program attempts to point out the clear contradictions of the capitalist, imperialist empire that we know as the United States.

NP's approach to developing community programs and their intentional repurposing of the Black Panther Party's 10-point-program reveals their commitment to continuing the legacy of the Party on Turtle Island. Huey P. Newton (1970), in a speech later titled, "Revolutionary Intercommunalism," discusses the importance of the 10-point-program and the BPP's survival programs:

A Ten-point Program is not revolutionary in itself, nor is it reformist. It is a survival program. We, the people, are threatened with genocide because racism and fascism are rampant in this country and throughout the world. And the ruling circle in North America is responsible. We intend to change all of that, and in order to change it, there must be a total transformation. But until we can achieve that total transformation, we must exist. In order to exist, we must survive; therefore, we need a survival kit: the Ten Point Program. It is necessary for our children to grow up healthy with functional and creative minds. They cannot do this if they do not get the correct nutrition. That is why we have a breakfast program for children. We also have community health programs. We have a busing program. We call it "The Bus for Relatives and Parents of Prisoners," We realize that the fascist regime that operates the prisons throughout America would like to do their treachery in the dark. But if we get the relatives, parents, and friends to the prisons they can expose the treachery of the fascists. This too is a survival program. We must not regard our survival programs as an answer to the whole problem of oppression. We don't even claim it to be a revolutionary program. Revolutions are made of sterner stuff. We do say that if the people are not here revolution cannot be achieved, for the people and only the people make revolutions (Newton, 1970).

Aligning themselves within this ideology, the Neighbor Program team understands that their community programs are not the end-all be-all revolutionary solution to the problems their community members face—rather, they see them as a functional intervention into the state-sanctioned, premature deaths of Afrikans throughout the city.

The Foundational Programs for Decolonization

The NP organization was formed in July of 2020 with its inaugural Breakfast Program that sought to provide much needed food, water, and survival resources for the unhoused people seeking shelter on Nissenan land. To this day, the program serves approximately 600-750 unhoused neighbors every month. During each distribution, the NP team distributes full meals that include snacks, fruit, a water bottle, a mask and a Neighbor Newspaper pamphlet. The pamphlets “have information on the weather for the next two weeks, local showers, [community] fridges, as well as vaccination sites. In addition, there's a Know Your Rights Guide, which is super important for our neighbors when they are approached by the cops,” (Neighbor Newspaper, 2021). In addition to meal packs, the NP team also distributes “feminine hygiene, dog food, cat food as well as neighbor needs,” which are “specific requests that neighbors asked for such as tents, socks, butane, batteries, clothes, deodorant, whatever it is that they need,” (Neighbor Newspaper, 2021). The inclusion of neighbor needs is a clear example of the close relationships the distribution team has built with their unhoused neighbors.

Before we continue to learn more about the first community program developed by NP, let us first discuss—what is a decolonization program? According to McGown (2021),

We believe it is our duty to love and serve our neighbor. We do that through providing the people with community survival programs or what we call programs of decolonization. We believe that people learn through observation and participation. So we believe that as people see the work, and people start to do the work, they'll realize that they can set themselves free because we are our own liberators. So ultimately, that's what our programs seek to do—they seek to build self-determination for colonized people here on Turtle Island. A decolonization program is simply a continuation of our ancestors' resistance. The Panthers called them community survival programs. Revolutionary and former Panther Jalil Muntaqim calls them programs for decolonization. These programs allow us to understand who we are, and help us realize that Afrikan and Indigenous people have lived communally here on Turtle Island. Before imperialism ever touched our shores, Afrikan and Indigenous people lived in communal societies—we worried about each other, we cared for each other, we loved each other, we died for our neighbors. Hence our name.

Programs for decolonization like the Breakfast Program are key to the framework of Neighbor Program as an organization. McGowan continues:

Decolonization programs are the evolution of the [Black] Panthers survival programs. These are programs that we've seen adopted by the state and federal government. One example of this is WIC (Women, Infants, and Children), which is focused on health for women and children. Another example is the free and reduced lunch program that has expanded during the COVID-19 pandemic to provide much needed meals for students throughout the year. Programs like these were all Panther programs originally. That work is what has inspired Neighbor Program. Just like Chairman Fred Hampton said, 'if you feed people for free, and you let them on the bus for free, and you let them see the doctor for free, pretty soon, they will look up and be free and not know it.' So that's kind of the goal with our programs. We show the community through practice—through actual work—that we can provide these resources to people (Bilal, 2022).

For the NP Team, decolonization programs are the tangible answer the many questions folks in the community would have about the organization. As a team, Neighbor Program understands that people in the community are going to “want to know who, what, where, when, why, and how” when it comes to what the organization stands for (Bilal, 2022).

One of the core NP members, mel charles, reflects on the idea of decolonization programs being an opportunity to educate people:

When I think about words like liberation and decolonization, I don't only think about what we are building—I also think about how I will answer folks who have questions about what we are doing. For example, if we don't have capitalism, then what do we have? If we don't have police quote unquote, 'keeping us safe,' then what do we have? And so that's what these programs are. That's what decolonization programs are, right? It's not charity. It's not just feeding people who are hungry, right? That's part of it, of course. In practice, that is what happens, but what they're trying to show people is that we don't need an economic system that requires us to pay ridiculous amounts of money for food that grows out of the ground that we ourselves worked to grow. Instead, we can have a system that looks like this, right? And so when we destroy this current food system, this will be our new food system. Right? And this is how it works. Right? And speaking to what Jordan was saying, it's a practice. And that's one thing that feels really important to me is to make this work appealing and to make folks feel interested in it, right? I am an educator. That's my passion. So, that's where I'm gonna go, but I believe that everyone has a space within this work to help us build something. Everyone has a skill to share. Everyone has something to offer. For me, decolonization programs are world building. What kind of world are we trying to build? (Bilal, 2022).

Decolonization Programs are an offering to the community that a new world is possible. They are tangible solutions to the questions that many colonized people find themselves asking each other. They bring hope to people who know nothing beyond a scarcity mindset that frequently reminds us that our paychecks are not enough to cover rent, food, medical care, childcare, car notes, etc. The list feels almost never-ending. Settler-colonial societies have gaslit us into thinking that we lack resources when in reality, we lack control over the resources in our community. Decolonization programs are an attempt to reveal these lies to the community. With principled organizing, the NP team believes we can take control of the resources our community needs to flourish.

Now, let us continue our discussion about the foundational decolonization program developed by Neighbor Program. According to one of NP's volunteers, the Breakfast Program serves "eight neighborhoods," (Neighbor Program, 2021). They prefer to use the term neighborhood so that people in the community understand that unhoused people build shelters and functional encampments that are a site of community and survival. The NP team believes that identifying the encampments as neighborhoods may help people to see how necessary a stable community is for unhoused people as they struggle to find collective safety in the face of daily terror. According to the National Health Care for the Homeless Council (2022), local city agencies, in coordination with terroristic police forces, carry out daily state sanctioned sweeps of unhoused neighborhoods. These sweeps cause a number of life-threatening problems for unhoused communities and they often:

Destroy items needed for survival; cause trauma and worsen mental health conditions; destroy life-saving medications and medical equipment; sever connections to care; undermine trust in service providers; increase arrests and assaults of resident; contribute to drug overdoses; push residents into more dangerous, isolated environments; cause widespread fear; increase hostile interactions with the police; disproportionately impact BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) groups and people with disabilities; violate rights; contribute to stigma; destroy vital records; prevent gainful employment; create criminal records; jeopardize housing opportunities; sever connections with community; damage hope; cost millions of dollars; divert money from solutions such as housing; increase incarceration cost; and they undermine population health goals (National Health Care for the Homeless Council, 2022).

Neighbor Programs' approach clearly aligns with the national push by community organizations to end the violent sweeps of unhoused neighborhoods that the NP team identifies as *terroristic*. In my time working alongside the Breakfast Program, I have heard members call these sweeps a number of different names but I feel the most accurate term is a *death march*. Forcing any group of people to

migrate from a safe location while simultaneously destroying all their belongings only serves to increase their risk of premature death. We have seen forced marches used as a tool of genocide throughout the long history of European settler-colonial terror from Turtle Island to Palestine and beyond. The forced migration of unhoused communities across cities in the so-called United States is a terroristic act of displacement—it is a death march.

In the beginning, the NP Breakfast Program team went out into the unhoused neighborhoods to build relationships, make connections, and make sure their unhoused neighbors knew that there were people in the community that care deeply about their survival. According to one of the volunteers:

Every time we serve our neighbors, we really take the time to build trust and relationships with them. We ask their names, how they're doing, if they need anything, if they're feeling alright. We serve with an undying love and establish a community bond with them, (Neighbor Newspaper, 2021).

Unlike many of the non-profit organizations throughout so-called Sacramento, the NP team makes it a point to go out into the unhoused neighborhoods. If you spend a few weekends in the unhoused encampments on Nisenan land, you will quickly realize that most of the city agencies and non-profit organizations set up tents or tables a clear distance from the encampments. This set-up forces unhoused neighbors to leave their shelters to line-up and receive resources from the various organizations. I've seen this myself throughout the dozens of times I've helped coordinate NPs Breakfast Program. These lines usually end up being filled with almost two hundred unhoused people. NP critiques this practice because unhoused communities already face so much terror and violence from police, city workers, shelter staff, non-profit staff, and case workers. They often do not have

anything besides the clothes on their back, the resources in their bags, and whatever else they're able to carry with them. Leaving all their belongings and their shelters unmonitored for an extended period of time could be risky. This reality is a result of the Sacramento Police Department that spends millions of dollars every year carrying out violent death marches—or what they call encampment sweeps—where they throw away unhoused people's belongings including their medicine, government IDs, and other essential items that they need to access resources and stability throughout the city (Neighbor Newspaper, 2021; see also Bilal, 2022).

Knowing this, the NP team does not want to exacerbate the violent conditions unhoused people face. The team is intentional about not forcing people to leave their belongings behind just to get access to some food and water. I have seen local police run coordinated sweeps during our distribution times in an attempt to destroy and dispose of people's belongings when they leave to get resources. This is a very important part of NP's political beliefs and practices. The team sees all people as their neighbors and they are intentional about meeting the people where they are at. This politic is evident throughout all of their programs and I believe it is a huge reason why the community has a deep trust for the members of the organization. Every time I've joined or coordinated a NP Breakfast Program distribution, the team has been welcomed into the encampments with love and we often spend our time just chatting or even sharing a meal with our unhoused neighbors. I came to know many of my neighbors by name and I often stopped by to say hello on non-distribution days. The NP team knows that this program is not a complete solution to the problems unhoused people face, rather, it is an attempt to build relationships, reduce harm, and provide people with basic resources

that may help them survive another day in the violent conditions that often produce premature deaths for Afrikan and Indigenous people.

Every time I speak with a member of the NP team I am reminded about their deep love for the people they choose to be in community with. There is a reason NP's first decolonization program was a direct extension of the programs developed by the BPP. We can see how their programs are rooted in a deep love for arguably the most forgotten people in our society. In a country that continuously dismisses and erases the existence of unhoused people, NP's team sought to walk alongside the people—to hold their hands—to look them in the eyes and say *we love you* and *we care for you*.

By September of 2020, Neighbor Program launched two political education programs for the community: Neighbor Newspaper and Neighbor School. Below you can find a brief history and overview of Neighbor Newspaper as described by one of NPs core members:

We first published Neighbor Newspaper back in September 2020. It was initially called Sac Voices. And at the time when we had started this, our goal was to educate the Sacramento community, providing political education for the community all while uplifting their own voices, and their own art, poems, writings and all of that. But as we grew as a program, and as abolitionists, we wanted to be very intentional about the vocabulary that we use. So we were Sac Neighbor Program and went to Neighbor Program. And we were Sac Voices, and went to Neighbor Newspaper, right. As abolitionists, we don't believe we are in the City of Sacramento, we believe we are on tribal Nisenan Land. Neighbor newspaper is going on, I believe it's 14th volume, not including the two special editions that we have done. So really, it's the 16th. Neighbor newspaper, and everything that Neighbor Program does is following the footsteps of revolutionaries, specifically the Black Panther Party. The newspaper is heavily, heavily, heavily influenced by the Black Panther newspaper—from its cover, to its content, to its mission and its goals. The goal of the newspaper is to provide digestible and understandable political analysis of present day society and present day reality for the people all while really combating the misinformation and everyday propaganda that's fed to the people by the colonizers. The newspaper is made up of typically three to four essays written by revolutionaries across the nation, folks in SoCal, and the Bay, in Miami, and all around the East Coast. We also have a youth section where youth

submit essays themselves. There's also a poetry section. At the end of the newspaper is the bulletin board. On the bulletin board, we provide updates of our own comrades and our programs. For our comrades in SoCal—The People's Coalition—we provide the newest episode for their Comrades Classroom Podcast, as well as People's Programs and their Hella Black podcast. We also include Agape Movement and their amazing political education series. So that's what we uploaded on the bulletin board and then we close out the newspaper with a playlist. Every volume has its own playlist, and encourages readers to run through the playlist as they read essays and poetry in the newspaper. Neighbor Newspaper publishes every three weeks on Mondays, and we've been publishing every three weeks in September 2020. The newspaper as a political education program has grown outside of just the physical newspaper. We started printing know your rights guides, which really breaks down how community members can interact or refuse to interact when being approached and harassed by the pigs. In addition, we started making propaganda pamphlets for the Free Breakfast Program (Neighbor Newspaper, 2020).

Today, Neighbor Newspaper has published over 40 volumes of its now monthly newspaper and it is constructed in the same manner as described by one of Neighbor Program's original core members. The paper has successfully provided people in the city and across Turtle Island with access to decolonial and revolutionary analysis, news, and essays for almost four years now. Based on my research and interviews with over a dozen community organizations nationwide, NP is one of the few Afrikan organizations on Turtle Island with a print and online monthly newspaper. The NP team has followed through on their promise to provide an alternative news source that serves to educate and inform the people about topics relevant to Afrikan and Indigenous people in so-called Sacramento and across all of Turtle Island.

Neighbor Newspapers sister program, Neighbor School, was the organization's first iteration of a community-based political education program that extended beyond the newspaper and attempted to provide hands-on learning experiences for youth and members of the community. The purpose of Neighbor School was to help people in the community understand “who they are. What

land are they indigenous to? What are we collectively fighting for? Who are their heroes? What does nationhood look like? What does it mean to be sovereign?,” (Neighbor Newspaper, 2021). According to McGowan:

Neighbor School started last summer (2020) shortly after everyone started to protest after the lynching of George Floyd. Neighbor Program came out and said, who's doing political education for the people? That's what we need right now. We couldn't really get anything together because of the pandemic so everything was held on Zoom at first. We knew that there had to be a way to capture all of this political energy of the people mobilizing in the streets. We decided to develop this political education program and we came up with the idea of Neighbor School. From there, we did a Neighbor School winter session right between the election and the inauguration. That was our first session officially as Neighbor School. Now (2021) we are in Neighbor School summer session. We're looking to continue to build them out. We started on the Zoom but we want to build it to more neighborhoods eventually (Neighbor Newspaper, 2021).

We can see how the NP team did not just force this program upon the people of the community. As they witnessed thousands of people show up to protests week in and week out, they worked to analyze and understand the needs of the community at that moment. Utilizing the theory and practice they have honed through conversations with Black Liberation Movement elders, the NP team knew that when the people are *mobilized*, it is the job of the community organization to *organize* them. Kwame Ture (2017) teaches us that there is a distinct difference between *mobilization* and *organization*. Ture argues that political education is key to help people become *organized* in the struggle for liberation. *Mobilization* is temporary. *Organization* is an attempt to sustain, to be permanent, and to be eternal. Kwame Ture teaches us that the unconscious people in our community can be easily mobilized around single-issue items but he believes that it is much harder to bring them towards organization.

This is where political education comes into play. How can we transform mobilization into organization? This was the task Neighbor School sought out to achieve.

At Neighbor School, community-members are invited to study key revolutionary movements, key concepts, key organizations, key political figures, and current events. Neighbor School is grounded in the tradition of the Black Panthers and their key philosophy comes from “the idea that, without an understanding of our true history, and where we have been, it’s hard to understand where we’re going and how we want to struggle for it,” (Neighbor Newspaper, 2021). In this way, Neighbor School offers the people of their community a chance to come and learn about the ideas and practices of revolutionary theorists and attempts to make key concepts accessible for people with various learning abilities. For the NP team, this is an attempt to help the people connect these key concepts to the challenges they face on a daily basis. Neighbor School is “bringing the community together and giving them words to describe things that they are already seeing in their daily lives,” (Neighbor Newspaper, 2021).

This framework of community education is linked directly to Amilcar Cabral and the PAIGC’s approach to political education that we discussed in Chapter Four. The PAIGC believed that “the meaning and impact of colonialism needed to resonate with people on the most personal level in their daily lives,” (Borges, 2022). These open community education sessions were essential to the PAIGC’s efforts and were crucial to the early stages of political education because they aimed to increase the people’s awareness of what was happening to them on their land. Just as the PAIGC taught them, the NP team understood that Neighbor School was an important starting point for the eventual development of a larger militant education project: Malcolm X Academy. Today, Neighbor

School is now known as Community Learning and the NP team hosts a Community Learning session every Monday evening both in-person and via Instagram live for community members who cannot attend in-person. Almost 4 years later, NP has continued to offer free political education for all members of the community, no questions asked.

Neighbor Program's fourth decolonization program was developed in October of 2020. The Albert Woodfox Political Prisoner of War Program (PPOWP) is inspired by the late Alfred Woodfox—former Black Panther Member and Political Prisoner of the group known as the Angola Three. The NP team read Woodfox's book *Solitary: Unbroken by Four Decades in Solitary Confinement, My Story of Transformation and Hope* (2019) during one of their monthly book studies and it was “Woodfox's first hand account of feeling forgotten by those fighting for liberation that birthed our PPOW program,” (Neighbor Newspaper, 2022). In an interview with Neighbor Newspaper (2021), McGowan outlines the purpose of the NP Albert Woodfox Political Prisoner of War Program:

The Albert Woodfox PPOWP started with us just compiling a list of incarcerated Black Panthers, captured revolutionaries, and writing to them. Our letters were written to provide a background of who we are and they were an attempt to just say, *hey, we love you, we support you, we will do whatever we can do to help.* We were just trying to build that relationship. In attempting to contact and maintain relationships with our Political Prisoners of War we have had letters disappeared, we've had books rejected, and we've had other attempts to sabotage our only way of contacting our elders. We've also been able to build relationships with certain folks, specifically, elder Veronica Bowers, Ruchelle McGee, and Dr. Mutulu Shakur. These are all folks who have written back to us. Ruchelle McGee even sent us a referral to his mentee. In most cases these folks have been captured for thirty, forty, or even fifty years. These are elders who need to get home to see their families, to find peace. This social and political system is designed against us. They've captured us, they've colonized us, and they set up these social conditions that criminalize our survival, they criminalize our

very existence. We know that if we want complete liberation, then we need the liberation of our Political Prisoners of War (Neighbor Newspaper, 2021).

The NP Political Prisoner of War Program is an attempt to honor the militant elders who have sacrificed their freedom and years of their lives for the people. Acknowledging them, showing them love, and offering them our undying support is the absolute least that we can do for elders who have been locked in captivity for decades. Ultimately, the goal of this program is to build relationships with elders of the movement so that they know there are folks who love them, support them, and are actively fighting for them on the outside.

Neighbor Program is not the only organization that serves to uplift political prisoners. The program is inspired by organizations like the Jericho Movement and NP has partnered with organizations that have worked tirelessly to free Political Prisoners like Mumia Abu-Jamal, Russell Maroon Shoatz, and Jamil Al-Amin. These elders have shown the NP team what it takes, they have paid their dues, and they have sacrificed themselves for the people. Knowing this, the core members of the organization feel it's only right for them to support, uplift, and empower them to continue the struggle for freedom. The Albert Woodfox PPOWP is a reminder that, "we must love to understand and love to be understood. We must love to help others and love those who help us. We must love to live in love and to be loved in return. We must love the freedom of others as we struggle to be free ourselves," (Neighbor Newspaper, 2021). Later in this chapter, we will discuss how the Albert Woodfox PPOWP became a core piece of the Malcolm X Academy curriculum. Much like the Black Panthers Oakland Community School, students of MXA are encouraged to build and maintain relationships with Political Prisoners and elders of the Black Liberation Movement.

In early 2021, Neighbor Program continued to grow and develop their community programs for decolonization. Since the organization was formed in 2020, its members have been hard at work building connections and forming relationships with elders and other organizations across the community. NP's trust-building work helped them secure access to an approximately half-acre plot of land at a farm who was interested in collaborating with the Neighbor Program team. This plot of land would eventually become the Assata Shakur Freedom Farm—NP's 5th program for decolonization. According to one of the lead organizers for the original Assata Shakur Freedom Farm:

The Freedom Farm is an intergenerational learning space dedicated to strengthening our knowledge of food growing practices, building and nurturing community self determination, and building sustainability for our Grocery and Breakfast Program. Our Breakfast Program distributes 700 meals a month at this point and we want our Free Grocery Program to try and serve 100 Afrikan and Indigenous households a month. We distribute our crops for free as a means to end food apartheid. Our intentions with the space are to hold workshops, create home gardens for families, and distribute our crops for free through our grocery program. Our farm is located on Nisenan land and we have 10 in-ground garden beds of 50 feet by 3 feet. Today is a landmark day. It is our first harvest and our first Grocery Program distribution. We believe that having access to nourishing food is a basic human right. We channel our undying love for the people into growing crops for them, (Neighbor Newspaper, 2021).

Political Education is infused into each one of the programs offered by the NP team. The Farm is not just about providing food for the people—it is a space that provides people with food, learning opportunities, and a tangible experience caring for the land with dignity. Since it first opened, the Assata Shakur Freedom Farm has taken many different forms. At the end of 2021, Neighbor Program actually lost access to the original space that housed the farm and it would not find a new home until the opening of the Shakur Center in 2022. Later in this section I will discuss the redevelopment of the

Assata Shakur Freedom Farm. As we discuss the growth of Malcolm X Academy, I will detail my work with the Assata Shakur Freedom Farm and its role as a daily practice in the MXA curriculum.

Before then, let's discuss the last decolonization program developed by NP before they opened the Shakur Center. In May of 2021, Neighbor Program hosted their first Free Food Program (which was serviced by harvests from the Assata Shakur Freedom Farm as mentioned above). For the NP team, "providing healthy food for families" was a "demonstration of [their] commitment to working to end food apartheid, (Neighbor Newspaper, 2021). To this date, the Free Food Program has provided over 6,000 grocery boxes for the community in each of the last two years (2022 & 2023). It is likely the largest growing program within the organization and has recently secured opportunities that will allow for the program to expand beyond the capacity it currently operates at. Every Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday the NP team—powered by a core group of volunteers—distributes dozens of boxes of food to community members in Oak Park. Historically, the program delivered boxes to the doorsteps of various community members who live in the project housing units of Oak Park. NP was able to build close relationships with these families because, as we discussed, many of the NP program core members are from Oak Park and grew up there as kids. This allowed for NP members to comfortably go door to door in Oak Park building deeper connections with families and allowed them to identify the needs of each household.

These connections are what eventually fueled the NP team to get started on planning an education program specifically designed for youth. The Free Food program in particular enabled the team to get to know families in the community and build trusting relationships. Neighbor Program actually credits the Free Food Program for sowing and nurturing the seeds that would eventually grow

into Malcolm X Academy (Bilal, 2022). During food distribution, the team would listen to stories and ask questions about the educational experiences of the children whose families benefited from the program. Many of the eventual students of Malcolm X Academy found out about the school because their family was receiving grocery boxes from the Free Grocery Program. The development of a youth education program was fueled by the needs the team witnessed during their Free Food Program distributions. In a reflection about the 2021 Free Food Program, the NP team wrote:

Luckily our programs and services had continued to expand and in May, we were able to begin our Free Food Program, aka groceries for families, with the amazing collaboration between our team and Ken Duncan. Through providing healthy food for families we are demonstrating our commitment to working to end food apartheid. It was during our work getting to know families in the community, through the grocery program, when we had been asked about holding tutoring or other educational services on multiple occasions. Holding youth educational programming was always a long term goal and so the seeds that were planted were beginning to point us towards a new method to serve the People (Neighbor Newspaper, 2021).

NP's connection with the community helped them to hold intentional conversations with their neighbors in Oak Park. Through these principled conversations, the NP team was able to identify the primary needs in the community and they realized they would need to start preparing a political education program for the youth sooner than expected. As we'll come to see, the goal of providing this program for the youth quickly became the primary focus for Neighbor Program in 2022.

The year 2021 was a historic year for Neighbor Program. In twelve months, they developed six programs for decolonization that had varying degrees of impact on the community. By the end of 2021, the Breakfast Program provided over 7,000 meals and over 400 tents to the unhoused community; Neighbor Newspaper published 16 total issues (2 Special Issues and 2 Special Reports); Neighbor School hosted weekly political education classes, they conducted four political education

series for the community, hosted a film festival, and were invited to help conduct the BPP 55th Anniversary Celebration; the Alfred Woodfox PPOW Program sent over \$1,500 and 10 books to comrades on the inside; and, lastly, the Free Food Program distributed 500 bags of groceries to various neighborhoods across Oak Park (Neighbor Newspaper, 2021). These victories are just the start of Neighbor Programs growth as a community organization operating solely off of donations and coalition building with other organizations. In their year end report published by Neighbor Newspaper (2021), the NP team discusses their goals for the year 2022:

In 2022 we are looking to secure a location to serve as our in-community hub for services, similar to the Panther's central headquarters. This site would serve as a location for our Free Grocery Program, political education classes, and hopefully, a liberation school. Through securing a location where we can establish the necessary programming for the community, we are providing an example of Afrikan resistance that our People can learn from, try, and evolve to push our People closer to independence. Through establishing a center for learning we can fulfill Malcolm X's 1964 call to action: 'We must establish all over the country schools of our own to train our own children... We intend to use the tools of education to help raise our people to an unprecedented level of excellence and self respect through their own efforts.' Through teaching our youth to love themselves—and in turn their fellow Afrikans—through affirming their humanity and dignity, we stand to break the euro-kkkolonizer propaganda machine that is hell-bent on the menticide of our children. To believe in Afrikan liberation, you are believing another world is possible, a world predicated on a Revolution of love. This is not to say our freedom will come without a physical cost; that would be illogical. Our freedom will most definitely come at a high cost, but what else would you rather give your life to other than our People? This is the basic principle of Revolutionary Suicide; and I wouldn't have it any other way in 2022. Neighbor Program will continue to stand on what we say, continue to study and evolve, and continue to serve the People—always (Neighbor Newspaper, 2021).

Study and evolve. Neighbor Program does not just claim to study and evolve—they put these principles into practice. At each step of their growth as an organization, the NP team has put their studies into practice by working alongside the people of the community to understand the terrain,

identify needs, develop solutions, and repeat this process all over again when it is clear things need to be evolved. Neighbor Program evolved in the year 2021 and, as we look forward, it will be important for us to understand the many ways NP waxes and wanes its programs according to the social, political, and economic conditions that are a product of settler-colonialism.

The Opening of the Shakur Center

In March of 2022, Neighbor Program found a home at an old church on 4th avenue—right in-between the two main parks that have defined the cultural history of Oak Park. I remember the night McGowan called me to tell me that Neighbor Program had finally secured a building. This was a goal we had talked about since we first met. “My n**** if we just had a building, imagine what we could do! We running out the trunk of a car right now wait till we get some land,” (Bilal, 2021). This is how many of our planning conversations concluded throughout 2020 and 2021. By the time we got off the phone call, I received 3D model pictures of the building that his 12-year-old son had sketched. There was a Black Panther Flag flying from a flag pole, the building front was painted red, black and green—a symbol of Black Power—and murals of martyred revolutionaries were displayed across the front and sides of the building. What a beautiful vision. The building itself to become a history lesson—all imagined by a 12-year-old! For me, this 3D model confirmed we were on the right path. The NP team had finally secured a building and the pace of the marathon we were running started to pick-up.

The large, two-story building of the Shakur Center is just walking distance from the original Black Panther office in so-called Sacramento. Within a week of receiving the rights to the building, the NP team began to run each of its community programs out of the Shakur Center’s gates. This is the

main difference between revolutionary, community organizations and city-backed non-profits. These community organizations get busy. They do not spend hours filing paperwork and jumping through hoops just for decisions to get made. All people from the community—regardless of their race, gender, sexuality, and/or religious background—are welcomed into the space and encouraged to build skills to take on leadership roles within the organization. Best of all, the money that comes into the organization actually goes directly into the community's hands. No time or money is wasted. The amount of space allotted at the Shakur Center allowed for the NP team to grow many of its core decolonization programs and it also enabled them to add new programs to the organizations list of services. The building had two parking lots on each side with enough room to park about four to six cars respectively. In the rear of the building, there was a basketball court, a volleyball court, and enough land to house about ten garden beds of varying sizes.

The Shakur Center empowered the NP team to visibly demonstrate the strength of Pan-Afrikanism for the people of Oak Park by providing the neighborhood with a variety of community programs powered by the strength of collective work. Within six months, the Shakur Center became home to a total of twelve community decolonization programs: a Breakfast Program, a Free Food Program, the Neighbor Newspaper, Community Learning Classes, the Assata Shakur Freedom Farm, the Afeni Shakur Legal Clinic, the Dr. Mutulu Shakur Health and Wellness Clinic, the Alfred Woodfox PPOW Program, a Mindfulness and Meditation Program, the Tupac Shakur Arts and Culture Program, a Documentary Film Series, and, most notably, Malcolm X Academy for Afrikan Education.

With the addition of the Legal Clinic, the Health and Wellness Clinic, the Mindfulness program, the Arts and Culture program, and Malcolm X Academy, it was clear that Neighbor Program was beginning to expand its capacity within the community. With this growth, the team saw an increase in community partnerships as well. For the Mutulu Shakur Health and Wellness Clinic, amazing practitioners showed out on the last Saturday of each month in 2022 & 2023 to help the NP put on a beautiful day of healing for people in the community who may not have access to frequent health care. The Health Clinic brought in dentists, acupressure practitioners, massage therapists, chiropractic care, and members of the Palestinian Public Health advocacy group. These practitioners provided people with holistic care and also offered them free political education class on the day of the clinic. A true demonstration of collective care and skill-building. Practitioners of the Health and Wellness Clinic have also written accessible articles for people in Neighbor Newspaper that cover topics such as: Breast Cancer Awareness Recommendations for Black Women, The Art of Self-study for fighting Winter Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), Holistic Living, and Natural Skin Care Remedies. According to Jordan, for these decolonization programs to sustain and be successful:

We need folks to help pool our resources—whether it's money, whether it's talents—like with the medical clinic we are just pulling people's talents; nurses, doctors, indigenous healers, community practitioners; we are asking them to come spend some time working with the people (Bilal, 2022).

The Dr. Mutulu Shakur Health and Wellness Clinic days eventually became part of the historic Sankofa Market that eventually moved from another location in the community to the Shakur Center. Through this partnership, Neighbor Program was able to offer the community access to farmers market food and goods on the day of the Clinic.

Within the first year of opening, the Shakur Center has allowed the Neighbor Program to grow in ways they could have only dreamed. The organization provided thousands of free grocery boxes and meals for families in Oak Park; their political education program hosted 35 community learning classes; the Assata Shakur Freedom Farm was rebuilt on the newly acquired land; within days of getting the keys to the center, Neighbor Program hosted the first Afeni Shakur Legal Clinic which has worked to expunge dozens of criminal records; the Dr. Mutulu Shakur Health & Wellness Clinic was able to run a program each month for over a year; and last but not least, the Center allowed the team to open Malcolm X Academy for Afrikan Education and the Tupac Shakur Performing Arts Center which “housed film screenings for political prisoners, open mics, a student art gallery and an archive of Malcolm X Academy for Afrikan Education” (McGowan, 2023, pg. 152).

By the numbers, Neighbor Program provided the community with: 7,000 hot meals; 2,250 grocery boxes; 13 Newspapers; 23 Community Learning Classes; 10 Health & Wellness Clinics; 10 Legal Clinics; Oak Park's 1st Malcolm X Day; weekly Mindfulness Program; one Trunk or Treat event; their 2nd Annual Holiday Meal Giveaway; their 2nd Annual Holiday Gift Giveaway; and their annual Black Family Day. The Shakur Center itself was becoming a symbol of dignity and self-determination for Afrikan and within the community. While multi-million dollar non-profits were failing to even provide water for the unhoused neighborhoods throughout Sacramento, the Neighbor Program team was offering a variety of services to the community of Oak Park with virtually zero funding outside of cash donations from community members

Through the spirit of the Black Panther Party, the NP organization has been able to provide the people of Oak Park with a community center that is “a demonstration of Afrikan resistance against

the empire,” (McGowan, 2022). Just like the Zapatistas, another organization Neighbor Program claims inspiration from, the Shakur Center is “a small battle for dignity, for land, for bread, for education, for health care, and for Afrikan Liberation,” (McGowan, 2022). The members of NP believe that the Shakur Center is:

solution oriented; this is a chance to make history, a chance to write in the book, to be the one who believed, to live that history alongside us. We met with the elders: they have granted approval, some have signed on to mentor and guide us; we have met with the community and they are excited for our programming to find a home in the Shakur Center and so I am asking you to join us in creating this history. No matter where you align yourself politically, the Shakur Center and Malcom X Academy makes sense if you have the goal for Afrikan people to be respected as human beings. There is no question our People need these programs and resources available to them (Neighbor Newspaper, 2022).

With this, the goals of Neighbor Program are clearly defined: dignity for Afrikan and Indigenous people within the city of so-called Sacramento, across Turtle Island, to the continent of Afrika, and throughout the entire Global South.



Figure 5.1 Neighbor Program’s Core Decolonization Programs. Created by Author.

The Shakur Center operated as the headquarters of Neighbor Program from March 2022 to July 2023. I myself found a home at the Shakur Center. Every morning, from August 2022 to June 2022, I walked to the light rail station across from my house and took it west to Oak Park. Sitting on the light rail, getting off at the UC Davis Hospital stop, and walking through Oak Park with coffee in hand became a ritual for me. Once MXA was up and running, I spent each morning doing chores, setting up the learning space, and prepping the Assata Shakur Freedom Farm for the babies to work in each day. To this day, this morning ritual is something I miss dearly. There are no words that can capture the love, care, and safety that the Shakur Center offered to so many people within our community. I am beyond grateful for the opportunity to have called it home.

The Conditions that Produced the Need for MXA in Sacramento

In Chapter Two, we outlined the historical context of settler-colonial schools in the so-called United States and worked to understand why Afrikan and Indigenous children face such violent conditions in schools today. We discussed how this reality is deeply connected to the historical development of settler boarding schools and worked to connect this history to modern systems of family policing that continue to target children today. How do the learning guides of MXA understand this history? What localized conditions have produced the need for a school like MXA? What social and economic conditions are Afrikan and Indigenous people facing in Sacramento, today? What type of violence are students facing within schools in Sacramento? How is this impacting schools, the students, their families, and the educators who work in these schools? Amongst all of this, during a time period where so many of our Afrikan and Indigenous relatives have been abandoned, we

must ask ourselves: how would our ancestors and elders of the Black Liberation Movement have grappled with the conditions our people face today? Ahjamu Umi (2021), writer and member of the All Afrikan People’s Revolutionary Party, poses the questions in this way: How would an organization like the Black Panther Party approach supporting communities who desperately need access to quality education, quality food systems, and quality health care? How would different chapters of the party design their own methods of intervening into social and economic conditions exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic? How would they address contact tracing, food distribution, education? How would they confront a society that sent our children back to school while the transmission of the virus was at its peak (Umi, 2021). These are the questions that fuel the Neighbor Program team and the learning guides of Malcolm X Academy (Bilal, 2022).

While Malcolm X Academy is a direct response to the call to open schools by revolutionary elders like Malcolm X, Jalil Muntaqim, and Assata Shakur—the school is also responding to the conditions produced by the ongoing gentrification of Oak Park, a historically Afrikan neighborhood in Sacramento. The Afrikan families in this neighborhood are struggling to pay their bills and many struggle to find money for food—this is why NPs Free Grocery Program is so needed in the community. Afrikan households in Sacramento spend “over 50% of their income on rent,” (Hooks, 2022). No other ethnic group in Sacramento experiences a higher level of rent burden. In the past ten years alone, Oak Park has seen more than 24% of its Afrikan residents leave the neighborhood due to rising costs of living (Hooks, 2022). Not one other racial group in the neighborhood saw a decrease in residency. This decrease of Afrikan residents in Oak Park occurred as Sacramento experienced a nearly 2% increase in Afrikan residents across the metropolitan area (Hooks, 2022). There are massive

gentrifying projects being developed across Oak Park that include a “billion-dollar UC Davis Aggie Square project,” and other changes due to redistricting and “political shake-ups,” (Hooks, 2022). Over the past decade, the city has also been developing “modern apartments, new stores and restaurants, streetscaping, and murals,” (Hooks, 2022). If you go to any gentrifying Afrikan neighborhood in the so-called United States, these are the markers to look for. These markers are an indication that “longtime Black residents” are being “priced-out and displaced,” (Hooks, 2022). These are the markers of erasure for historically Afrikan communities in America. Systemic changes to the community of Oak Park have been so drastic that, “current and former area residents alike wonder if Black residents will stay much longer,” (Hooks, 2022).

In an article written for Neighbor Newspaper (2021) law student and coordinator of the Neighbor Program Expungement Clinic, Khalil J. Ferguson, argues that:

Gentrification in Sacramento and Neocolonialism on the continent of Afrika stem from the same neoliberal policies and have the same degradational effects. The erosion of communal relations and the displacement of low-income individuals are an afterthought in place for urban development policies that seek to attract direct investment in an attempt to revitalize the community. Therefore, it can be observed that community members who reside in the jurisdiction of the specific areas have no economic or political control over policies that affect their livelihood, in line with the premise of neocolonialism outlined by Kwame Nkrumah. As I have lived in Sacramento and attended Sacramento State, studying Economics and International relations, I have noticed distinct similarities between the imposition of free-market policies in the political-economic sphere that aid in the exacerbation of socio-economic issues for Black people domestically and globally. The conditions faced by my people are the results of racist policies such as redlining, segregation, and over policing. Legitimized by the state apparatus and capitalist finance institutions, these de jure and de facto practices created a dependency relationship between us and the state. As I observed the history of Oak Park and the characteristics of suburbanization leading to white flight, I found that the same colonial systems of control were used to mitigate problems in the neighborhood as were used in colonial Afrika – a punitive and militarized criminal justice system. In addition, I have found that the ramifications of

these policies are what have created the environment allowing for gentrification (Neighbor Newspaper, 2021).

Ferguson’s analysis is on point. Following the Great Depression and World War II, “an influx of Black residents into the neighborhood laid the groundwork for white flight,” (Hooks, 2022). Racist white families began to sell or rent out their homes as they fled to the newly built suburbs outside of the city. Policies like redlining assured that Afrikans throughout the city could only live in certain spaces and “Oak Park was that space for [Afrikan] people,” (Hooks, 2022). The policies that shaped the neighborhood in the early 1900s—along with the political influence of wealthier residents—are the same policies that are now working to gentrify the neighborhood in 2024. A neighborhood that was once developed and maintained by its Afrikan residents is now seeing its heart and soul completely displaced.

As we discussed above, NPs Free Breakfast Program serves hundreds of unhoused Afrikan neighbors in Oak Park and Sacramento more broadly. The disproportionate number of Afrikan individuals who are unhoused is a direct result of the neoliberal gentrification practices Ferguson discusses in his essay (Neighbor Newspaper, 2021). According to a recent SacBee report, although Black people only make up 13% of the county’s population overall, they account for 34% of its unhoused population (Neighbor Newspaper, 2021). Rising redevelopment-related rents, migration pressure from the Bay Area, and inflationary consumer goods prices coupled with stagnating wages are the causes of this. Ferguson (2021) continues to say that:

Displacement is inherent to gentrification – by definition, the removal of a lower class for a more affluent group of people, the connection between colonial domination of a territory and gentrification of a community is inextricably linked to neoliberal-neocolonial policies (Neighbor Newspaper, 2021).

Displacement for housed residents is no different than the displacement of unhoused residents we discussed earlier in this chapter—the experiences and the conditions produced by this displacement are inherently intertwined. Whether housed or unhoused, when people systematically lose access to community, life-saving support systems, vital resources, and spaces of safety and comfort—it is due to the genocidal policies enforced by America’s settler-colonial government.

Now that we’ve discussed the material, economic, and social conditions that Afrikan families face in Oak Park and Sacramento more broadly, let us discuss the conditions that Afrikan students face within Sacramento colonial schools. In California, 67% of Afrikan children do not read or write at grade level; 86% of Afrikan children are not at grade level in science; only 31% of Afrikan children have completed their requirements necessary for admission to a California State College or University (compare this to 49% of students from European descent and 93% of Asian students); and finally, only 77% of Afrikan children graduate from high school in contrast to 88% of European students and 93% of Asian students (Benford, 2021). In Sacramento particularly, Afrikan youth are vastly over-represented in statistical categories such as “emotionally disturbed, chronically absent, referred to law enforcement, arrested, low graduation rates, and high suspension and expulsion rates,” (Kaitapu, 2021). During the 2015-2016 school year, Afrikan scholars were “25 times more likely to be arrested than white students and 8 times more likely to be referred to law enforcement” for incidents that occurred during school (Kaitapu, 2021). Considering the disproportionate number of Afrikan children who are detained and reported to the police in Sacramento, it should be noted that they are not committing more crimes or violations than their peers of European descent. According to Kaitapu, “they are criminalized and vilified for displaying normal adolescent behavior more than their

white peers and they're subject to biases, over-policing, and hyper surveillance," (Kaitapu, 2021). These variables actively fuel the unnecessarily high frequency of Afrikan students' encounters with terroristic law enforcement. Even if the majority of infractions were actually committed by Afrikan youth, it would be far more beneficial for behavioral intervention to address the underlying causes of these infractions, link these children to resources and support services, and concentrate on helping the student grow from the experience rather than placing them into the death cycle of America's prison regime (Kaitapu, 2021). For this reason, rather than continuing to emphasize punitive measures, educators from around Sacramento are pushing for trauma-informed and restorative methods. The learning guides at Malcolm X Academy have experienced, witnessed, studied, analyzed, and discussed these conditions with community members and families who are served by NP's various community programs. Through these conversations, they knew that their school, grounded in Liberation Pedagogies, would be able to provide families the trauma-informed practices they were seeking.

For Malcolm X Academy students in particular, one of its earliest enrolled scholars was a 5-year-old kindergarten student who was expelled and kicked out of two different schools within the first month of starting. In another example, a 5th grade MXA scholar was suspended from his school and his parents eventually decided to pull him from the district after administration mandated a randomized, compulsory stop-and-frisk search on their son after he brought a vape battery to school. Two students from the inaugural class at MXA had joined the school because of the criminalization their students experienced in the state-funded schools. This was not the only reason parents at MXA pulled their students from public schools. One MXA parent took her students out of the state-funded schools because they didn't even notice when her son with autism eloped from campus. She explained

this stressful day to me in a one-on-one interview we did halfway through the first school year at

MXA. She said that:

My son is on the spectrum. He has autism. He eloped from school. And I wasn't notified by the school and they did not tell me anything until pick-up time. It was actually another Black parent at the school who pulled me aside and told me that they had seen my son off campus and there was nobody around to even help him. Luckily, I showed up at the time that I did and I went to the front office and I asked why my son eloping off campus was not reported or even discussed with me. Nobody called or anything? I actually had to push the issue. They needed to understand that this is my son and if anything happened, I would like to know. I was going to school with my son every single day after that to make sure he was safe. This is when I realized that I can't deal with this anymore. There had been other issues with the school because I did not like what and how they were teaching my kids. They were focusing on Greek mythology only and never talked about how a majority of our students are Afrikan. They wanted us to participate in days that celebrated colonizers and they tried to get us to dress like them and dance like them and sing their silly songs. It was supposed to be a holistic school where they get to be free and develop their individuality before they even learn anything. How are my Afrikan children going to develop their individuality if they are not even learning about themselves? I really had a lot of faith in that school. I put a lot of effort, you know, time and effort, into that school. I was extremely disappointed by the very last day of the school. Especially with what had happened with my son on the spectrum. I didn't see any type of progression or any type of diversity in that school. I had to take my kids out of that school because it was not a safe place for my kids to grow up and develop their individuality like the school claimed. That was my family's final straw, I knew I had to do something (Bilal, 2023).

Not only was this MXA parent upset with the lack of care and supervision for her Afrikan son who is on the spectrum, she was also disgusted with the curriculum and pedagogy the school used to educate her son. This was not the only parent who was dissatisfied with the quality of state-funded compulsory schools; many of the MXA parents pulled their children from these schools for similar reasons. Another MXA parent pulled their child from their state-funded school for different reasons. In our interview she stated that:

[My daughter] was having trouble with her reading level and she even did her third grade year with mostly intervention classes at her other school in addition to tutoring after school for the entire school year. Even with all of this we still didn't see much progress. From there I decided to start homeschooling her for fourth grade. She felt like she was lacking the social aspect that traditional schools bring. So we reached out to Malcolm X Academy and it seemed like a good fit. And when we started going there, she loved it. So we kept going every single day (Bilal, 2023).

The more and more I spoke with families at MXA, the more I realized how disgusted parents are with the quality of education being offered to their children at state-funded schools. Whether they're being criminalized, forgotten about, or outright miseducated by the teachers—it was clear to me that our MXA families could not be an anomaly. The data from across the state and from within the city demonstrates to us that this is the standard for Afrikan students in many of our neighborhoods across California. In reality, this has been the standard of education for Afrikan and Indigenous children since the first boarding school was opened by the settler-colonial government of the so-called United States.

Marcus Forbes, an educator and well known basketball coach throughout the Sacramento region, was one of the many consultants we met with as we worked on developing the pedagogy and curriculum of MXA. In an interview we did for the Comrades Classroom Podcast, Forbes analyzes the conditions these MXA students faced within their previous schools:

Our people [Afrikans] have been conditioned and socialized under a capitalist society. right? A lot of our political imaginations are stunted. As scientific socialists, we can analyze how Afrikans are affected materially under capitalism. But we also need to understand what happens to our students on more of a spiritual and energetic level. We are internally colonized people, we have to depend on white supremacist institutions, and specifically within education, we're socialized and conditioned and educated under white supremacist and settler colonial logic. Even if capitalism were abolished tomorrow, our way of life is so deeply intertwined with capitalism, that a lot of people don't even know how to relate to each other outside of the realm of

capitalism. There are a lot of Afrikans suffering because of that. Most of the time, they don't know why they're suffering. It manifests itself in unconscious trauma responses in many instances. A lot of babies acting up in school, you know, getting in trouble, and they don't even know what it is they're reacting to, but they're reacting to a system that already feels oppressive by the age of five or six. Psychologically, they call it a racial battle fatigue. This is where we are experiencing something that is a completely different reality. It's a product of having to cooperate with and involve ourselves in the systems that are set up for us and set up for our destruction (Bilal, 2022).

Forbes perfectly encapsulates the realities of students and families who shared their stories with me in our one-on-one interviews. The Afrikan children in these families likely did not know why they were acting out or having trouble grasping the curriculum at their state-run schools but the unconscious traumas stored within their brains and bodies were reacting to a colonial education system that was restrictive, punitive, and compulsory. Forbes continues:

At the end of the day, our people, our ancestors, have laid out a blueprint for us. We've been surviving for centuries. This work that we are doing, to me, is a way for us to pool a lot of our resources, all those survival mechanisms, and really meet the community where it's at. There's no way that students should be bound to an eight hour school day. There's no way that we should condition our kids to think they need to go into debt just to go to college and get a nine to five job that still has them living paycheck to paycheck. We are proposing alternative ways for our people to take care of themselves. People shouldn't have to wait on their next check to be able to afford rent and they shouldn't have to worry about how they're going to put food on the table each day, right? We can work to provide that as a community. Multiple generations of Afrikan and Indigenous people have never seen what the world looks like outside of a deeply capitalist society but we can do the work of providing resources for our people and start building that reality. We can build something new while the society that we're in is crumbling (Comrades Classroom Podcast, 2022).

Forbes hits on an important point here that I want to expand on. In Chapter 2, we discussed the many ways that settler-colonial boarding schools attack Indigenous children both mentally and physically. Colonial schools operate as mechanisms that condition children into the fold of the settler society and propagandize them with western, colonial values that are founded upon genocidal logics. It is a system

of indoctrination of the young. Colonial school systems train people to be obedient and conformist; they encourage them to not think too much, do what you're told, stay passive, and don't raise any critical questions. Students are filtered out according to their willingness to be obedient (Chomsky, 1991).

Noam Chomsky argues that the settler-colonial education system works to guarantee a lot of stupidity within its daily practices. He believes that:

If you can guarantee lots of stupidity in the educational system, you know—stupid assignments and things like that—the only people who'll make it through are people like me, and like most of you I guess. People who are willing to do it no matter how stupid it is because we want to go to the next step. So you may know that this assignment is idiotic and the guy teaching up there couldn't think his way out of a paper bag, but you'll do it anyway because that's the way you get to the next class, (Chomsky, 1991).

Within this system, obviously there are people who refuse to do these ridiculous, stupid assignments. These students are identified as behavioral problems. For Chomsky, all of this structured stupidity is a technique that functions to reward the skill of obedience; he believes that if you were to go to the elite universities, “you'd find more obedience and conformity probably because you're getting the students who were better able to do it,” (Chomsky, 1991). This is the system that Forbes is hinting at when he mentions the conditioning of Afrikan youth. At Malcolm X Academy, a majority of the students enrolled were the students who refused to be obedient within the settler-colonial system. They were the students who refused to be indoctrinated and were quickly labeled as behavioral problems, criminalized, and pushed out of their schools as young as 5-years-old.

MXA's Director of Programs, Jordan McGowan, identifies this system as the empire's evil education system. For Jordan, the empire's evil education system is a necessary mechanism of

European genocide against Afrikan people. He believes that it is important for community organizations to help their neighbors identify the complex layers that make-up this genocidal war against Afrikans while simultaneously working to “educate our children through our own means,” (McGowan, 2021). Jordan argues that the settler-colonial system attacks our students and systemically limits the number of Afrikan educators available to Afrikan youth. How can we undo a 500-year process that has functioned to indoctrinate self-hatred into our children from the ages of 5 to 18? For Jordan, it is imperative that we build safe educational spaces that have the capacity to reclaim Afrikan and Indigenous traditions, practices, and customs, (McGowan, 2021).

The hate and terror that Afrikan and Indigenous students have faced within the colonial school system has been documented and recorded throughout modern history. The data we highlighted above demonstrates the many ways that Afrikan students continue to be victims of “genocidal colonial institutions that are designed to miseducate our children and steal their love for learning,” (McGowan, 2021). Jordan continues his report on these statistics as he writes:

In the majority of the largest school districts [in the so-called United States], the academic achievement gap has only widened within the last decade. Currently, the NAEP reports that Afrikan 8th grade students are testing at far below grade level in reading and literacy. To add insult to injury, not only are our students attacked in regards to curriculum and pedagogy, but their very humanity is often attacked within these schools. Hence why suspension rates for Afrikan students are dramatically higher. According to new reports from the Center for Civil Rights Remedies at the UCLA Civil Rights Project and the Learning Policy institute, Afrikan students lost 103 days per 100 students enrolled during the 2015-16 school year—82 more than the 21 days their white peers lost due to out of school suspensions. This type of anti-Afrikan environment creates a hostile learning environment in which our students are under constant attack inside their classrooms for more than seven hours a day at times (McGowan, 2021).

Jordan and the community at MXA are very clear in their stance that Afrikan people will continue to suffer at the hands of the “evil American empire” so long as their people are systematically miseducated. Afrikan youth will never develop the capacity to rise up in just resistance against settler-colonialism if we continue to permit our oppressors to instill their morals, their values, and their distorted history into the minds of our children. This system is set up to enforce obedience and control, so if we truly value our freedom, we must take education seriously—especially when it comes to the development of our children, (McGowan, 2021). Jordan fully believes that “we can no longer allow this system to corrupt our youth—it is an act of genocide to destroy, in whole or in part, a particular group of people—and through attaching our youth, the European settler-colonial system is directly responsible for seeking to destroy the fabric of our people,” (McGowan, 2021).

The history we’ve discussed throughout the previous four chapters justifies these claims. Jordan’s beliefs are fueled by an intense study of our ancestors who have waged a similar battle against settler-colonial educational systems. Afrikan people will be on the path towards liberation once they have access to a proper education. Not before, but after. The value of education and “a commitment to learning must be properly understood as a tool to liberation,” (McGowan, 2021). The MXA team, invoking the words of Assata Shakur, understands that the settler-system will never provide our youth with the education they need to free themselves. Thus, “it will be up to us to educate our people in order to create a consciousness that can push us even closer to revolution; a process of constant growing, learning, and doing,” (McGowan, 2021).

As I was finishing up writing this section, I sat down with my partner, Sam, who has been integral to the development of MXA and who has spent countless hours with me theorizing and

practicing all of the methods discussed throughout this study. In our conversation, we focused on the recent uptick in physical and psychological violence in schools and wondered how, if at all, community schools could offer a solution. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the Institute of Education Sciences has reported an increase in physical and psychological violence throughout all public schools in the so-called United States (School Pulse Panel, 2023). Why is it that our settler-colonial society continues to raise-up children that are filled with anger and rage? How has the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to children's behavior and capacity to manage their emotions? I asked Sam what she thought about these statistics and, from her experience, what is the root cause of a lot of this violence? She believes that:

A lot of it comes from deep frustration. Frustration with not knowing how to deal with conflict or big emotions in a healthy way. How would you know how to manage these things if you were never taught? Realistically, a lot of adults don't even always know how to handle that. Frustration is a normal emotion that comes with doing anything, especially as a kid, you're learning everything for the first time. But if nobody tells you that frustration is part of the process, what do you expect? We also have to consider what environment children come from. They may come from a home or attend a school where physical and emotional violence is used rather than healthy communication. Maybe they are surrounded by people who demonstrate that hitting, punching, and destroying objects around them is the way you get attention. If they see this at home and in school, how else do we expect students to react when they have big feelings? The adults in children's lives need to understand that kids are very much aware of everything that happens around them. They are like sponges taking in information like how you speak, your tone of voice, and your body language. They know what a hostile environment feels like even if they cannot name it. If they are also absorbing these tendencies on social media and on TV, how are they to know any different? If we want to see these things change, we will have to teach both our families and our scholars why violence is so normalized within our society. We must talk to them about settler-colonialism, and capitalism. We cannot simply blame them for acting a certain way. We must show them grace, teach them, and demonstrate new ways of interacting with each other. When we teach kids about violence most parents just say, 'if someone hits you, hit them back!' They are taught to defend themselves regardless of what happens. They are never challenged to critically think about self-

defense. How can we help scholars critically think through the decisions they are making? Is this disagreement with my close friend worthy of physical violence? If my friend pushes me should I immediately push them back? What skills can we teach children that help them deescalate situations with people they share community with? They observe teachers and other adults who immediately escalate to yelling or physical violence. We need to deeply think about how we choose to raise our children to react to things especially with how much violence is in our society (Bilal, 2024).

Children are saturated with violence both in the home and inside of their classrooms. According to Sam, they are surrounded by adults who also have never been taught how to manage feelings of despair, anger and frustration. A lot of the outbursts we see in schools are learned behaviors that come from a deep frustration of never being treated like human beings. Sam builds on this framing:

Children deserve to be treated more like humans and less like little worker bees. Educators need to understand that children in early childhood education are in classrooms for the first time. Their sharing space with peers for the first time. It's their first time being outside of the home setting. While this approach may work for capitalism and creating obedient workers, it doesn't serve to create well rounded human beings. Children are gonna have feelings, they're gonna have thoughts, they're gonna experience conflict. Educators have to figure out how to navigate these things without being punitive, without being authoritarian. When schools reopened during the COVID pandemic, we taught children and educators that their safety was not important. We forced children back into packed classrooms and reminded them that the economy and maintaining the status quo was most important. There was very little change to the infrastructure. Proper safety measures were barely implemented or maintained. As soon as the coast was clear, we happily removed masking restrictions and pulled supports that help our most vulnerable students access schools safely. We threw children into the trenches and hoped for the best. Data shows that 20 to 24% of children who had COVID developed long COVID which we know can have tremendous impact on the brain, the frontal lobe, and cognitive function (Bilal, 2024).

In this quote, Sam is trying to stress the importance of our intervention methods in schools. We need to first understand the skill sets that students are coming into schools with. Rather than simply blaming families or individual student behaviors, how can we actually provide students with an environment that humanizes them and understands the daily struggles they are inevitably going to

face? Sam also mentions the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. How can we develop schools that are sensitive to this reality? Why have our schools abandoned infrastructure that was intended to keep everybody safe?

During this conversation we also discussed the types of skills our children are learning throughout their early childhood education. What careers are they being prepared for? How can community schools intervene in settler-colonial and capitalist career pathways? She believes that:

Children are saturated with images of police and military and social media influencers. Of course those are the jobs they feel are attainable. They are not exposed to jobs like construction, carpentry, electrical, nursing, or teaching. In fact, these jobs are often portrayed in a negative light and children are constantly reminded how underpaid these positions are. These positions are completely disrespected. They are not exposed to jobs and careers that require real skills. Skills that can uplift and maintain the infrastructure in our communities. As a nanny and preschool teacher, I've spent a lot of time with families and children and I have seen how little we take the time to show children how to do simple daily tasks like pouring themselves a drink, cleaning around the home, or cooking a meal. There is a complete lack of understanding how a home or a community should be maintained. Rather than taking the time to show children how to complete tasks, I see adults using technology as a pacifier while they complete the tasks themselves. I understand that it takes time and patience to teach children how to do new tasks but it is something we have to do. It might take an extra twenty or thirty minutes. It might take a couple tries for them to get it right. But this is how we develop whole human beings. It requires adults to see the child as a functional member of the community, not just an object to be controlled. They are full human beings that need to acquire skills that contribute to their growth and survival. We also need to recognize that a lot of families for the foreseeable future will still be forced to work forty or sixty plus hour work weeks and they will continue to be robbed of the time they need to build these skills alongside their children. They genuinely don't have the time to ensure their children are learning. This is not an indictment against the parents, this is a symptom of capitalism. It is not a failure of the parents, it is the failure of a society. Our schools can be bridges that help enact these changes in a child's life. Our goal should be to curate a space where we can impact the children's lives and, hopefully, transform their families as well (Bilal, 2024).

Sam's brilliant response made me immediately think about the Zapatistas True Education System. In the Zapatista system, children are provided an education that enhances their math and literacy skills while ensuring that they are building skills needed to maintain their homes and the economic infrastructure of the community. From a young age, children are seen as an integral part of the society and they are taught how to be active members of the struggle for liberation. In Sam's reflection, we can see how children in our communities are barely taught the necessary skills they need to take care of themselves. Knowing this, how can we possibly expect them to become functional members of a self-determined society?

At the present moment, the empire's evil education system is the only option available to Afrikan youth in Sacramento. The MXA team knew that this reality had to change. Even if that transformation started with just a few students—the team felt they had to start somewhere. This is what makes MXA such a transformative environment. It is a school built by Afrikan and Indigenous learning guides who are distinctly aware of the conditions that their people face throughout their community. They live and walk alongside the community. They work alongside the people to develop solutions for the conditions they face. The principles that guide the MXA team are grounded in Afrikan and Indigenous pedagogies and practice. They are a team of learning guides who want nothing more than to be in community with the children they educate—there is a deep love for their people that drives them, a deep love for Afrikan and Indigenous people. The MXA team is made up of people who the children can actually see themselves in—they serve as a mirror and window into a new world. This reality is the opposite of the school system that most other Afrikan students in Sacramento are forced to learn within. Afrikan youth are facing so many different obstacles in these state-run schools.

All throughout the country, schools with majority Afrikan students are being targeted and shut down—just like the schools the government shut down in the 9th ward of New Orleans following the devastating impacts of Hurricane Katrina. According to reports, “once half or more of the student body is composed of [Afrikan] students, closure rates rose to 2.5 percent and exhibited a sharp incline thereafter. California’s rates [of closure] more than doubled those nationally,” (Murray, 2023). These are the conditions that make Malcolm X Academy an essential liberation project for Afrikans in Sacramento.

The Founding of MXA

Although Neighbor Program was founded in the summer of 2020 amidst the George Floyd uprisings and the COVID-19 pandemic, the idea for building a militant education project in Sacramento, CA was born long before the founding of the organization. In a conversation I recorded with MXA’s core members, each one of us had a different story that led us towards collectively opening up a liberation school (Bilal, 2022). We all had years of teaching experience in the classroom, many of us studied education in graduate school, and we have all taught students at every grade level: early childhood, elementary school, middle school, high school, and higher education. At one point or another, each one of us—sick of the colonial education system we were forced to teach within—created a detailed outline for what we felt a school should look like. We all dreamed of something different for our students, but we had no idea what that could actually look like in practice. It never felt possible until we began to deepen our study of the liberation struggles our ancestors have waged. While we all had a past life as educators, our political education and our daily groundwork within our

different community organizations is what actually brought us together. For Jordan McGowan, mel charles, and myself, much of this journey was ignited by a virtual class we took with veteran Black Panther and Black Liberation Army member Jalil Muntaqim—who is the author of the book, *We are Our Own Liberators*, that we discussed throughout Chapters One and Two. Jordan began our conversation by reflecting on our time in Jalil’s class:

For me, this is one of those things where we ask: how do things align? I think back to last spring. Me, Mel, and Dejay were taking Jalil’s class on *We Are Our Own Liberators*. In that class we kind of had that conversation with Jalil where we asked him: what should our organizations be doing? He told us that we should be taking control of schools and our education. This was an answer that I had received from several elders of the Black Liberation Movement. The elders really pushed us on this journey. This is really where this all started. I personally took a deep dive into Malcolm. In 1964 Malcolm X founded the Organization of Afro American Unity and he called on us to open our own schools. We can see where Jalil got this theory from. We can see how this traces back to even before that. As enslaved Afrikans we started our own schools so that we could learn; so that our babies could learn. When we look at this history, it just makes sense with where we’re at. Our babies are under attack. When we read Assata [Shakur], when we listen to Tupac [Shakur], and when we see what Afeni [Shakur] and Dr. Mutulu [Shakur] did—there’s no choice but to act. If we know that these elders have called us to take control of our schooling, our education, our healthcare—then our only option is to make those things happen. With this building [The Shakur Center] opening up, this was just like divine timing (Bilal, 2022).

The opening up of the Shakur Center was divine timing indeed. It happened at a moment in time where each one of the MXA learning guides was able to devote a majority of their time to developing, planning, and opening up a school.

MXA’s minister of education, mel charles, followed up Jordan by reflecting on her experiences in the Jalil’s class which lead her to where we are today:

Jordan and I met in the summer of 2020. And I know that Dejay and I had been mutuals on Twitter for a minute, but really, it was Jalil Muntaqim’s virtual class in

January of 2021 that brought us all together. I think that first day we came in and Jalil said that the goal of this class was for everyone in here to build cadres and to begin connecting with each other to develop programs for our liberation. I knew that all the folks around me ran different decolonization programs and so I remember hearing that and being like, bet check! That's what Jalil said so that's the mission. That's the goal. I understand the assignment. From there it was really dope to be able to connect specifically with Dejay and Jordan in the Thursday class because I know we would be in there running it up every week talking about the questions that Jalil was asking us. We were asking him questions and we were really trying to engage in a dialectical process. We would ask him to tell us what he knows—what worked and what didn't work? What programs should we be focusing on? What obstacles should we be thinking about? We don't always have the opportunity to be in space with our elders who have really done the work and who have experienced what it means to build towards revolution. For me being an educator that's kind of where I took his call personally (The Comrades Classroom Podcast, 2022).

Those conversations with veteran Black Panther and Black Liberation Army member Jalil Muntaqim were incredibly formative experiences for all of us. He led these classes via zoom just weeks after being freed from serving 49 years as a political prisoner in the U.S. prison camps. As soon as he was free, Jalil was back in the field organizing in the community and he willingly shared knowledge with each and every one of us. I think all of us felt as though we could not waste his time or energy. As soon as Jalil reassured us of the mission, we got busy developing our cadre and we began planting the seeds for a project that would eventually become Malcolm X Academy.

Marcus Forbes was also sitting in on this interview. Early on in the process, Marcus was an important consultant for the MXA team because he had a lot of experience building educational spaces outside of schools for student athletes. The MXA team felt his knowledge and experience could have a positive impact on MXA's pedagogies and curriculum. Marcus reflected on how he first got involved with MXA and he discussed why he felt a school grounded in Liberation Pedagogies was so important:

I remember, Jordan and I met in the summer of 2020 and we were talking about collaborating to create some sort of cultural hub or some sort of Resource Center that could be of advantage to the community. We've mentioned our elders and our political idols a lot and this work is really a continuation of that legacy. This is super important to me because the institutions that we've been made to rely on—our medical institutions or educational institutions—have been tools of our oppression. I mean, you can talk about the oppression of the spirit when a kid has to sit at a desk all day, often with no windows. You can talk about the deep interconnectedness between the school system and mass incarceration. You can talk about unmotivated teachers—teachers who aren't compensated fairly and are working under hostile conditions. Our schools are in underdeveloped neighborhoods and they themselves are drastically underfunded and under-resourced. That is intentional, right? This is part of that history of oppression. It's connected to the same things that our ancestors were fighting against. So really, this work is super important because it's struggling to give us political autonomy, economic autonomy, and we're pooling these resources for Afrikan and Indigenous youth and giving them an education that they need. There's no reason you should be at school from nine to four, right? We will have a more free flowing school where kids are actually studying what they're interested in and you can actually get more life skills out of it that are built for the 21st century—skills that you cannot develop in a traditional school that was built to compliment the European capitalist economy. So here we are with an opportunity to actually liberate our Afrikan students. We have an opportunity to put them in a position of empowerment by not regurgitating banking model school systems to them where the educator is holding all the information and they're just empty receptacles waiting to learn from us. That's a colonized way of doing education. It's not really education. This is allowing us to really step into the role of educators in the full sense of that term. We are playing multiple roles and attempting to meet their daily needs because like mel said, some of the kids will be hungry first and foremost. As educators we need to be able to have empathy; we need to be able to understand what our students are going through and provide whatever that is for them. We're in charge of their development of their empowerment, and whatever role that requires us to take. That's what we have to do. So I'm excited about this and collaborating with this team that has done such incredible work. I think coming together on a project of this magnitude and referencing the blueprint that's been laid out for us historically is an incredible opportunity and the timing is just right (Bilal, 2022).

Building off of this excerpt from our interview, I think it is important to discuss more liberal frameworks that seek to reform schools rather than revolutionize them. Liberal attempts at decolonization locate the colonial school system as a site of possibility, but they don't necessarily point

out the fact that these schools were inherently built using settler-colonial and white supremacist logics and frameworks. They don't discuss how the state itself is designed to reproduce these systems through its different mechanisms of control. They ignore that the school site is one of these mechanisms. I have sat in countless meetings with school leaders, researchers, and self-proclaimed community organizers from around the country who claim to be interested in transforming schools but they ignore the primary contradiction that all schools in the so-called United States share: settler-colonialism. It's important for us to understand that Malcolm X Academy is specifically challenging this liberal framework of reform and is instead attempting to answer the call made by elders like Jalil Muntaqim, Malcolm X, Assata Shakur, and others.

In this interview, the MXA team is not just calling for us to reform the schools that our students are in; they are not just calling on us to change the curriculum or decolonize the classroom in a metaphorical way. They are trying to get people to understand that these state-run schools are rooted in settler colonialism and they are dependent upon tools that have been used to terrorize and remove our people from their community. The MXA team is talking about building alternative school systems in our communities and building systems that will allow us to reimagine education and build skills that will enable our community members to self-determine their futures. I think this distinction that the MXA team is attempting to make is crucial to our understanding of community schools. MXA is not just about providing students with a different kind of education inside the classroom—this is not just the development of a standardized ethnic studies curriculum for a state-run school district. The project of Malcolm X Academy is a call to action within a generational struggle for Afrikan and Indigenous liberation on Turtle Island. But why now?

mel continued her reflection on the early stages of MXA's development as she discussed the important role community organizations have in organizing people in their community:

I believe that whatever those goals you might have as an organization, or as a group, we do not achieve those without education. And so I think a lot of people in a lot of different organizations in the summer of 2020 after George Floyd was murdered—we saw a lot of reactive measures happening. That's not the first time we've seen it, right? We saw Trayvon Martin murdered and we saw a reaction. We saw Mike Brown murdered and we saw a reaction. This has happened time and time again. Reactions but no organization. For me, what happened in 2020 amidst this pandemic was that there were some folks who were a part of a reaction and there were some folks who felt like they couldn't just react again. They said, I can't go back to a reactive life. They said, I really have to start thinking about what it means to build a future where this does not happen anymore—where we do not need to hit the streets, because another one of our Afrikan siblings has been murdered as a result of this white supremacist terror corporation that is the so called the United States of America. Right? And so I really started honing in on what it means to provide folks with a true education that makes clear what it is we are up against. And not just what we are up against, but also, how are we going to beat what we're up against? How have we claimed victories in the past? Right around the time I was noticing these developments among organizations and the reactionary movements Jordan had tapped in with me and we started building a lot together. Jordan is also an educator and about a year ago we started talking about what it would mean for us to start doing a free liberation school. And it was very general, very broad. We know we wanted to teach folks. Right after Jalil's class it ended up being a small group of us who began meeting regularly talking about building out a curriculum for liberation schools. We started posing questions like: what are the things that have helped us in our political development? What are the questions that we've had? What are things we needed to learn along the way to get to where we are now? How does one become politically educated to the point where they will literally stand up and say, I am a revolutionary and here's what that means for me and my community? At this point it was Fall of 2020 and Jordan came to me and was like, 'Yo, there's this church that has a spot for us to come twice a month on Fridays for a few hours. We can teach some babies for a little bit, get some groceries off, and check-in with the families—are you down to come in and collaborate with me as an educator in that space?' That was an easy yes for me. We had already been in conversations about what it would mean to be doing education for the youth. I knew that this is what needs to be done and this is what I'm going to do as an educator (Comrades Classroom Podcast, 2022).

Just as we discussed in the previous section, mel is demonstrating here how the MXA team did not just spontaneously come up with the idea to open a school—they utilized Neighbor Program’s connection to the community to study and understood the violent conditions people face. They recognized the political moment of the George Floyd Uprisings and connected that moment to the reactionary movements that erupted during past public executions of Afrikans in the past decade or so. The MXA team’s study of Pan-Afrikanism, Pedagogies of Resistance, and past liberation movements helped them to identify this moment with clarity and enabled them to develop solutions for the obstacles people were facing daily—these solutions manifested themselves via Neighbor Programs various decolonization programs. They knew political education was a huge part of this. If people do not know why they were living paycheck to paycheck—or if they do not know the history of settler-colonialism, how could they develop solutions to heal the root causes of their suffering?

Jordan jumped in to build on what mel was reflecting on. He provides us with a more detailed history of just how MXA developed out of the successes of their food distribution programs. When people within the community recognized how many people NP was feeding, they began to offer the team physical spaces to run their programs out of. Before this, NP was running programs out of members’ garages, kitchens, and borrowed spaces. Jordan explained that:

This first church that offered us space is what really opened me up to this idea of opening up a liberation school in 2020. It just all felt aligned. We started moving some of our programs into this one church in North Sac. Truthfully, it was difficult for us because the pastor was a little bit more conservative. It was an older Black Church you know. They moved at a different pace. He didn’t necessarily want to change us but he did want us to tone down our politic some. We still ended up working together. We did our Thanksgiving drive with them and we were able to do 250 turkeys in three different neighborhoods. That kind of perked up some ears in the community about who we were as an organization. Eventually some folks from a well-funded non-profit

reached out and said that they were getting ready to close their doors and they had some buildings and they would love to see if we would like to take over some. The second building that we saw was a church in Oak Park, about 20 minutes on the other side of Sac from the church we were currently partnering with. It was perfect. They already had a deal with the food bank and they were already running groceries out of the building. There's a black church there, it was on 4th Ave., and it had all of the makings of what a strong community center could look like. We knew what battling for land, for dignity, and for self determination meant to us. Now we would have a location to run our programs out of. Instantly we were able to run a legal clinic out of the building—that was our first day—we ran an expungement clinic for the community. We knew we would be able to run a health clinic. Open a school to teach the babies. This would allow us to connect with the community, farm with the babies and show them how to grow their own food. The kids and the community would be able to eat food they grew right in the neighborhood. How beautiful is that? We knew we could provide students a space to express their art. Again, all of these plans we immediately drew up are aligned with the core principles that our elders have taught us for decades. For us, it only made sense to take the building considering the amount of food that was already going out into the community. It's in the heart of a community that is fighting gentrification, that has a long history of Afrikan resistance—a deep Panther history. We couldn't allow that community to lose access to groceries. If nothing else, based on principle alone, we knew that the community could not afford to lose access to those groceries. As a team we decided we were gonna double down on that and we were gonna go all in. Ever since then we have been on this fundraising kick to really make this shake because we were not in a position financially to really do this. But again, we had faith in the politic we were walking in. All the pieces continued coming together at the right time. mel was able to come to be the Minister of Education; Dejay was able to come to be the Minister of Curriculum; Marcus is able to support as a consultant. We had different folks [on the Neighbor Program team] who have been volunteers and they are now stepping into leadership roles within our different decolonization programs. At the time I knew there was something special happening and it all kind of centered around us getting this building. I knew that my ancestors had sacrificed too much for us to not fight this battle. For us to not answer this call. And again, I'm a believer. I heard God tell me to do this. So I jumped off the ledge. I've had this on my heart for eight years. For eight years I've been wanting to open a school. Now the timing was here. The team was here. And I think, you know, God had to evolve me; life had to evolve me; my politics had to evolve—all of those things (Bilal, 2022).

This moment seemed like a perfect time for the NP team to finally carry out their dream of opening a liberation school grounded in the principles of militant education. Like Jordan said, on principle

alone, they had to at least attempt to build this educational project—even if it failed, the learning guides felt that it was their duty to try.

Jordan continued his reflection:

When mel and I say that we talked to God and that we talked to our ancestors—this isn't some crazy thing. This level of reflection is rooted in Afrikan practice. These are the practices that we intend to bring to the school. We are Afrikans who engage in Afrikan practices and we are not ashamed of being Afrikan. We are not ashamed of being Afrikan. When we said we were building a school we knew we were going to build an Afrikan school because we're not ashamed of being Afrikan. This was our duty. We are Afrikan educators and we're going to open an Afrikan school. For us, as long as we tried there was no failing. As scientific socialists, we are supposed to try; we are supposed to experiment; we are supposed to fuck up and fail and fall on your face and say get back up and continue to get better every day. You can't get better if you never mess up. So we try to get better every day. That's what we're here to do. To get better for the people, for our community—we wanted to try to put our people in a better position than they were in yesterday (Comrades Classroom Podcast, 2022).

Without fear, the MXA team was steadfast in their commitment to open a school for Afrikans in so-called Sacramento. For me, it was beautiful to see how each and every decision they made was grounded in the ideologies developed by their revolutionary ancestors.

The ancestors were not the only ones who granted the team permission to continue this struggle. Ericka Huggins herself—former Black Panther and Director of the Oakland Community School—was one of the many elders the MXA team consulted as they developed the plans for Malcolm X Academy. mel was the first to reflect on our conversation with Ericka Huggins and Angela LeBlanc-Ernest, founder of the Oakland Community School research cluster at UCI. This moment was a blessing. How often are you given the chance to sit down with an elder of the Black Liberation Movement and share knowledge? For the MXA team, this was the second time in a year that they've

been able to sit down with an elder to discuss the framework of a liberation school. mel began her reflection highlighting this moment:

I think being able to have the opportunity to meet Ericka Huggins and share this project with her was the most invaluable experience I probably have ever had as an educator. Before we started recording [this interview] I was just talking about how when I started learning more about the Panthers and I heard about the role of Minister of Education. My eyes lit up like a five year old. I want to be like that—that's what I want to be. That's really honestly the first time that I've had one of those moments. I've never been the type of child who was like 'when I grow up, I want to be this.' I never had a definitive answer. And so to me that that speaks to how this has been a calling and a passion for me. Meeting Ericka, hearing what she had to say, and being able to watch some of the video footage from the Oakland Community School with her was really motivating. Ericka kept saying to us that this school has got to be successful. OCS became the longest running program of the Black Panther Party in Oakland because their intention was there. They talked about how they weren't paying their educators at first. They talked about how they were in this grant writing process trying to get things together. They talked about how they had to involve the community to really pull all of the things together to make it happen. What they came back to is that they had the people who were going to do the job. They had people with intention who were going to get it done one way or another. And that's really what you need to build a school like this. Hearing that felt really motivating and honestly, it is something that I keep coming back to in any moment of doubt or anything like that. I keep coming back to this intention and knowing that that is all we need to make it happen. Having the opportunity to share our work with her and to see that she was really rocking with it blew my mind. A lot of the things that they were telling us about the Oakland Community Schools lined up with what we were thinking about for our school. A lot of the things we were telling them about our vision sparked memories for them about their early conversations about opening up a school. This was really inspiring for me and helped me to know that we were moving different; we were moving in the right direction. Our team was ready. We have people committed and prepared to get our kids in the studio recording their own music and recording their own podcast. We have a newspaper that is ready and already operating to get kids to be able to submit their writing, their artwork, and their photography. We have the expungement clinic that is ready, willing, and operating in the community to work on clearing records for family members of children that attend the school. We can provide legal support for our families. We have barbers ready to come in and give the babies haircuts. We have Jordan's wife ready to make lotion for the babies. There will not be ashy babies at our school! The community is fully bought in. That is one thing that Ericka and her team kept coming back to. The community needs to be in it

and our community is in it. We have the most amazing team. I could talk about our team for hours and days but I think that's really what I took away from that meeting with Ericka. You got to have the community and you got to have the intention. We have both of those things (Bilal, 2022).

I really can't express how important that meeting was for our team. We were able to share space with someone who was a core organizer in the Black Panther Party and was at one point the Director of the Oakland Community School. She took the time to sit down with us, listen to our ideas, and share knowledge about how we can incorporate some of the Panther's practices into the daily fabric of our school. What a blessing!

Jordan followed up Mel's comments with a reflection of his own:

Ericka and the Oakland Community School have heavily influenced my teaching for the last five or six years. Sitting down and speaking with her about any of these teaching practices that I utilize was amazing. She talked about some things that I already studied but she also talked about some things that only she holds from her memory of OCS. Hearing those things was affirmation that we were taking the right steps as we opened our school. Ericka confirmed for me that we were trying the right things, asking the right questions, and moving in the right direction. Speaking with Ericka, you can hear and see how impactful this school was for her and the community. The pride in dignity that she carried in her voice when she talked about the school was inspiring. The dignity and the pride that children had when talking about the school—former students who are now adults—was inspiring. We got to hear about what some of these OCS alumni are doing because of their experience at the school. As an educator, I have lost so many babies to these streets. I have had to bury so many of my students. This is everything for me. For Ericka to say 'yes, you are on the right path' was incredible. Like She gave us the nod. I couldn't believe we were here. It felt like we had finally arrived in the moment. No one probably believed in OCS when it started. People probably don't believe in us. But Ericka did. That was all the confirmation we needed. It was a huge push for us to continue this process (Comrades Classroom Podcast, 2022).

Following this conversation, it felt like Malcolm X Academy for Afrikan education was officially born.

After speaking with Ericka, it felt like there was no deterring our team from our mission. Each of us

had spent years feeling empty and unfulfilled as educators and we arrived at a moment where we felt we could finally do right by our people.

Soon after this conversation our entire team planned a visit to the Shakur Center so that we could envision and map out what MXA could look like in this space. The learning guides wrote about this planning experience in a Neighbor Newspaper article:

We also had the entire Malcolm X Academy leadership team in the center during the 2nd weekend of March. We were able to plan and map out so many next steps in preparation of building out a Liberation School in Oak Park. We designed walls and rooms, we created team units and projects, we created plans for school day structure and for community building. We were blessed to have veteran Panthers and Panther Cubs visit the Shakur Center to canvas the projects with us to give out information about our Free Food Program. It was beautiful to see the group move so naturally; Afrikans of all different generations working together, talking to each other, talking with other Afrikans in the neighborhood, runnin down a quick “who we are” for those asking. It filled me with so much joy. It was this joy that brought me to introduce the rest of the team to Miss Margie (an Afrikan elder and neighbor of MXA who plans to send her granddaughter to our school). As we all spoke about our vision for the Center and the school Miss Margie said, ‘yall go ahead and wake this neighborhood up.’ It has resonated with us all month—it sounded like Miss Margie’s voice reflected a renewed sense of pride in her neighborhood (Neighbor Newspaper, 2021).

Two years following these conversations and planning meetings, I can sit here and tell you with confidence that this team has more than accomplished their goals. From Jalil’s class, to that meeting with Ericka Huggins, all the way up to the school’s opening day, this team did everything they said they were going to. Malcolm X Academy for Afrikan education has been open for two school years and we have already started planning sessions for year three. MXA is a school modeled after the militant education projects we outlined in Chapter Four. Most importantly, it is inspired by and deeply connected to the Black Panther Party’s Oakland Community School which operated from 1973 to 1982. Over the past two school years, MXA has worked to educate our scholars using

traditional Afrikan and liberatory methods that rely on praxis, theory, and history and guide the framework of the school. Our scholars have been given the opportunity to learn through action and practice, creation and building—we've given them the space to embody the natural learning process of trial and error. Malcolm X Academy was founded on the shoulders of all the revolutionaries who championed the importance of education, who launched literacy programs in their communities, and who built community schools for the people. Just as the Panthers declared, “we want an education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society. We want an Education that teaches us our true history and our role in the present day society,” (Black Panther Party, 1966).

In honor of the Panthers, the MXA team refuses to stand by passively and wait for the American empire to provide our people with a dignified education. They have built it themselves (Neighbor Newspaper, 2022). The MXA team is proud to have opened a liberation school in the historic neighborhood of Oak Park—the same neighborhood where the Sacramento chapter of the BPP was headquartered. Opened in 2022 and still operating in 2024, MXA continues to uphold the long history and tradition of Afrikan resistance by teaching our children the true nature of themselves and the society they live in. The MXA team has cherished every moment over the past two years and for me personally, it has been an honor to witness the genius and beauty of the children that guide our school. What remains of this chapter is a celebration of their achievements and the documented journey that got them to where they are today.

MXA's Political Struggle for Space

Throughout this narrative so far, we have seen the different ways that Neighbor Program and Malcolm X Academy have engaged in a political struggle for space within their community. For the first two years of the organization's life, the NP team operated their programs out of cars, garages, living rooms, and they hosted events in spaces owned by partner organizations in the community. At different stages throughout this struggle for space, even my partner and I have had our garage and living room filled with excess supplies for the Free Breakfast program and the Assata Shakur Freedom Farm that could not be stored at the Shakur Center or, most recently, the Shakur House. This struggle for space is inherently political.

During the height of the pandemic, the city of Sacramento was given \$25 million dollars to develop shelters and different programs for unhoused residents in the city. Nine months later, the people of Sacramento still have not seen a penny of that fund spent (Clift, 2024). There are dozens of nonprofits throughout the city who receive hundreds of thousands of dollars in funding from the city and a large percentage of those funds never even get used for the programs they claim to run. A recent audit revealed that the state of California did not have any meaningful data or outcome tracking of the billions of dollars it has spent on "homelessness initiatives," (Hoover, 2024). Where is that money going?

In my time with NP, I have applied to countless city and state grants but we have not been able to secure any meaningful funds. Most of our funding has come from community donations, donations from NBA players, and a few state grants. Even in these scenarios, we have had to distill and filter the political aspects of Neighbor Program in our applications so that we do not get turned away

for being *too radical*. While the city sits on millions of dollars in funding, organizations like NP struggle to even find space to store food, water, farming equipment, school supplies, etc. These are intentional political decisions being made by the city. If they wanted to solve the issues unhoused people face, they would. If they wanted to develop schools that serve the interests of Afrikans in so-called Sacramento, they would. But the reality is, they do not want to and they will not. These cities and their politicians are committed to uplifting the capitalist system implemented by the settler-colonial government of the so-called United States; the history we studied throughout Chapter 2 verifies this claim. Knowing the solutions to their struggle for funding and space will never be solved by the city and their well-funded nonprofits, how does NP understand and engage in this political struggle for space?

In July of 2022, Neighbor Program officially lost their rights to the Shakur Center on 4th avenue. To invoke the words of an Afrikan giant, Nipsey Hussle, “even if it was temporary, at least we had the shit.” This was a line Jordan repeated to our team consistently as a reminder of the beautiful things we accomplished at the Shakur Center alongside the children of MXA. In an essay, Jordan wrote to the community updating them on the status of our time at the Center: “capitalism mandates that rent and bills be paid, and we don’t got it y’all,” (McGowan, 2022). We spent months trying to figure out how we could raise enough funds to keep operating our programs out of the Shakur Center. As an organization, it was estimated that we put in approximately \$25,000 of time, money, and labor into renovating the Shakur Center. We redesigned the entire landscape. We got Habitat for Humanity to donate a new \$16,000 gate at the entrance of the building and they also replaced the entire wooden fence on the eastern side of the building that was blown over during the 2022 storms. We invested so

much time, labor, and money into this building—and our landlord knew this. As much as the landlord claimed to love and appreciate the programs we offered to the community, the only thing he really cared about was our rent checks. We could not afford the \$5,500 monthly rent checks in addition to our bills and costs of operating programs like Malcolm X Academy. As soon as the opportunity was presented to him, he kicked us out of the building and sold it. Within weeks, the new tenants destroyed the farm that we built, painted over the red, black, and green stripes of the building, and painted over the Black Panther on the basketball court—entirely erasing the memory of Afrikan resistance that we tried so hard to rebuild on that 4th Ave. block. In that essay I mentioned above, Jordan reflected on how painful losing this building was for our team:

At Neighbor Program, we preach the need for community, unity and vulnerability; well it is time to put that into practice. We are struggling, just like so many of us, due to the conditions kkkapitalism forces upon us. Yes, we know it looks great on social media; and to be honest, it's truly even more beautiful and breathtaking to experience it all firsthand. But the truth of the matter is, despite how good it looks; all them Instagram likes, reposts, followers, even the number of grocery boxes given out and the babies being taught to love themselves here at the Shakur Center, kkkapitalism mandates that rent and bills be paid. And we don't got it yall. These babies connect with the land, with the people, with each other, with the walls and floors, to the park down the street and the music we like to listen to. They have connected to our hearts forever. They have connected themselves to the history of 4th Ave, Oak Park, Sacramento, California, Afrikan Resistance, Pan-Afrikanism, and the Liberation of Our People forever. I am so fortunate to have been forever changed by this first year at Malcolm X Academy and even though we will need to be in a new location next year, we trust that by leaning into our community and showing the babies our demonstration, the good and the bad, we can push forward Our People's fight for liberation. What we have done at 3841 will forever be important. The people we fed over our time here will forever be a testament of our love and work for the people. The hundreds of people being fed every month should show you the very real need our community is in, and who will serve and fight for the Afrikans in Oak Park if we are forced to relocate out of the P? We are calling on everyone who supports who we are, what we do, and more importantly the future of the MXA babies; our future as Afrikans, we need your support to continue this work. We are busy at work trying to

write grants, we are trying to find a new headquarters, we are trying to fundraise, because what we do know is that our work can't stop. Not because of one person, not because we are the vanguard, but because we have too many Afrikans to let down if we do. We represent a history and tradition of Maroons/Panthers and we intend to serve Our People until we can no longer serve. Part of our service is to demonstrate for the People that there is something better for us than what amerikkka has to offer, which is community. Community will save us; from our financial hardships and crimes of survival to the destruction of the evil empire that has long oppressed us. The only way we can defeat the evil the world will throw at us is through holding on close to each other, learning to love ourselves and each other so that we can get back to living in ways that make sense to us as Afrikans (McGowan, 2022).

And just like that, Neighbor Program was forced out of the Shakur Center. We can see how painful this process was for the NP team. It was even harder seeing the students suffer from decisions made by a wealthy landlord. At this moment, the NP team really felt as if they had failed their community and the babies that attend their school—but, at the end of the day, these are the conditions that our people have faced for decades.

In Chapter Four, we studied different organizations and we saw the different ways they engaged in a deep struggle for space within their respective communities. They all faced different forms of warfare that aimed to destabilize their organizing capacity. For the NP team, this has manifested itself as a financial war against the organization. While lack of funding and access to resources is one aspect of this war, the NP team has also seen their bank account mysteriously shut down on two different occasions. These actions felt like targeted attacks on an organization that publicly dedicates its work to the struggle for Afrikan liberation. The loss of the Shakur Center felt like another targeted attack on their organization. They hosted a number of conversations with their landlord who initially showed interest in working with the team on rent payments and tax write-offs. Immediately following these discussions, the building received an influx of cash offers and the

landlord put the Center up for sale. The landlord refused to give the NP team time to come up with their own funding to try and make a bid for the building—he had no interest in allowing us to stay at the Center. While all these business decisions could have been coincidental, knowing the history of government attempts to destabilize revolutionary organizations, this felt like another targeted attack against Neighbor Program and the Afrikan community of a gentrifying Oak Park.

The team said goodbye to the Shakur Center in July of 2022 and quickly transitioned into a small house a few blocks away on 33rd Street—they named it: the Shakur House. The team was ecstatic to have been able to stay in Oak Park. For a few months, it felt as if the organization was going to be forced out of the neighborhood entirely. Instead, they were able to secure a small house through a friend of the organization who wanted to support Neighbor Program by offering the team an affordable space to operate MXA and the Free Grocery program. The organization vowed to “continue the work no matter where we are, who we are working with, and/or what our name is,” (Neighbor Newspaper, 2023). In a conversation I had with Jordan and mel, they reflected on this political struggle for space. mel started off our conversation:

This has been a deep struggle. Buildings are expensive. Our new building is small but we’re making it work. It has limited us in a lot of ways though. I can really see the impact on the learners who are all constantly navigating how to share such small space with each other. It can make it harder to get them to focus. Or to get them to stop fighting with each other. It’s limited our ability to have more free play throughout the day and allow learners to get some of their energy out in between learning blocks. It’s also almost gutted our farming program because NP still has to navigate running all of its other programs alongside a community school which means sometimes outdoor space is tighter than it already is and we haven’t really been able to find space to bring that farming curriculum back into the mix for learners on a regular basis. Land and space would make a huge difference for our work in so many ways (Bilal, 2024).

Jordan built on this discussion about the struggle for space:

We had all the space and none of the money so now we have a little space and a little bit of money. Because of our inability to sustain ourselves on 4th at the center we have lost the Assata Shakur Freedom Farm, we have struggled to maintain our health/wellness & legal clinics, which also served as a market day which MXA scholars were able to vend at. Our smaller space this year has made it a challenge for students to focus at times when they feel so bunched in, when there are too many sounds, stimuli, etc. Rainy days are extremely hard, as the kids have nowhere to put their energy (Bilal, 2024).

This transition has been a struggle for everyone involved. For the babies, for the learning guides, and for the community members who benefit from the various programs NP was able to operate out of the larger Center. While the house has still been able to provide a space for the Free Grocery Program, the Free Breakfast Program, and Malcolm X Academy, we can see how this transition has shifted NP ability to meet the needs of their community members and their scholars.

Through all of this, the team of learning guides at MXA have been able to find glimpses of joy and positivity. We can hear it in a reflection they wrote for one of the more recent issues of Neighbor Newspaper:

The Shakur House is beginning to feel more like home and we are beginning to find our rhythm. We continue to expand the number of families we serve through our Free Food Program every month, we are bringing back more in-person programming for October, and are back to two monthly breakfast program distributions on Sundays. We are excited to continue to grow MXA as well as lay down a demonstration that can serve as a foundation for other communities to build liberation schools in a similar manner. While the Shakur Center is missed, we truly believe what we are doing at the Shakur House on 33rd might be more important because it demonstrates just what is possible. We are operating out of a trap house and we have not stopped or even slowed down serving the people. We hope that our tribe's work brings Afrikans a sense of pride; that our efforts in the name of Afrikan Liberation fill your heart with a love that moves us closer to freedom (Neighbor Newspaper, 2023).

Most importantly, I feel it is important for us to highlight how this transition has impacted the babies of MXA. How has the MXA team flipped this moment into a learning experience for both the learning guides and the scholars?

mel reflects on this impact in an essay she wrote for Neighbor Newspaper:

As y'all may or may not know, Malcolm X Academy has had to downsize our facilities this year. We went from the penthouse suite overlooking the neighborhood to an old trap house in the cut. It's been hard and also pretty amazing. The kids have been having a really hard time adjusting. We can all see it and are finding ways to make it work. In the meantime, a lot of what we've been doing is teaching the kids what it means to share space - how to share space. and how to balance that alongside their own needs. I could keep writing but I feel like the point has maybe been made. Every day, I feel grateful for the opportunity I have to help shape a different way of approaching things. It is by no means easy and the colonial propaganda/mindset is deep. To use some big words for a bit: the nature of imperialism and colonial governments is nefarious and devoid of any system of value outside of global domination and resource-hoarding. everything they do from the way they set up their schooling systems to the alliances they form and the military stances they take are all in service of those ultimate goals. and the ways they've set up their entire process of schooling and political education is a masterful show of the diligence and attention these governments pay to instilling an embodied loyalty and sense of nationhood in their masses. it is something that latches onto us even as infants. It is why me and my family are holding this school. It is why we choose to be honest with our babies about what is going on in the world and why. It is why we practice a rigorous level of holding ourselves and our babies accountable to our community agreements about how we will carry out sharing space together. The enemy has been at work - molding our babies into who they want them to be. We are choosing to combat that with our own form of militant education - rooted in, because of and only possible with, love (Neighbor Newspaper, 2022).

Through this transition the babies have had to learn how to share space differently. The scholars went from having a three story church building with more than enough space to run around and make connections with the land. Now, they're in a smaller space with little to no outside space aside from the big park they walk too just up the block. The learning guides and the children have had to

collectively consider how to share the space in a way that honors our Afrikan and Indigenous principles of community and collective living. How can we create this new space together? How can we bring what we created at the Shakur Center to the Shakur House? How are we sharing space together? Moving into a smaller space has forced the children, learning guides, and family members of MXA to directly engage in this process of space making.

I'll conclude this section by leaning on the words of NP's founder:

Our time on 4th ave. will be remembered forever by the people who have experienced it. The love that is here is undeniably and indescribable but it is the most special thing I've ever felt. Long Live The Shakur Center & the LOVE that the center has housed! (Neighbor Newspaper, 2023).

Organizational Capacity and the Role of Learning Guides

Afrikan children aren't the only ones suffering from within the confines of state-funded compulsory schools—their teachers are also largely dissatisfied with the realities they face as educators within the colonial school system. According to recent reports, Afrikan educators were more than twice as likely to leave the teaching profession in comparison to educators of European descent (Levy, 2023). Indigenous North, South, and Central American educators were just as likely to leave the profession as Afrikan educators. State-run schools are frequently in search of ways to recruit Afrikan and Indigenous educators but they have no plans in place to actually retain them—such as empowering them to shape the policies and curricula that guide the school (Levy, 2023). Afrikan and Indigenous educators “are more likely to be uncertified or teaching in an underfunded district, all of which is associated with someone leaving the profession at a higher rate,” (Levy, 2023). They are suffering from obstacles like burnout, low-salaries, job-related stress, and high intentions of leaving the

professions—each of these marks are notably higher than their peers of European descent (Pottiger, 2023)

In my conversations with the Afrikan and Indigenous learning guides at MXA, their experiences as educators are strikingly similar to the experiences our students have faced. All of them have been pushed out of state-run schools for the methods and curricula they employed to educate their students. Many of them stated that they publicly went against the wishes of their administrators who frequently requested that they teach a different version of Afrikan and Indigenous history to their children (Bilal, 2023). This aligns with the nationwide push to erase history and disguise the genocidal nature of the so-called United States. According to a recent Rand Corp. survey, 1 in 4 teachers have been told by school officials or district leaders to “limit their classroom conversations about race, racism or bias,” (McGowan, 2022). Even today, teachers are being targeted, threatened, and placed on leave for speaking out about the genocide of Palestinians in Gaza (Masunaga, 2023).

This is nothing new for Afrikan and Indigenous educators. In an essay that we quoted early titled, *The Empire’s Evil Education*, Jordan discussed the reality that Afrikan and Indigenous educators face in state-run compulsory schools:

As an Afrikan educator, the question becomes how long can I allow this type of culture to persist in my workplace? How long would you be able to suffer through this type of pervasive anti-Afrikan sentiment? Who would want to subject themselves to working in an environment where they are asked to shrink their humanity? This is the plight of Afrikan educators inside the colonial education system. When should you stand up for yourself and your students, for our collective human rights and dignity? Or do you need to make sure your bills are paid? This is why so many of us are confined to a type of wage-slavery that holds our rebellion in check. Due to the limited numbers of Afrikans within education, many Afrikan educators do not want to rock the boat for fear of losing their job. Afrikan educators need to be able to freely be themselves and teach in a liberated fashion if we want to truly impact our youth. While

the mainstream conversation centers around critical race theory, the only true education can come from a liberated learning and militant pedagogy. That puts us in front of another problem that faces us as Afrikans within the [so-called United States]; so many of our Afrikan educators still see themselves in that [mythical Black Middle Class] and want to build a better America [alongside the colonizers]. This identity crisis waters down the educational movement because it allows for symbolic victories and catchphrases that serve as illusions of progress. No amount of cultural representation in a settler-colonial system can make up for the impacts an anti-Afrikan education system has on Afrikan children and educators (McGowan, 2021).

Jordan was spot on here and the data backs up his claims. Afrikan educators want nothing more than to be able to teach their children in a liberatory way. Many enter the profession as first-generation college students who feel a duty and cultural responsibility to give back to Afrikan youth. They want to be educators. They want to inspire and support students in every facet of their development. This commitment to the youth often draws Afrikan and Indigenous educators into “hard-to-teach areas, Title 1 schools, and buildings that are underfunded and lacking resources,” (Pottiger, 2023). Trying to transform a school that is inherently committed to upholding white supremacy and that status quo maintained by settler colonialism as an exhausting task. And many teachers, like their students, might not have a total grasp on the history of settler colonial education and they may be unaware why they are having such traumatic responses to the violences they face as educators within these schools. Afrikan educators go into education because of their deep love for helping children grow and learn. The data shows that Afrikan teachers have the strongest relationships with their students and this trend is on an upward tick (Pottiger, 2023). The question that sits on the minds of educators at MXA is: what type of education system can we build that is safe for both Afrikan and Indigenous educators and their students?

When thinking about teacher capacity, the MXA team knows that our educators deserve better. Just like the children, they deserve a life filled with dignity, safety, and peace. How have they built their capacity to grow and learn as learning guides while simultaneously trying to co-design an entire school alongside the community of Oak Park? Through my conversations with the learning guides of MXA, three themes emerged as we discussed the different ways they worked to build capacity amongst their team: collectivism, horizontal leadership structure, community buy-in, and mentorship. Let's start with collectivism. In one of our interviews, mel brilliantly captures that collective nature of the MXA team:

Me and my team have spent the last year surviving alongside each other. It hasn't been easy. But it's also been kind of beautiful. I've transformed in this process in ways that are pretty tough to put into words. And I'm mostly able to sit in full awe, grace, support and wonder of myself every day. It's a pretty wild place to be in for someone like me. Mind, heart, spirit. Not always perfectly aligned or strategically balanced—but working. I am grateful. I have been witnessing our team of less than perfect people showing up when they can, how they can, and sometimes not at all—but a group of individuals who each decided that r/evolution is love and they have been taking different-sized steps towards that decision ever since. Steps to build each other up. Steps to love and support one another. Steps to pour into a shared vision to create a liberation school for young Afrikans to be able to pull up to and not be traumatized, propagandized, and otherwise harassed during the formative years of their lives. Me and the team—our community—have spent the past year just kind of making it work for us. Piecing it together week to week: you good? Who needs a pep talk? Who can pull up on which day and for how long and what can you do when you're here? Clearly we've been making it work! and, nothing has come without sacrifice. I don't think any of us takes for granted any of the sacrifices that have come with our decisions to commit to the practice of r/evolutionary love. I know I don't (charles, 2024).

Iron sharpens iron. We can see the type of community and collectivism that has been built amongst the team at MXA—it is a true family environment. We make space and time to share meals together, we spend time with each other's families, we all pull up to support Jordan's youngest son at his

basketball tournaments, and the team is always invited to his babies birthday parties. We share something so much deeper than a job title at a school. This team has built a community and the love that we share is something that has driven their capacity to continue this work.

Within this community that we have built the MXA team has had to reimagine their working relationships with one another. In typical schools, organizations, and business within the so-called United States, teams rely on a hierarchical decision making structure where each person has a direct supervisor and there is a specific top-down process that outlines how decisions get made. Hierarchical decision making structures like these “invite abuse, reproduce racism, sexism, ableism, ageism and other patterns of oppression,” (Spade, 2021). Horizontalism, on the other hand, is a form of “participatory decision making” that utilizes consensus and teams to “cultivate meaningful collective control” and prevent the power dynamics that emerge in hierarchical decision making models (Spade, 2020). Horizontal leadership is a democratic tool that empowers collectives of workers with significant influence and autonomy over decisions that are made for the larger organization. Within horizontal organizations, teams are structured in a way that centers the main issues and goals of the organization at large rather than the will of one individual who is seen as the primary leader, owner, stakeholder, etc. In this model, teams, not individuals, are the cornerstone of the organization. This framework empowers teams to organize themselves around particular goals and tasks that are positive for the organization as a whole. Utilizing this model, no one person can dictate how a team or organization operates—decisions and action steps are made collectively and both individuals and teams are held accountable to the goals and needs of the organization at large (Spade, 2021).

The MXA team believes that this model invites people to generate more wisdom collectively because they are able to think of solutions and plans together during weekly team meetings. What things are going well? What can we improve on? What action items do we need to accomplish in the coming weeks? Which team or pair of individuals is going to carry out certain action items? Constant feedback and check-ins with the entire team is essential because then each member is afforded the opportunity to provide feedback and knowledge about every decision made within the organization. When people have a say in the decisions being made, they often implement the work more thoroughly and with greater care for their work. For the learning guides at MXA, horizontal decision-making structures invite people to share, build, and hone their skills in a way that enables everyone to share the responsibility of what is happening on a day to day, or week to week basis. With horizontal group structures, our teams can be people building machines where an individual's capacity is nurtured in a way that benefits the community at large. In one of the interviews I did with mel and Jordan, we discussed the ideal structure for the teams that make up Neighbor Program and MXA. At the end of the day, this organization is small. There is a core team of 7 learning guides and a handful of 20 volunteers that keep all of NP's programs running smoothly. Within this team structure, Jordan believes that "we're at our best when our different programs have at least two learning guides or coordinators," (Bilal, 2023).

Even in smaller organizations, NP has demonstrated that horizontal decision-making structures are still important. Even if you only have two people leading a particular project or program, the decisions are made and feedback is provided by the larger team of members and volunteers. This model worked the same at the school. With a total of only fifteen students enrolled, MXA did not

have an issue with ratios. On most days we had three to four learning guides in the space helping guide the babies through their school day. On some days, we only have two learning guides. On occasions, one person was left to run the school by themselves. Throughout these different experiences, the MXA team came to the conclusion that the programs operate most effectively when there are at least two team members present to help coordinate any given program (Bilal, 2024). In this way, individuals can better execute horizontal decision-making structures and the learning guides can feel more supported by other members of the team.

If we're keeping it real. This model is not perfect nor does the MXA team believe it's fully sustainable for the long haul. At the moment, everyone on the team is working full time jobs to support themselves and their families in addition to their work with Neighbor Program and MXA. We still live in a capitalist system unfortunately and the team has learned that it is incredibly difficult to receive funds for this type of schooling. To sustain this effort, the MXA team believes that they will need to find a way to pay at least two members to work at the school full time. With a fraction of the funding most schools receive, MXA could operate for years. This conclusion is not an exaggeration, this is based on their experiences over the past two years operating the school on less than \$2,000 a month. With proper funding, there is no telling what this team could build for the babies at MXA.

Let us move our discussion forward to talk about how community buy-in has been essential to the organizational capacity of MXA. Much like the Zapatistas True Education System, the MXA team of learning guides has had to utilize their horizontal organizational structure to be uplifted by the community. If you remember our discussion on the Zapatistas True Education System, the community was responsible for taking care of the education promoters who did not earn a salary for

their work. Instead, the community provided them with housing, food, health care, and all of their other basic needs. At MXA, although the community did not have the capacity to provide the learning guides with things like housing and health care, there was an abundance of resource and labor sharing that allowed for them to work for the school without an additional salary. All of the learning guides relied on the Free Grocery Program and the Assata Shakur Freedom Farm to ease the burden of buying foods from the store—many of us could not afford the healthy foods that we received for free through the grocery program and the farm. In addition to resources, the families of the school and the neighborhood community came together to support us and they made sure that we weren't tasked with running the entire school by ourselves. They helped with organizing the decolonization programs, janitorial labor at the school, landscaping around the school grounds, leading reading circles for the babies, cooking meals for the entire school, and so much more. Parents and community members of the MXA students became functional members of the organization. This level of community buy-in is what has enabled the MXA learning guides to successfully operate the school for the past two years.

Another aspect of their capacity building has been mentorship. Previously, we discussed how the team at MXA is full of well-trained learning guides who have over two decades of collective teaching experience and years of graduate school study. Even in the eyes of the colonial school system, this team is full of elite educators who have proven themselves at the highest levels of education. While each learning guide has spent time in their personal lives studying to become an educator and building relationships with various mentors who have carried them along for this journey, the team also sought out mentors who could specifically help them with the development of MXA. As we noted above,

they called in elder Ericka Huggins and the research cluster at UCI who is leading the Oakland Community School research project to share knowledge and space with their team. These relationships have greatly shaped the work that they do at MXA and helped build the capacity of their learning guides. One of these mentors was a Ph.D. candidate from the University of Brasilia. In an essay for Neighbor Newspaper, Jordan explains Ellen's role as a mentor for the MXA learning guides during the summer before the school opened:

We had the dopest few weeks with our newest comrade Ellen Cintra from Brazil. Ellen is an Afrikan educator and Ph.D. candidate at the University of Brasilia where she has been researching the Black Panther Party's Oakland Community School(OCS). Her research led her to connect with Ms. Ericka Huggins, Director of OCS and veteran Panther, who referred her to Ms. Jil Christina Vest at the West Oakland Mural House & Mini-Museum. Ms. Jil told Ellen about the work we have been doing out here and Ellen first visited the Shakur Center for our Free Grocery Program and Malcolm X Day. She decided to come back and spend three weeks with us before returning to Brazil. Our time with Ellen was beautiful! Ellen jumped right into the daily activities at the Shakur Center and became a fully embraced Neighbor Program member through her radical love for all Afrikans. Ellen was able to share so much wisdom with us; through Ellen's conversations, we were allowed to learn and connect with Afrikan traditions and practices from throughout the Diaspora. Ellen's visit was another reminder of the power of Pan-Afrikanism. Ellen told us that she was able to 'find home' at the Shakur Center; she said this was because of the love we had for Afrikan People. That is exactly what the Shakur Center should be. A Pan-Afrikan embassy where our People can find safety, freedom, and love (Neighbor Newspaper, 2022).

Ellen is not the only mentor who brought wisdom and experience to MXA and their team of learning guides. Throughout my time as the Minister of Pedagogy, I have seen the team rely on the knowledge and skills of dozens of community members who have come in and shared their skills with the team and the students at MXA. These partnerships and collaborations brought in a wealth of knowledge to the students. While I will dive deeper into their impact on MXAs curriculum and pedagogy in the next

two chapters, I feel it is important to note here the many different ways these community practitioners have contributed to building the capacity of the MXA team.

Leaning on their commitment to horizontalism and collective decision making, the learning guides of the school knew that they needed to rely on the community to help fill in the gaps that their team did not have the capacity to fill. If the babies wanted to learn more about horsemanship, health and wellness, comic books, art, farming, and photography, the team knew that it would be beneficial to bring in community practitioners who are experts at their respective craft. While the MXA learning guides may be expert educators, they are not experts in every topic, field, and art form. Building these relationships with mentors and practitioners in the community was essential to the organizational capacity of the team.

As we conclude this section, I think it is important for us to reflect on the ways that unity and community support uplifted the organizational capacity of Malcolm X Academy. Jordan wrote about the importance of these relationships in an essay for Neighbor Newspaper:

We have built relationships with the neighbors: Miss Margie, Chili, Black & the rest of the OGs at The Big Park, Mike and Mr. Lonnie, to name a few. These are some of the Afrikans that have been in community with us and what I find in retrospect is that although I stand on and preach Pan-Afrikan unity, I wasn't fully confident that we would be accepted in the community. But as we came with love, we were also met with love. As we came with humanity, we were met with humanity. As we spoke to the community it was evident the same way we loved the people, the people loved us. And for the exact same reason too; because we recognized each other as one. This has reminded me that our people naturally love each other. Let us not deny our history; whether that be on the enslavement camps known as plantations, the ships that brought us across the Middle Passage, or our communities on the Continent itself. We have always been communal in practice: family, clan, tribe, village, set, street, block, hood. This is why being in community with the people is the most important aspect of anything we can do in building out programs (Neighbor Newspaper, 2022).

And this has proven true. Just like the education promoters of the Zapatistas, the learning guides at MXA have had to fully lean into the community who have made sure the team has everything they need to survive and operate the school. The community has collaborated with the team and helped to take on the responsibility of making sure Malcolm X Academy could open its doors and most importantly, keep its doors open. Without this level of unity, discipline, and coordination, a militant education school like this would not be able to sustain itself. The history we studied in Chapter 4 and the direct experiences of the MXA learning guides are clear demonstrations of the importance of collectivism.

Chapter Six—From Pedagogies of Resistance to Pedagogies of Love

There's no weapon that is stronger than the power of the people—because we live for the people—because we love the people—we walk with the people because we are the people.

—Jordan McGowan (*founder of Neighbor Program*)

Inside of compulsory public schools in the so-called United States, students are often told what to learn, how to learn, and when to learn. At Malcolm X Academy, the learning guides utilize pedagogical methods that work to instill a wide-range of social and political consciousness into their scholars. These methods have been developed and implemented within the framework of Neighbor Programs political ideologies and they are nurtured within the organizations decolonization programs that have provided scholars with a space to develop practical skills and knowledge relevant to the liberation of all people and their communities. For MXA learning guides, *education is a practice*. They believe that you cannot simply teach your students about resistance, liberation struggle, and systemic oppression without also providing them with pathways for practice, implementation, and analysis. While many scholars research and write about topics related to power and oppression, MXA learning guides do not believe this work can be seen as transformative or revolutionary if said scholars are not finding ways to apply their work in “tangible efforts towards liberation,” (charles, 2023). In an essay titled, *Who is the Scholar Activist*, MXA’s Minister of Curriculum, mel charles, discusses the concept of dialectical materialism and what it means to be a militant educator:

The Black Panther Party, who studied Mao and practiced dialectical materialism, understood their role as revolutionary educators within their communities. This led to the creation of their liberation schools which centered the knowledge of the people while considering the material conditions of their communities. Their schools addressed the material needs of their community by providing meals, transportation,

self-defense, and literacy courses. Simultaneously, they equipped their students with the political education and ideologies needed to understand their respective roles in the movement for liberation and self-determination. Students of these liberation schools engaged in action, community support, and the ongoing development of decolonization programs. Dialectical materialism focuses on the material (objective, perceptible, concrete, etc.) realities of any given society in order to understand how ways of life shift and can be shifted. As a revolutionary committed to abolition and the total liberation of all Afrikan people from the capitalist-imperialist society, education must be understood through this lens. If I notice the material conditions of my students and our communities and I place them at the forefront of my pedagogy, the only logical next step is to act upon our direct experience and our analysis of the conditions. This, and only this, will allow me to consider my next best steps as an educator. Do I need to break something down further? Do I need to ensure all my students have the supplies they need to engage fully? If I can't make this happen, how can I adjust my classroom space to meet their needs? Do I need to make sure my students are fed? Am I teaching the right material according to my students' most pressing and current needs? Am I employing appropriate technologies, speakers, teaching styles? Do I need to check in on the socioemotional well being of my students? Is the lesson and lecture the most important thing for us right now? Will all of this help lead us towards liberation? These are the questions a militant educator asks themselves daily. Such practice embodies a moral commitment to act truly, a dedication to human well being, a search for truth, and a respect for others. It relies on wisdom and discernment in order to adapt contextually (charles, 2023).

These teachings are at the heart of MXA's pedagogical practices. If one claims to be a militant educator, how are they working to gain clarity about the material conditions that their students, families, and community members face on a daily basis? With the answers to this question, the militant educator is able to better tailor the learning experience to not only meet the individual needs of their scholars but also, they will be better equipped to incorporate methods and practices that lead their scholars towards developing the necessary skills to carry on the liberation struggle in their communities. Through this practice of resistance, the militant educator becomes a central figure in the development of resistance pedagogies within any militant education system.

Throughout this study, we have demonstrated the different ways that colonial schools serve as mechanisms that are primarily invested in the interests of settler-colonial society and capitalist production. MXA, on the other hand, has created a learning environment that is invested in the needs of the community and grounds itself within a larger political framework that acknowledges the people's right to self determination for colonized Afrikan and Indigenous people globally. The teaching methods implemented by MXA learning guides enable their scholars to gain experience with "problem posing resistance pedagogies" that encourage scholars to identify and analyze problems in their local communities (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). Within this process, they are challenged to develop, implement, and evaluate plans of action that work to address structural problems in their communities. Pedagogies of Resistance at MXA invite scholars to engage in a reciprocal process of communication and problem solving alongside their learning guides. These methods are accessible and engage with democratic educational processes that challenge militant educators and scholars to connect their learning to larger social movements. Pedagogies of Resistance situate the learner and their educators right within the larger political landscape of the community.

At a very simple level, the resistance pedagogies of MXA teach scholars how to practice discipline and accomplish focused tasks. If our goal is to feed the community, what are the action steps that need to get done? How can we address this gap we see in our neighborhood? What worked? What didn't work? The methods utilized empower students to not only live in their community but to develop their community. How can we be self-determined as individuals and as a community? How are you able to communicate your feelings? What does it actually look like to sit in a circle and have conversations? What does it look like to take accountability for losing control of your emotions?

In one of our conversations, MXA minister of curriculum, mel charles, discussed Pedagogies of Resistance and the value of scholars and families being able to participate in NP's decolonization programs:

How are folks equipping themselves for the liberation struggle? Questions like this deeply inform our pedagogical methods. What do folks need to feel invested in this project of liberation and resistance? What do folks need to even know that there is a problem? What is the system that we're trying to dismantle? What is the society that we're trying to create? What does it mean to be self-determined? Answers to these questions are going to contextualize what your whole position is on whether or not there's even something that needs to be changed in our society. A huge part of our pedagogies and curriculum revolve around the fact that our people need to first know that they are Afrikan and Indigenous, not just Black and Brown. They need to know their history and have an understanding of who they are and why we should understand ourselves in this way. It's beautiful seeing kids and families know their history. For myself, I was thinking about how when I was our scholar's age, I did not even know who Malcolm X was to be real. I was a fifth grader and I had no idea who Malcolm X was. Our kids know of and write letters to political prisoners and elders of the liberation struggle. That's knowledge I didn't have in college. We always tell them that we want them to be self-determined learners and our students have a strong grasp of what self-determination means. They know how to grow food. They know how to work the land in tangible ways. They understand what systems they could implement if the current system was completely dismantled. They have those practical skills of creating a food system, a health system, a legal clinic, and newspaper. They understand the importance of self-defense and wellness. They practice deep breathing and acupressure. All of these things deeply inform our methods and our curriculum. I am not saying they can build their own society tomorrow, but you can see how they're building real skills that will serve them and their community today, tomorrow, and in the future. Throughout history, there have been many elders of the liberation struggle who were forced to flee America and find refuge in Cuba, China, or Afrika. What does that process look like? We have students learning Swahili. That's a practical skill they could use in the future. If you go home to a nation on the continent, would you be able to communicate with your people? If you can't read or write—if you aren't literate, how will you accomplish your goals? They are asking each other these types of questions here at MXA. This was a long-winded response but I really do feel like our understanding of what is needed to build self-determined communities is what informs our methods and our curriculum (Bilal, 2022).

In my time with MXA scholars and learning guides I have seen the scholars completely take control of different decolonization programs. For the Free Grocery Program in particular, the students are a key part of this program. Food deliveries usually arrive at the school between 9 and 10 am. At this time MXA scholars are typically just arriving, eating breakfast, or engaging in choice time—meaning that they could be reading, playing sports, working in the farm, or participating in another choice-based activity. As soon as the food arrives, without any directive on most days, the scholars drop what they’re doing and begin unloading boxes of food into the common area. The older students usually take lead on weighing the grocery boxes since they are heavy in weight and the younger students will begin sorting the goods into different categories. Once the food is weighed and sorted they begin evenly filling the grocery boxes with the various foods that were donated for the day. After they’ve filled the forty plus boxes throughout the common area, MXA scholars then participate in their Grocery Math where they add up each of the categories of food to get a final poundage for the day. This number is then documented for the food bank while the younger scholars count the total number of boxes packed that day. In this way, MXA scholars and their families are able to engage with the leadership of the school and they are encouraged to help make decisions and shape how the school and its programs operate. These methods encourage students to connect the struggles they see in their community with the struggles of their Afrikan and Indigenous relatives who face similar material conditions in other cities, states, regions, or nations.



Figure 6.1 Image of MXA scholar adding carrots to grocery boxes. Source: Malcolm X Academy Walking Archive, 2023.

The Free Grocery Program is just one example of the ways in which MXA scholars are encouraged to build practical skills within the community context. I have seen scholars selling art, photography, and other goods at the Sankofa Market; I have seen them doing acupuncture on an elder in the community during the Mutulu Shakur Health Clinic; and I've witnessed them organizing food and snacks packs that would eventually be distributed to the unhoused neighbors during NPs Free Breakfast Program. The work that I've seen MXA scholars and learning guides participate in on a day to day basis is a clear demonstration of what resistance pedagogies can look like at a community school.



Figure 6.2 Image of MXA scholars packing boxes for their annual turkey distribution. Source: Malcolm X Academy Walking Archive, 2023.

MXA learning guides are able to implement these pedagogical methods all while still centering the wants and needs of the individual scholars. In my discussions with one of the school's education consultants, Marcus Forbes, he broke down the importance of tailoring the methods and curriculum of the school to the everyday needs of our children:

That's what's so oppressive about our school systems. You're told what to learn, how to learn, and when to learn. Life in the community isn't really like that. It's not separated into segments. We can and should orient learning around whatever it is the kid actually wants to spend their time doing. Some kids all they want to do is play sports, right? Some kids like video games, other kids like watching TV, some kids like to read and write, some kids like photography, and some kids are into music, right? There are ways we can integrate their learning into the things they love most. You can still teach life skills, you can still teach history, you can talk about liberation movements. You can teach all of these things through lenses that most interest the students you are working with. If a kid loves sports, you can teach about Vietnam and you can teach about imperialism through a study of Muhammad Ali, right? There are different ways to capture kids' attention and you're actually going to get more learning

out of them if it's relevant to something they actually care about (Comrades Classroom Podcast, 2022).

This is a method I observed many times as a learning guide at Malcolm X Academy. For the older boys at the school, we often had to get them interested in difficult topics by building connections between the topic of discussion and one of their personal interests. For example, when we first started having discussions about mindfulness and deep breathing, we pulled a ton of photos and interviews of famous athletes talking about the importance of breathe work and being in control of their emotions. Seeing their favorite athletes discuss these topics made them feel connected to the discussion and they felt more comfortable learning and participating in the lessons about mindfulness and deep breathing. We did the same for the younger girls at the school who were obsessed with Disney movies. We utilized their love for movies like Moana and Encanto to teach them about the settler-colonial history of the oceanic region and South America. Utilizing these practices enabled the MXA learning guides to capture their students' energy, imagination, and attention within a lesson and you could feel the deep passion and love students had for particular discussions.

Marcus continued his reflection:

Their schedule doesn't have to be regimented either. We have elders in the space. We have a community of folks who really care about these babies and want to see them succeed. At the end of the day, we just want them to be happy. Our learning guides function as counselors, educators, custodians, cooks, mechanics, coaches, etc. We know everything that's going on at the school and with our babies. Our scholars are at a school where everyone who's there knows them personally. So we know if they're in a mood or if they're having a rough day. We know their family history and the conditions they are living in so we might understand why the scholars are feeling a certain type of way. We know if a student needs some space to take a break and meditate. We know if a student might need a break to get some sunlight. Maybe they just need some exercise or to work on a creative project. Our relationships with the kids allow us to tailor our methods to each individual student. We can bend each day to the

needs of the scholars in our school and work to provide them with an educational experience that they need on any given day. That's the beauty of this thing. We don't have to operate within those oppressive structures of colonial schools. All of our kids are with us because they were reacting either physically or emotionally to those environments. Now, they're in a space where they can be active all day if they need to; they can lay down to take a nap during the school day if they need to (Bilal, 2022).

If you walked into MXA tomorrow you would see exactly what Marcus is talking about. In the best way possible, the babies really run the school. That's not to say there is no structure or systems in place to guide the babies throughout their day, but if they're not feeling up to it, MXA learning guides always have fallback systems of care that the babies can turn to if they need to be in a different space or mindset. No adult shows up to work every single day the best version of themselves, there's no way we can expect that of our children.

Marcus continues:

Even if you're just listening to a conversation between two kids, you can find a way to make that a learning experience from them. You can teach them how to communicate effectively, you can teach them how to treat others with respect, you can teach them, valuable skills that are honestly glossed over in the traditional colonial school system. If kids are bullying each other in a traditional public school, a lot of times that goes on unaddressed. I know this from experience as an educator within those schools. They say they want to stop bullying but rarely do they ever intervene in the conflict. Here at MXA, we can actually teach kids how to be better humans to one another. A lot of capitalist ways of thinking have been internalized by our youth. Most of their relationships are all based off of value judgments. They're transactional, not reciprocal. What can I get from somebody? How can I get them to benefit me? How can I win this exchange? It's manipulative. At MXA, we teach the youth how to live more of a communal lifestyle. By doing this, we can produce better people of the world. That goes back to the world building aspect that guides our decolonization programs. That's the same thing we're doing with our curriculum. Showing the babies that it's possible to build a new world and here are some of the skills you might need to do it. That's what we're doing with this pedagogical framework. We're building something entirely different. We've studied the history. People have created community schools just like this. Many communities have replicated it. MXA is a way for us to directly respond to the structures that are oppressing our youth in so-called Sacramento. We're

giving them an alternative education system where they get to have choices that allow them to guide their own learning. That's what autonomy is. That's what self determination is. The curriculum emerges from individual wants and needs of the kids. At MXA, our scholars are proof that kids actually enjoy learning. People think that kids don't like learning, and our young Afrikan kids are always labeled that way. They even use statistics to try to show that our people are just less receptive to learning and stuff like that. MXA is proof that actually, our kids love learning when they feel safe, and loved, and cared for. Even better, they love putting forth what they've learned into the world. They love group projects. They love walking the neighborhood and learning about the science of the city infrastructure or the native plants in people's front lawns. We are demonstrating what is possible for our kids. By allowing the kids to be in charge of their own education, we are meeting them where they are at instead of imposing something onto them (Comrades Classroom Podcast, 2022).

In this way, the scholars are being exposed to so many different methods that center their wants and needs. This model allows for scholars to guide the learning process and we can see the many different ways the MXA learning guides are attempting to spark a true love for learning and a deep love for the community around them in that process.

Someone might read this and think, where within these methods are scholars actually learning math or literacy? MXA learning guides provide scholars all the tools they need to succeed as learners and the structure of their day requires students to focus on literacy and math alongside the rest of their learning goals. We'll outline what that structure looks like in the final section of this chapter. Nonetheless, MXA learning guides make it a point to emphasize for their students how difficult it would be to do all the things they love if they couldn't read or write. You love sports? You love fashion design? You love baking? You cannot be great at fashion design if you can't read and write. You cannot be great at baking if you aren't strong with numbers. They give them examples of athletes who are skilled in so many different aspects of their life outside of sports. The learning guides are providing their scholars with the same tools they might get in a traditional colonial school but they are going

above and beyond by employing resistance pedagogies that connect the skills they are learning to their hobbies and their work in the community. They are delivering the curriculum to scholars through the medium they love most and disguising core subjects by tailoring them to topics scholars are already passionate about.

I want to conclude the introduction to this subsection with a reflection from one of the parents at MXA who felt the schools' pedagogies sought to provide their children a space to just be themselves:

It's been awesome. MXA gave my kids a space for them to be naturally themselves. A lot of times they're forced into a society where they can never be their natural selves. They have to hold back the way they talk or the way they look so that they don't get discriminated against or so they don't experience violence while being out in the world. For my kids, that's how their schools were too. They could never be themselves. They even had police all around their schools, how can they feel safe in a place like that? MXA has offered me and my kids a safe haven where we can go out into the community, go out to the park, or even just go to school and feel completely safe. They could come here and we could talk about difficult topics. It gives me a chance to join in on their learning process. I can be their teacher or learning guide too. Having the community at MXA is like having additional help on the path that we're going. They see more than just mom and dad teaching them these things. They see other people teaching them some of the same values we want to instill in our kids (Bilal, 2023).

Pedagogies of Love

At MXA, when the learning guides talk about pedagogies of resistance, they often mention that these methods of teaching are inseparable from pedagogies of love. In my many conversations with the learning guides of MXA, we often laughed and joked about the very real ways our scholars bring out our deepest triggers and traumas. This is the reality of being an educator. You are going to get overstimulated. You are going to feel all sorts of feelings. Past traumas that are stored within our

epigenetic DNA are bound to be dug up during the difficult moments with students and families (Wolynn, 2017). Conflict brings up trauma—and at the end of the day, our children are not always cognizant of the emotions and feelings their educators are having—they just want to feel loved. MXA learning guide and Minister of Curriculum, mel charles, wrote a brilliant essay for Neighbor Newspaper about how love moves through the spaces of MXA. Below you can find an excerpt of that essay:

The thing about the babies of Malcolm X Academy (and of children in general) is, they do not care. Me and the other learning guides laugh about this a lot. Because what I mean by that is, while our babies are filled with such loving and compassionate hearts, they don't care what we are going through or how we feel about ourselves or whether or not we are fully healed. They just want to be loved. And to feel our love. And they need to be loved and be able to feel our love, always. This is something they are teaching me to be better at - loving in spite of myself. So for one day out of the week, I found myself forced to turn my love back on. To practice empathy, compassion and grace at my highest level. And I wasn't always perfect at it - because I'm not. And my 'highest level' some days was not all that high. But with each passing week, I found my heart softening until I realized I was no longer forcing love. I was enjoying myself. Enjoying the feeling of love again (Neighbor Newspaper, 2023, pg. 11).

Loving in spite of myself. This has certainly been one of the most difficult things to hold as a learning guide at MXA. The scholars and learning guides have been through the mud. For better or worse, they have a clear understanding of the violent conditions their people face and they themselves have lived through some of the most violent conditions a human has been asked to survive. Family struggles, community struggles, and personal struggles are all things that the MXA team is trying to navigate while also developing an entire school and maintaining the growth of twelve different community programs. Within all of this chaos, like mel said, how can we continue loving in spite of ourselves? Her essay continues:

Mondays at MXA serve as a consistent reminder of what love means to me, an opportunity to be in regular practice of that love and a group of people who have been so open to me and my growth. Because most kids never give up on the people they love. It is both beautiful and at times tragic, but it's the truth. And it's such a beautiful thing to be able to witness and an immeasurable thing to be able to be held in. The students and families of MXA have never stopped holding me accountable in the most beautiful ways while simultaneously never giving up on me. Always believing in me, my ability to show up for them, the strength of my voice, the sincerity of my intentions. and never too consumed by ego to honestly share with me the ways I let them down. If that ain't love then I guess I've still got some searching to do. But in the meantime, I'll be kicking it with the kids of Malcolm X Academy and I welcome anyone who feels called to find love to come do the same, (Neighbor Newspaper, 2023, pg. 11).

What a beautiful reflection. Pedagogies of resistance and love have shifted the school environment into a space that nurtures family, collectivism, and community; a space where the line between scholars, learning guides, and parents are blurred and the people involved are encouraged to hold each other close through difficult times. Forming these connections are vital to the efficacy of these teaching methods.

When discussing pedagogies of resistance and pedagogies of love, many educators often refer to Paulo Freire's book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, as a guiding framework. For me, I often question—how are these educators actually applying his work in their daily teaching practice? How many of these educators have actually aligned their work with real-life liberation struggles being waged throughout Afrikan and Indigenous communities on Turtle Island? While there are clear risks that come with “putting true revolutionary education into practice,” the learning guides of MXA believe that militant educators “must be willing to actually uphold the principles of dialogic praxis which Freire outlines in his work,” (charles, 2023). For Freire, this work should be a complete embodiment of love, humility,

mutual trust, faith and hope. I will again turn to mel to help us gain a clearer understanding of what it means to embody these five themes as an educator:

Love. Non-capitalistic love is revolutionary. It is more than a feeling or a thought. Love is an act; a choice one makes to reject fear and instead wholly commit to others. It humanizes the *other*. Love, in and of itself, must be an act of liberation. Educators must allow love to guide their work. This means recognizing the humanity in the communities they have entered (Neighbor Newspaper, 2023).

With this, MXA learning guides believe that their teaching practices should be grounded in a deep love for the people that we are learning and growing alongside. This love not only brings us closer together but it helps us to see clearly how our life experiences and struggles are deeply connected. We pull ourselves out of the capitalist mindset that teaches us to focus on the self: self-care, self-love, self-help, etc. Pedagogies of love challenge us to move beyond the self and center the importance of the collective as a whole.

Humility. Educators may find themselves committed to a particular group or cause. They may have spent countless hours reading, learning, writing, and theorizing about their particular group or cause of interest. An educator will have accrued the same level of knowledge and still recognize their own ignorance. More importantly, they recognize and value the wisdom, knowledge, and insight of the groups they are working with as equally—if not, more so—important truths. For an educator, the language and stories of the people hold extreme weight. They are woven into the lessons with a clear affirmation that these words hold as much credibility as statistics, theoretical models, or *proven facts* (Neighbor Newspaper, 2023).

Pedagogies of love and resistance challenge educators to see how everyone within the learning space has something to offer and something to learn. MXA learning guides believe that we are all learners and we are all educators. Put simply, we all have something to offer and we all have something to learn. This level of humility empowers everyone in the space to utilize their wisdom to help each other learn and grow.

Mutual Trust. Trust should be viewed as a prerequisite for educators, as well as an ongoing process. They must be committed to developing and maintaining a trusting relationship within the communities they educate alongside. Trust plays an especially important role in cases where a community has experienced intense material trauma. As an educator, working towards that relationship of trust means being willing to be present, consistent, vulnerable, and transparent. There should be no expectation that those who have been historically marginalized share their voices without reciprocity. Learning, growth, and dialogue is a collaborative process. Thus, educators are responsible for sharing their own stories and voices as they are for collecting and uplifting others. This is not to say that an educator's voice should overpower that of the historically marginalized (Neighbor Newspaper, 2023).

Without trust, we cannot expect scholars, families, or community members to fully buy-in to the learning process. If people are not moved by a deep trust for one another, our systems, procedures, and programs will not be able to serve the broader liberation struggle. Simply invoking the words of revolutionary struggle is highly risky for most educators—claiming to engage in the practice of liberation struggle is an even higher risk for the militant educator. Trust is integral to the success of these practices.

Faith. Faith is not an uncritical belief in people. Faith is the critical belief that people hold the power to transform despite the inevitable obstacles and setbacks encountered. An educator cannot practice in a dialogical way without faith. Hope. Engaging an educator must remain cognizant of the reality that justice has long been delayed—it's a marathon. By choosing to actively engage in the deep critical reflection and interrogation of historic power and oppression, educators are willingly immersing themselves into a long story of violence. That said, hope is vital for an educator. An educator must be willing to continue moving forward despite a lack of immediate results. At times, they must be willing to wait—not idly—but in action (Neighbor Newspaper, 2023).

Moving through and being moved by love is something the MXA learning guides are figuring out each and every day. To remain in this struggle, they believe that we must be moved by revolutionary hope and optimism. Our people have been forced to endure over 500 years of genocidal occupation and

they continue to face enormous obstacles that include but are not limited to police terror, housing insecurity, wage theft, environmental collapse, and the primary contradiction, European imperialism. In the face of all of this terror, we must maintain revolutionary hope, optimism, and faith that our people will eventually be free from generations of pain if we organize ourselves properly.

For the last two years, the MXA community has been figuring out what exactly it means to move in love. What does it mean to be guided by love? This is a process that they've had to endure together, as a community. Each learning guide has had the opportunity to engage in this process alongside the scholars and their families. Sometimes love at MXA looks a lot like struggle. Being in community with people means that we will inevitably experience conflict and disagreement. This is true even with the community at MXA. The scholars and learning guides are all flawed people trying to find healthy ways to navigate interpersonal relationships within a community that has experienced a lot of deep trauma. Pedagogies of love challenge us to navigate these conflicts by holding each other closer.

At MXA, community circles are important to their implementation of pedagogies of love. The learning guides utilize community circles whenever they join in conversation with each other because they allow for each member of the circle to be seen and heard. Morning circles, afternoon circles, circles to share about joy, circles to navigate grief and harm—circles invite us to relate to each other in new ways. In another one of her brilliant essays for Neighbor Newspaper, mel reflects on the importance of community circles:

Choosing love is hard. Trying to define love is nearly impossible. Everyone comes into space with a personally significant definition of what it looks like to move in love, and most times can hold that definition with a rationalization rooted in truths. So, lately

when I've been thinking about love, I think about what it means to do the exact opposite of what the empire would do. For the purpose of this piece, 'the empire' refers to colonizing forces that prioritize the sustainability of capitalism above all else (i.e.. amerikkka, Israel, etc). So lately what I've been reflecting on, and trying to bring into our space is a practice of thinking 'what would the empire do? and how can we plan to do something completely different?' Where the empire would say, 'dispose of this person,' how can we find a way to keep them around and deepen our connection? Where the empire would say 'they're more trouble than it's worth,' how can we keep ourselves open to the possibility that it could actually end up being the most worthwhile. Where the empire says 'punish them' how can we instead question our own realities and share in a moment of growth? At MXA, I get to practice this. We sit in circles with the learners of MXA (and sometimes with their families) week after week, talking through what it looks like to show love and respect to our friends—talking through our community agreements, our shared values, bodily autonomy and our hard boundaries as Afrikans. We sit in circles and address beef to the point where I know these kids are sick of hearing me and I have a much better understanding of why my college students were begging to go back to sitting in rows by the end of our summer in Ghana. At the end of the day, all of our babies know they are loved. They all have been able to be reflective for themselves of what it looks like to move in love. I have learned from them how I can better support their learning and growth. With them, I have been forced to test my own commitment to living a life of love again and again. What's most beautiful to me is that I've learned that we all can sit down and talk to each other about some really big things (Neighbor Newspaper, 2024).

I have witnessed exactly what mel is talking about in this essay. Each and every day that I have spent at MXA, community circles were a core part of our daily practice. I have witnessed scholars as young as five years old embrace the practice of community circles and I have witnessed them teach lessons to everyone in the room about what love can look like in a space like this. I have seen them express their feelings, hold themselves accountable, and navigate conversations that cause most adults to throw child-like tantrums. The scholars of MXA have proven that pedagogies of love can be transformative. They have proven to me that these practices have the potential to completely shift how we relate to each other as community members.



Figure 6.3 Image of MXA scholars participating in a community circle with Dre T. Source: Malcolm X Academy Walking Archive, 2023.

To ground their commitment to Pedagogies of Love, Assata Shakur’s poem *R/evolution is Love* has really guided the teaching practices of MXA’s learning guides. Everyday for the past two years, the MXA community has turned to this poem time and time again as a reminder of what it looks like to move in love. So much so, one of the seven-year-old scholars at the school has completely memorized the poem and leads her peers in a daily recitation during their morning check-in. The first time I witnessed her memorized recitation, tears of joy filled my eyes. To conclude this section on pedagogies of love, I want to reflect on some key quotes from this poem.

This is the 21st century and we need to redefine r/evolution. This planet needs a people’s r/evolution. A humanist r/evolution. R/evolution is not about bloodshed or about going to the mountains and fighting. We will fight if we are forced to but the fundamental goal of r/evolution must be peace (McGowan, 2021).

The fundamental goal of revolution must be peace. As we work to build a new world for our future generations, our work must be guided by hopes of peace. Since the past 500 years have been defined by

generations of settler-colonial terror, we must take the time to show our children what peace can look like within our communities. Our ancestors were forced to resist the domination of settler-colonialism and we understand we may be asked to carry on this fight when the time comes. But until then, our actions must be guided by love and peace.

We need a r/evolution of the mind. We need a r/evolution of the heart. We need a r/evolution of the spirit. The power of the people is stronger than any weapon. A people's r/evolution can't be stopped. We need to be weapons of mass construction. Weapons of mass love. It's not enough just to change the system. We need to change ourselves. We have got to make this world user friendly. User friendly (McGowan, 2021).

It's not enough to change the system. We need to change ourselves. There will be no revolution without the revolution of the self. Revolution is evolution. Assata Shakur's spelling of *r/evolution* throughout the poem is extremely important. If we hope to transform our society at large, we must first be able to transform and evolve ourselves. Even if the economic system of capitalism ceased to exist tomorrow, most people in our society would still engage in sexist, racist, homophobic, and other behaviors that cause deep harm to the people in our communities. Oppression would still exist. Our present world has been constructed to benefit a small number of people while the majority are exploited by the systems working to uphold European settler-colonialism and imperialism. As we struggle to build a world that is user friendly to *all* people, we must first start with the transformation of ourselves.

Are you ready to sacrifice to end world hunger? To sacrifice to end colonialism. To end neo-colonialism. To end racism. To end sexism. R/evolution means the end of exploitation (McGowan, 2021).

R/evolution means the end of exploitation. The MXA community has demonstrated for their people what it means to sacrifice to end the violence that people experience in their communities. They have

sacrificed so much of their personal lives to make sure that the people in their communities have food and other essential survival resources. They have shown that they are willing to sacrifice their personal glory for the greater good of everyone in their community.

R/evolution means respecting people from other cultures. R/evolution is creative.
R/evolution means respecting and learning from your children (McGowan, 2021).

R/evolution means respecting and learning from your children. One morning when I arrived at MXA to set up the Assata Shakur freedom farm, one of our fifth-grade students interrupted my work and asked me to come with him into the community room where we hosted most of our learning sessions. I followed him down into the space and he instructed me to sit down. I was pretty confused about why he was asking me to come inside because I still had a lot of work to get done with the farm and I also had to turn our compost system. This is what my brain was focused on. Quickly, my mindset shifted. He said, “Dejay, you know how you guys always teach us things? Well, just like Assata’s poem says, it’s my turn to teach you something,” (Bilal, 2022). For the next half-hour or so, I forgot all about my duties on the farm and sat with this scholar while he taught me how he makes necklaces, bracelets, and earrings to sell at the Sankofa Market. I had an absolute blast. Making the earrings was a very intricate process that required a ton of fine motor skills and the scholar was patient with me as I made mistakes and asked questions to clarify if I was doing it right. In that moment, he was the learning guide and I was the scholar. This is exactly what we set out to accomplish when we opened Malcolm X Academy. We wanted to completely blur the lines between teacher and student—in this moment, I knew we had achieved that. Without our youth, r/evolution is impossible. We have so much to learn from the children of the next generation who will carry on the struggle for liberation when we no

longer have the capacity too. When we are no longer on this Earth in the physical form, the children we work with today will be the next generation to pick-up our struggle for freedom. How can we humble ourselves and discover new ways to learn from the children we work with? Afrikan and Indigenous traditions teach us that we should work and live for the benefit of children that will be born seven generations into the future. This includes the current generation of children. As we make decisions, the MXA community believes that we need to consider how our choices affect the future generations that will inhabit our communities.

R/evolution is beautiful. R/evolution means protecting the people. The plants. The animals. The air. The water. R/evolution means saving this planet. R/evolution is love (McGowan, 2021).

Community Agreements

During one of our interviews, Jordan was sharing with me about three of the new students who had joined the school for the 2023-24 school year. These three babies and their family were unhoused at the time and living month to month out of a local motel in Oak Park. After being at the school for no more than two months, the baby's mother told Jordan a story about their new bedtime routine. Every night before bed, the three babies laid down and recited the Malcolm X Academy community agreements. *We show love and respect to our friends. We communicate with our friends. We know being here is enough. We honor our ancestors. We are leaders. We breathe when we have big feelings. We keep our space clean. We try hard things. We eat together.* Following their recitation of the agreements, they told their mother, "We know that Ms. Raiin loves us. We know that Mr. Jordan loves us. We know that mommy loves us," (Bilal, 2024). Two months into the school year, three of MXA's

newest students had already memorized the schools community agreements and recited them every night before they went to bed.

One thing MXA's learning guides love most about their community agreements is that they have nothing to do with academic standards or alignment and they have everything to do with what it means to develop whole, loving human beings. At MXA, these nine community agreements were developed by our team of learning guides during one of our earliest meetings back in the summer of 2022. We knew that we needed a set of guidelines that would help both the learning guides and the students clarify the expectations we had for each other as community members in a shared space. These agreements have become a central part of MXA's liberation pedagogies and, beyond that, they have become an integral part of each school day on the MXA campus. There have been days when I was teaching at the school and, as the learning guides, we got rushed through our morning routine and forgot to do our daily recitation of the community agreements. On days like this, one of our six year old scholars was always quick to remind me, "Mr. Dejay! We didn't do our community agreements," (Bilal, 2024). In those moments, we would drop everything we were doing to join together in a call and response recitation of the agreements. This is how every morning circle at MXA got started: deep breathing, community agreements, and a grounding check-in question. For the bulk of this section, I want to reflect on each one of MXA's community agreements and help us gain an understanding as to why they are so important to everyone who calls MXA home.

We show love and respect to our friends. While this community agreement may seemingly speak for itself, we all have different interpretations of what love and respect can look like in practice. At MXA, these conversations occur daily. When students are showing love and respect, learning guides

are quick to use positive reinforcement by emphasizing the exact action the scholar took to show love or respect to another person in the community. When scholars are not showing love and respect, learning guides would often challenge them by asking critical thinking questions about their actions. What happened? Why did you choose to do that? What were you feeling when you made that choice? How would it make you feel if someone did that to you? How can we handle the situation differently? How can you show your friends love and respect next time? If you were to spend a day at MXA, you would see how every interaction throughout the school day is used as a learning opportunity; the learning guides are quick to turn moments of conflict or disagreement into an impromptu community circle so that everyone can reflect on the situation that occurred. By doing this, everyone in the school community is invited to collectively analyze and reflect on high-risk situations that occur throughout the school day. When scholars at MXA make mistakes, this was never used as a way to shame them, but rather, a demonstration of what community accountability can look like in real time. If a scholar isn't showing love and respect, their friends will be quick to join in on the conversation and give them advice on how they can change their behavior next time. The scholars take it upon themselves to help each other and their learning guides maintain the schools community agreements.

We communicate with our friends. MXA learning guides teach their scholars that communication is key to any relationship. When we join in community with other people, it is important for us to practice and strengthen our communication skills that can help us build strong, healthy relationships with other people. Through healthy communication, we can develop levels of trust and understanding that are essential to collectively navigating conflict within our schools and organizations. Effective communication also helps prevent misunderstandings and can help us to

resolve conflict in generative ways—strengthening the bond we share as a collective. By developing communication techniques that are open and honest, MXA community members are attempting to cultivate a supportive and nurturing environment where people can navigate conflict, disagreements, and challenging obstacles without the entire community falling apart. From my experiences interviewing dozens of organizers and educators from across the country, I learned that there are a lot of young people who did not grow up surrounded by strong relationships where people engaged in healthy communication with one another. In fact, most of the relationships they observed as kids utilized violent communication where people reacted with anger and focused on blaming or judging the other person (Bilal, 2024). Most of us had never even heard of the term nonviolent communication (NVC) until we were well into our twenties. NVC is a term that was developed by Marshall B. Rosenberg (1999) and he offers it up as a powerful communication tool that seeks to foster connection and understanding in our interactions and conversations with other people. NVC challenges people to move away from blame and judgment by emphasizing empathy and compassion in our interactions. At MXA, NVC provides the scholars and learning guides with a framework for expressing themselves honestly by helping them to communicate their feelings and the needs underlying them. By practicing communication where people are actively listening and trying to understand the needs behind another person's words and actions, NVC helps the community at MXA build stronger connections and find solutions that work for everyone involved.

We know being here is enough. This one is my absolute favorite community agreement at MXA. On any given day, as educators, we will never fully understand what it is like to walk in another person's shoes. We may never fully know how each person is showing up to a space. Sometimes, just

being present in the community is more than enough. There will be days where our scholars and learning guides may not be able to bring their *best* self into the space—and that is okay. Maybe they didn't get enough to eat. Maybe they were unable to get any sleep last night. Maybe they had a long commute into work and they're overstimulated. Maybe they have just lost a loved one. Maybe they don't have a stable home to sleep in. No matter the reason, everyone should be welcomed into the community as they are and nobody should be asked to offer more than they can give. For me, this community agreement is essential to our belief that liberation will not come until *all* oppressed people are free. This includes our physically and mentally disabled community members. This community agreement challenges everyone who shares space at MXA to reject ableism. Looking back at the definition we explored in Chapter Two, ableism is “a system of assigning value to people’s bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas of normalcy, productivity, desirability, intelligence, excellence, and fitness,” (Lewis, 2022). At their core, ableist ideals are deeply rooted in systems of oppression such as “eugenics, racism, misogyny, colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism,” (Lewis, 2022). Ableism excludes people from participating fully in their daily life by making certain spaces and systems completely inaccessible for some people. At MXA, the learning guides believe that community spaces cannot be filled with ableist expectations that require more from a person than they have the capacity to offer. *To each according to their need, from each according to their ability.*



Figure 6.4 Image of MXA scholars participating in a community reading circle about disability justice. Source: Malcolm X Academy Walking Archive, 2023.

We live in a world that is constructed for and maintained by able-bodied people. For years, the disabled community has advocated for the need to offer hybrid in-person and virtual events for people who do not have the capacity to show up in person—for many people, they are unable to show up in person because it is genuinely unsafe for their physical or mental health. Throughout the years, these requests went ignored by schools, event planners, the health industry, and everywhere in between. As soon as the COVID-19 pandemic hit and we went into lockdown, suddenly every profession was able to offer remote work, hybrid events, and virtual accommodations because able-bodied people were now losing access to things they were accustomed to. Four years into the pandemic, we've seen all those supports slowly go away. As soon as able-bodied people were seemingly unaffected by the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic, our society shifted back to its ableist ways of limiting access to spaces for people who are physically disabled, mentally disabled, or immunocompromised. At MXA, the scholars and learning guides are trying to build a community environment where everyone

is invited to show up to the space as they are. And regardless of what they can offer the community on any given day, being present in the space is more than enough. For their presence alone is a gift of love to the people around them.

We honor our ancestors. Although this community agreement only names our ancestors, I've witnessed MXA learning guides explain to scholars how this community agreement extends to honoring our elders as well. During the Spring session of Malcolm X Academy's first year, we received a visit from a legend of the Black Panther Party, Akinsanya Kambon. Elder Kambon was a member of the Sacramento Chapter of the BPP and he was one the most influential artists to come out of the party outside of Emory Douglas himself. Huey P. Newton actually commissioned Elder Kambon to come to Oakland and design a coloring book that the BPP would eventually adopt as an education tool for community members. He even designed the famous Black Panther that is on the BPP flag. On that day, I had never seen the scholars of MXA so well behaved. They were in awe of the former Panther and they hung on every single word he spoke. It was clear to me that this community agreement is one that scholars took personally. Whenever an elder entered the space, they morphed into the most gracious hosts I had ever seen. Providing elders with a tour of the building, offering to get them anything to eat or drink, welcoming them into our learning session, and thoughtfully listening to any wisdom they had to share. For me, this community agreement speaks for itself. Honoring our ancestors is a practice that is embedded into the daily lives of everyone at Malcolm X Academy.



Figure 6.5 Image of Alter MXA scholars built to honor their ancestors during Dia De Los Muertos. Source: Malcolm X Academy Walking Archive, 2023.

We are leaders. At MXA, scholars are reminded frequently that “we all have something to offer and we all have something to learn,” (Bilal, 2023). Anyone and everyone in the community has the capacity to be a leader regardless of their abilities. Just like the Zapatistas, the learning guides of MXA are trying to cultivate a space that relies on principles of solidarity, cooperation, and collective participation. For this to be successful, the learning guides know that they need to incorporate lessons and practices that work to develop the leadership skills of everyone in the space. Bad leadership is the practice of one person enforcing domination over others just because they have a leadership title. While I may carry the title of MXA’s Minister of Pedagogy, I do not have the final say on what is incorporated into the curriculum, rather, my job is to coordinate and assure that tasks related to the

curriculum get accomplished when needed. This is not to say that we do not have leadership, but more so, how can we share leadership amongst a collective? How can we cultivate a space where every person is working to become a leader in their own right? How can we share the leadership responsibilities required to make our communities thrive? At MXA, the learning guides and scholars worked to share leadership roles by first identifying the different responsibilities of the group: working on the farm, cleaning the common spaces, cooking meals, teaching lessons, coordinating food distribution, etc. Once these different responsibilities were outlined by the team, they worked to rotate taking lead on different roles within the community. Delegating and rotating through the different responsibilities helped the MXA team to form a leadership development process where volunteers, scholars, and learning guides were invited to participate in coordinating the different tasks that needed to be completed throughout the day for any given decolonization program. Even if it was leading a lesson, sometimes MXA learning guides asked the older scholars to teach a lesson to the younger scholars; we would even ask volunteers if they had skills they wanted to share with the students and, many times, we leaned on volunteers to help teach lessons to the scholars when they were on campus helping with the farming or the free food program.

The goal of leadership development is to help people see different levels of responsibility as stepping stones toward accomplishing specific goals, increasing engagement, increasing self-awareness, and developing the skills needed for particular tasks. There is so much more to leadership than just rotating roles. Good leadership development understands that people typically enter into community spaces harboring deep-seated fears about their own abilities, their own value, and their ability to be good enough. These insecurities can be debilitating. How can we nurture an environment that

encourages people to take on leadership roles without the fear of failure? At MXA, learning guides try to build the environment through the practice of action and reflection. What did we learn from this experience? What was good and what could we do better next time? How can we react differently when we are presented with obstacles? We need space to reflect on our roles and responsibilities so that we are not filled with fear about failing and or not being good enough. Through this practice, each person in the MXA community is challenged to step into their role as a leader.

We breathe when we have big feelings. When one of the first grade scholars was asked to write about this community agreement for our Malcolm X Day Newspaper, she wrote that “when we get mad, we have our deep breathing. It helps us calm down. Once you breathe, you will feel better. All you gotta do is put your finger in your years and do three deep breaths,” (Neighbor Newspaper, 2023). This scholar is talking about the National Acupuncture Detoxification Associations 5-point protocol that was utilized by Dr. Mutulu Shakur at the Lincoln Detox Collective in New York. At MXA, the scholars utilize this 5-point protocol to put pressure on specific spots in their ears during deep breathing exercises in the morning. This community agreement gets put into practice every single morning at MXA and each of the scholars knows that deep breathing is a skill they can lean on when they are experiencing big feelings or navigating heavy emotions.

We keep our space clean. There are many functions to keeping our spaces clean. For one, MXA learning guides discuss how this community agreement is grounded in traditional practices and ideologies of Indigenous land stewardship that guide communities in caring for their ancestral lands. Indigenous land stewardship is deeply rooted in an ancestral connection to the land that has been passed down through generations as a form of community and ecological knowledge. Land

stewardship is rooted in the sustainability of resources that ensures their availability for future generations. Through practices like controlled burns, crop rotation, and selective hunting, Indigenous communities have demonstrably maintained biodiversity and preserved ecosystems across the globe for millennia. These are the types of knowledge systems that the learning guides of MXA want their scholars to understand. As guests on occupied Indigenous lands, how can we participate in the stewardship and sustainable management of the places we call home? How can we show love, care, and respect for the land and other living organisms in the same way that we are called to show love and respect for other human beings in our community? In addition to land stewardship, MXA learning guides have also discussed how keeping our spaces clean is good practice for our overall physical health and mental well-being. A dirty environment fosters bacteria growth and allergens that can trigger illnesses and disease—this would make our spaces less accessible to people in our community who are disabled or immunocompromised and it could even lead to health concerns for the able-bodied people in our space. Beyond this, a cluttered space can be visually distracting and contribute to feelings of stress and anxiety that so many of us carry on a day to day basis. MXA learning guides believe that a clean environment can promote calm and clarity which enables their scholars to seamlessly relax into the community space.



Figure 6.6 Image of MXA scholars helping install a fence. Source: Malcolm X Academy Walking Archive, 2023.

We try hard things. MXA learning guides understand that new, difficult tasks can be initially daunting, but they believe that embracing the struggle that comes with trying hard things can be extremely beneficial to the growth, resilience, work ethic, and perseverance of their scholars. MXA learning guides have discussed with me about how facing challenges head on with the support of loving and caring people can foster the personal growth of their scholars. By stepping outside of their comfort zones, MXA scholars are challenged to push their limits, develop new skills, refine existing skills, and cultivate a form of resilience that will serve them when future obstacles inevitably arise. Overcoming these challenges helps the scholars to boost their confidence and develop an attitude that will empower them to face future obstacles with greater determination. For MXA learning guides, when scholars embrace hard things, they are empowered to reach their full potential, they are able to cultivate valuable life skills, and this can hopefully help them to lead a more fulfilling life.

We eat together. At MXA, sharing meals was never just about nourishing our bodies with healthy foods; eating together was also about nurturing connections and well-being between the scholars and learning guides in the space. The MXA team believes that sharing meals together as a community can help foster stronger bonds between people by deepening their practices of communication and providing structured time to connect their shared experiences. It also helps people to feel a sense of belonging and support within the community. MXA learning guides utilized meal time to extend the community circles and create another positive space where individuals could share about their days, thoughts, and feelings—meal time was just another space where scholars could work on strengthening their emotional intimacy. Beyond just eating together, scholars at MXA were always invited to take part in preparing the meals. According to the learning guides, cooking food collectively invites the scholars to build connections that go beyond just sharing a plate. More importantly, preparing and sharing the meals as a community proved to incorporate healthier eating habits into the scholars lives. While most kids came into the program eating highly processed foods that contained an assortment of chemicals and dyes, by the end of the first year, most of the scholars had grown accustomed to drinking water and eating foods with natural ingredients (Bilal, 2024). Eating together proved to have a number of benefits on the MXA scholars. They witnessed others make healthy choices, they grew healthy foods using their own hands, and conversations amongst friends naturally slowed down their eating—promoting mindful consumption within the space. Ultimately, sharing meals as a community became an essential part of the school day at Malcolm X Academy.



Figure 6.7 Image of two MXA students cooking food for breakfast. Source: Malcolm X Academy Walking Archive, 2023.

Conclusion

Over the past six months, the MXA team has spent countless hours communicating and reflecting on their work with the entire community: learners, learning guides, families, community members, and volunteer educators. Within these conversations, their school has been transformed and remade throughout every step of the process. Their pedagogies, practices, and daily learning environments are shaped by the daily struggles of their community as a whole. By asking questions, identifying problems, and implementing plans of action, the MXA team has fostered a space where growth and reflection are essential to the daily practices of the community. Without a commitment to the pedagogies and methods demonstrated by MXA's learning guides, well intentioned educators will continue to reinvent European standards of education that have harmed our communities for generations.

Chapter Seven—The Malcolm X Academy Curriculum and Daily Structure

We need a r/evolution of the mind. We need a r/evolution of the heart. We need a r/evolution of the spirit. It's not enough just to change the system. We need to change ourselves. R/evolution means respecting and learning from your children. R/evolution is love.

— *Assata Shakur*

During the first school year at Malcolm X Academy—no matter what happened the previous day—I always felt like a new day brought the gift of a fresh start to both the learning guides and the scholars. Building a school community from scratch was physically and emotionally draining for everyone involved. As we discussed previously, navigating conflict and developing community codes of conduct brought out traumas that everyone was forced to navigate in real time. The first two years of MXA have been humbling for the learning guides for a number of reasons and, on some days, the survival of the school felt uncertain. The team spent hours anxiously wondering if they could sustain the school community that so many had called home. Nonetheless, they were optimistic and steadfast in their efforts. It was an honor to witness and participate in the daily struggle to show up for the children and the community of Oak Park. When their own lives seemed to be falling apart, MXA learning guides arrived at the Shakur Center each and every day ready to take on the new challenge. Indeed, every new day at MXA felt like a fresh start—a breath of fresh air.

I was privileged to have enough time and capacity in my day to set-up the learning environment for our scholars each morning. The classroom set-up for the scholars was constantly being reconstructed throughout the Shakur Center because Neighbor Program had so many different programs running on a day to day basis. By the end of the first year, the old chapel on the main story of the church became our primary learning space. In this setting, we were able to set-up a circle shaped

seated area, tables for group work, a space to eat together, and with those, there was still plenty of vacant space for students to spread out and enjoy flexible seating options. Every morning, after tending to my daily chores on the Assata Shakur Freedom Farm, I would head up to the old chapel and spend the rest of my morning reconstructing our classroom space, printing out worksheets, organizing supplies for the days activities, and setting up the projector with our morning circle time slides. Another day, another fresh start.

The malleability of our classroom space allowed for us to adapt to the day to day needs of our scholars. Some days, if the weather permitted, we would spend the entire day outside for all of our learning sessions. Other days, we spent most of our time inside the center. Just as the school space offered flexibility and fresh starts, so too did the MXA curriculum. Each day, week, and month at MXA was shaped day to day needs of the students and the community. While we had every intention of sticking to our structured lesson plans and curriculum outlines, the lives of our babies didn't always fit so neatly into the structure of the daily planning. By the halfway point of the first academic year, MXA learning guides had developed the framework for a legitimate alternative education that creatively blended methods of unschooling and homeschool instruction, parental involvement and horizontal leadership, and militant education and liberatory self-determination. Within this uniquely Afrikan and Indigenous space, the community believed that a new kind of education was possible. What kind of education were they providing for their students in this space? How did they develop lesson plans? What subjects did they cover? As the end of the first school year approached, the answers to these questions became clearer.

In my role as the Minister of Pedagogy, I coordinated with the MXA learning guides to develop a transformative curriculum that was deeply embedded in Neighbor Programs political philosophy and the rich history of militant education that we've discussed previously. While we were consciously trying to deviate from the compulsory state-funded schools, we still wanted our scholars to build skills that would set them up to succeed should their parents decide to return them to colonial schools. In reality, we knew that MXA may not be able to offer a sufficient high school education for our scholars and we were transparent about this fact. We purposely incorporated curricular decisions we knew would reduce the shock factor that would inevitably accompany their return to the colonial school system. I spent the summer of 2022 with the MXA learning guides developing a year-long curriculum that the scholars and learning guides would follow throughout the inaugural school year. We started by creating a scope and sequence model that listed out all the different topics we would cover throughout the year. Our mission was to develop a curriculum that utilized project-based learning platforms to encourage critical thinking, play, community enrichment, and hands-on activities that were led by scholars. In our final draft, we sketched a curriculum that covered five major curricular themes: (1) Afrikan and Indigenous Culture, History, and Language, (2) Farming and Food Forestry, (3) Arts and Culture, (4) Self-defense and Martial Arts, and (5) Science, Technology, Engineering, and Science (STEM). Although we did not successfully cover each of these subjects in our first academic year, by the second year—with the development of our Swahili curriculum—the MXA team had incorporated each of these themes into the school's curriculum. I want to note here that a majority of my analysis here will cover the first academic year at MXA because most of the data and archival documents I've studied focus on that inaugural school year. While learning guides have

continued to document the progress of MXA throughout year two, a lot of the data collection is still in progress at the time of writing.

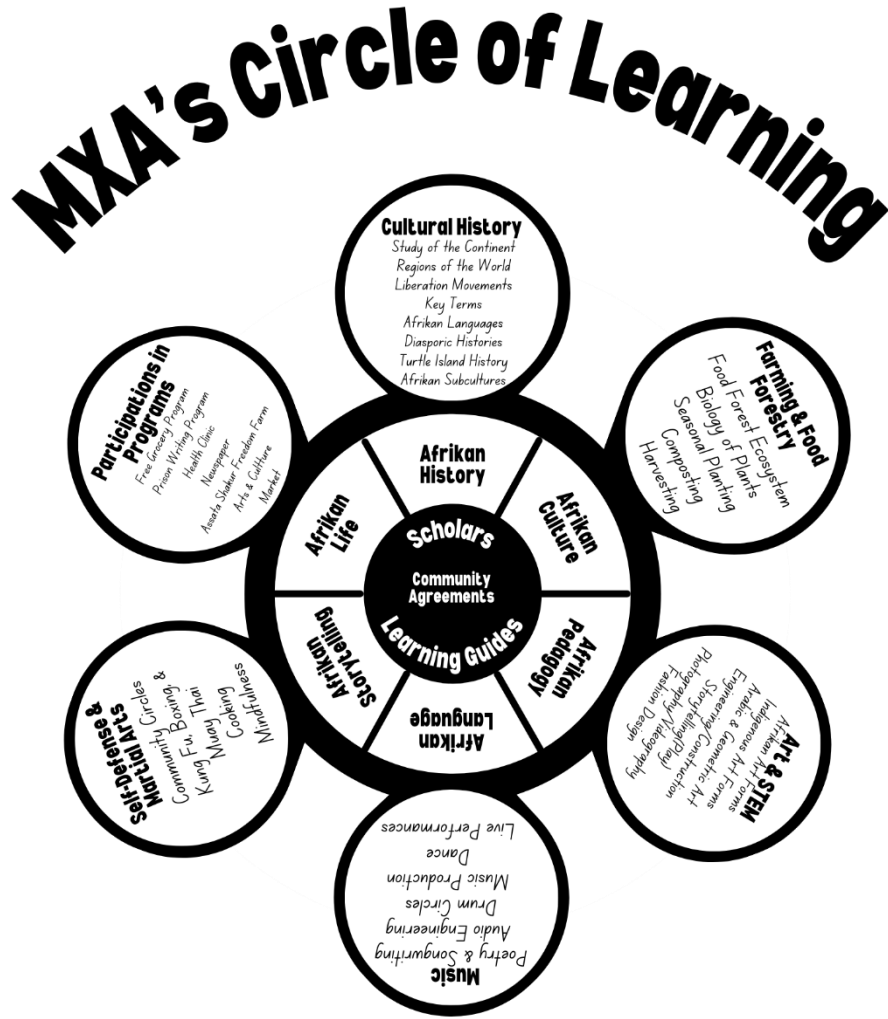


Figure 7.1 Graphic of MXA’s Circle of Learning. Source: Developed by the author.

During the curriculum building process—once the five themes were identified—we made a list of social movements, organizations, regions, and nations that we felt shaped the revolutionary history of Afrikan and Indigenous peoples. From there, each curricular week of the school year was shaped by a particular moment in history—during that week, each of the major curricular themes were bookmarked by a deep dive into the social movement, organization, region, or nation that was the

focus of the week. For example, during the Spring Season of the first academic year, students spent a week focusing on the Oceanic Region. After gaining a basic understanding of the region's geography, scholars studied the cultural history of the Indigenous peoples who were native to the area. They learned about histories of resistance carried out by Hawaiian and Māori communities in the region. They learned about their food systems and sustainability practices that were unique to their geographical region. They recreated art and drew pictures of animals that called the region home. They learned about key themes like storytelling, mythology, and wayfinding that were essential to the cultural traditions of Hawaiian and Māori peoples. They designed their own wayfinding maps and built paper canoes similar to the ones set sail by the Indigenous people of the region. Each of the major curricular themes that the learning guides wanted to cover were shaped by the knowledge systems developed out of a particular region. Another example comes from their week-long study of the Arab world. In the MXA Weekly Newsletter (2023), learning guides wrote that:

This week we spent time learning about our school's namesake, Malcolm X, and his journey with Islam that eventually led him to change his name to El-hajj Malik El Shabazz. We spent time learning about Ramadan and watched/analyzed the movie *Bilal: A New Breed of Hero*. We did an art project that exposed us to mosaic art in the Arab world. We then used our new skills creating mosaics for a math lesson in shapes and geometry (MXA Walking Archive, 2023).

In this example, we can see how the scholars' regional studies influenced every part of the curriculum for that week. Another example comes from the scholar's study of Nipsey Hussle and his connections to East Afrika. The MXA Weekly Newsletter (2023) reported that:

This week, we spent time learning about late rapper and community organizer, Nipsey Hussle and the impact he had on his community—building programs and providing resources. We connected this learning to lessons about Eritrea, where he's from, and other nations in East Afrika. We had a farming lesson on Tanzanian agricultural

methods and built solar power ovens during our STEM lesson to connect our readings about solar energy in East Afrika (MXA Walking Archive, 2023).

With these examples, it becomes clear how scholars at MXA are able to learn core skills like math, science, and literacy alongside their studies of social movements, organizations, and revolutionary leaders from Afrikan and Indigenous cultures across the global south. You may have noticed that this section will not include a detailed description of MXAs literacy, math, and STEM curriculum. As I've discussed throughout this thesis, literacy and curriculum were essential to the MXA curriculum but they utilized standard teaching methods to grow the students' progress in literacy and math. I want this section to focus on the unique curricula developed by the MXA team rather than highlighting parts of the curriculum that you could find in any school. If you are interested in learning more about the literacy and math curriculum used by MXA learning guides, please see Table 7.1 below.

Table 7.1 Malcolm X Academy Scope and Sequence Documents: Math & Literacy

Literacy Curriculum (Grades K-2)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Daily Circle Readings & Book Studies:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Black Panther Party Graphic Novel; Afrika Amazing Afrika; With Lots of Love; Where Do They Go?; What Will These Hands Make?; What is Hip-hop?; What Are Your Words?; We Move Together; We Are Water Protectors; Vinyl Moon; Youth to Power; The Year We Learned to Fly; The Worms that Saved the World; The Gilded Ones; The Everybody Gets Anxious Activity Book; Stay Solid!; Sea Girl; Sanctuary; Rolling Warrior; Rad Girls Can; Missing Daddy; Lubaya's Quiet Roar; and Julian is a Mermaid- SWBAT to read short vowel sounds- SWBAT to read long vowel sounds- SWBAT to read key sight words for their grade level- Daily Spelling Curriculum<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Daily Sentences for dictation- Kamali Education 30 Weeks of Spelling Activities- Kamali Education Daily Handwriting Practice

Literacy Curriculum (Grades 3-5)

- Daily Circle Readings & Book Studies:
 - Black Panther Party Graphic Novel; Afrika Amazing Afrika; With Lots of Love; Where Do They Go?; What Will These Hands Make?; What is Hip-hop?; What Are Your Words?; We Move Together; We Are Water Protectors; Vinyl Moon; Youth to Power; The Year We Learned to Fly; The Worms that Saved the World; The Gilded Ones; The Everybody Gets Anxious Activity Book; Stay Solid!; Sea Girl; Sanctuary; Rolling Warrior; Rad Girls Can; Missing Daddy; Lubaya's Quiet Roar; and Julian is a Mermaid
- Grammar:
 - Nouns, Proper Nouns, Names And Titles, Names Of Special Places, Days Of The Week, Singular And Plural Nouns, Plural Nouns, Irregular Plural Nouns, Pronouns, Using I Or Me
 - Action Verbs, Singular Verbs, Helping Verbs, Adding Ed Or Ing To Verbs, Using Is Or Are, Using Was Or Were, Using Verbs And Adverbs, Adjectives, Using A Or An, Adverbs, Using Adj. Or Adv.
 - Complete Sentences, Sentence Parts, Word Order Sentences, Telling And Asking, Kinds Of Sentences, Joining Sentences, Adding Describing Words, Beginning Sentences
 - Writing Names Of People, Writing Initials, Writing Titles Of Respect, Writing Names Of Places, Writing Names Of Days
- Writing:
 - SWBAT write a poem
 - SWBAT write a complete paragraph
 - SWBAT create an audio essay

Math Curriculum (Grades K-2)

- Unit I: Counting
 - Counting to 5, Counting and Numbering to 5 Counting and Numbering to 10 One More, One Fewer, Before and After, Missing Numbers, Practice Counting, Skip Counting, Find a Pattern
 - Unit II: Addition
 - Sums to 6, Sums of 5, Sums of 6, Number Sentences Using a Graph, Sums to 10, Sums of 10 Adding Zero Doubles
 - Unit III: Subtraction
 - Subtract 1, Subtract 2, Subtract 3, Subtract 0, Differences from 5, Differences from 6, Differences from 7, Differences from 8, Differences from 9, Differences from 10, Fact Families to 5, Fact Families to 8
 - Unit IV: Number Sense
-

-
- Numbers to 19, Tens, Ten More, Tens and Ones to 20, Tens and Ones to 30, Tens and Ones to 40, Tens and Ones to 50, Groups of Ten, Guess and Check Tens and Ones to 100, Missing Numbers, Before and After Comparing Numbers Using Estimation
 - Unit V: Money
 - 1 Cent or Pennies, 1 Cent & 5 Cent, 1 Cent & 10 cent, Pennies, Nickels, and Dimes, Money Equivalent, Show How Much Using Logic
 - Unit VI: Time
 - Unit VII: Geometry And Measurement
-

Math Curriculum (Grades 3-5)

- Multiplication and Advanced Multiplication Workbook
 - Times Tables 2-12 Mastered
 - Two-Digit Multiplication and Three-Digit Multiplication Mastered
 - Problem-Solving Word Problems with Multiplication Mastered
 - Fractions Workbook
 - Naming Fractions, Drawing Fractions, Writing Fractions, Understanding Fractions, Understanding Mixed Numbers, Fractions On The Number Line, Equivalent Fractions, Compare Fractions, Common Fractions.
 - Division Workbook
 - Basic Division
 - Problem Solving Word Problems with Division
-

STEM Curriculum

- SWBAT understand and implement the engineering design process
 - SWBAT design and build a rubber band car
 - SWBAT design and build popsicle stick catapults
 - SWBAT create slime and floam
 - SWBAT understand and create crystals using borax
 - SWBAT build and design a toothpick tower
 - SWBAT implement basic coding practices
 - SWBAT review and implement the engineering design process
 - SWBAT design and create lava lamps
 - SWBAT design and build mini greenhouses
 - SWBAT build a mechanism to drop an egg from a specific height
 - SWBAT build a model Solar System
 - SWBAT understand their brains, fight or flight mode, and the importance of breathing
 - SWBAT design and build a paper cup tower
 - SWBAT create a lemon volcano
-

-
- SWBAT make ice cream using chemistry
 - SWBAT create a paper chain in teams
 - SWBAT understand and discuss the scientific developments of the Arab world
 - SWBAT understand, discuss, and build volcanoes connected to their study of Cape Verde
 - SWBAT design and build a Solar Power oven
 - SWBAT understand and describe the science of waves
-

Afrikan and Indigenous Culture, History, and Language

When MXA learning guides ridiculed the compulsory education of colonized children in the so-called United States, they often emphasized the blasphemous European narratives that repeatedly erased the realities of Afrikan and Indigenous resistance, culture, and history within the curriculum. The learning guides frequently called back to the question of Afrikan and Indigenous identity and the children's knowledge of themselves and their ancestors. White supremacist narratives and anti-liberatory hostility from teachers and administrators undermined Afrikan and Indigenous children's feelings of dignity, pride, and self-worth. MXA learning guides felt that state-run schools put forth curricula that either ignored or made a mockery of Afrikan and Indigenous traditional cultures. Even with the push towards ethnic studies and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) within schools, most curricula produced by state-run institutions continue to omit any histories that militant education systems choose to put at the forefront of their studies. Key individuals, stories, and organizations that make up the foundation of modern revolutionary history have been completely erased from history books. Considering all of this, MXA learning guides sought out to develop a militant education curriculum that both highlighted the true histories of Afrikan and Indigenous people while

simultaneously introducing scholars to knowledge, skills, and practices that have been preserved by Afrikan and Indigenous people for millennia.

MXA learning guides believe that their scholars and their community members need to have a grasp of who they are as a people, where they come from, and where they are going. To do this, the learning guides intertwined historical, political, and social teachings within lessons about collectivism and sacrifice that are grounded in traditional Afrikan and Indigenous values. In an interview I did with one of the parents at MXA, she discussed the importance of MXA's curriculum and how it positively impacted hers and her daughters self-worth:

Malcolm X Academy allowed me to interact with my daughter and encouraged me to be more involved with her schooling. It made me realize how much of a disconnect there is from the parents, teachers, and students in the traditional school system because I realized that I'm also the teacher now. I was able to make decisions alongside the learning guides and better understand my daughter and what she needs to learn. I got to better understand the way that she learns. I got to see clearly things that she didn't like and ways that she enjoyed working on certain subjects. MXA made me realize how much I had to learn about my daughter and myself when it came to schooling. There was also a sense of freedom because we weren't constricted to the school's calendar and their schedule. We got to move freely. We did field trips and we got to come and go as we please. I was still able to teach her the curriculum even if we weren't present on campus some days. We got to learn more about certain subjects or less about another subject as long as it was in line with her curriculum standards and the curriculum provided to us by MXA. She got to learn skills like yoga, gardening, working on the farm, and horseback riding. She learned a plethora of different things about Afrikan history and liberation—all of the things that I didn't know that she needed. We both realized that there's so much more to learn outside of the traditional history given to us at colonial schools. We learned about how we are more important than we are made to seem as Afrikans. I definitely feel the community aspect of Malcolm X Academy is really important and I think that if more kids got to experience the love and knowledge we share at MXA, there would be less adults who feel low self-worth and purpose. The things that Malcolm X Academy taught my daughter were closer to her heart than just her brain (Bilal, 2023).

Even in this quote you can hear how this parents' world-view was completely shifted by the history and skills she and her daughter were able to engage with at MXA. This exemplifies one of the many ways MXA attempts to grow the students' individual pride and love for oneself—a practice that they could then translate into a love for one's community and the people within it.

In another interview with the same parent who's quoted above, she expands on why she felt MXA had such a strong impact on her daughter's sense of identity and self-worth:

I love that MXA is structured in a way that allows students to learn what is important, while also being involved in choosing what they would like to learn. The topics are interesting and also important for children to build an identity. 'Afrikan-Americans' have an extremely hard time with identity. We have little knowledge of where we come from and traditions that we should uphold. MXA brings the opportunity to its students to understand that we were so much more than slaves. A week at MXA involves the basics like math, science and English but also expands on learning around breathwork, movement, gardening, music and art (Bilal, 2023).

In addition to focusing on self-worth and identity, MXA introduced scholars to histories of knowledge and skills used by Afrikan and Indigenous people before settler-colonialism—when they lived in fully functioning societies before any European set foot on their lands.

Much like students of the True Education system in Chiapas, Mexico, MXA scholars learned about how their ancestors had organized their social and economic systems around the cycle of the seasons. The school itself was organized around the seasons. Rather than trimesters, semesters, or quarters, the school year was broken up into four learning seasons: Fall, Winter, Spring, and Summer. The seasons helped shape both the school curriculum and the yearly calendar. School closure dates and breaks were placed at the conclusion of each season rather than the colonial holidays that state-run schools were structured around. They learned about how different Afrikan and Indigenous

communities developed their food systems; they discovered how Afrikan and Indigenous communities utilized natural resources to make clothing, build dwellings, shape tools, and develop medicines. They were exposed to traditions and rituals that were key to Afrikan and Indigenous spiritual life. Scholars were introduced to Afrikan drumming circles, Danza dances, and the importance of oral tradition.



Figure 7.2 Image of MXA scholars participating in a community drum circle. Source: Malcolm X Academy Walking Archive, 2023.

MXA learning guides utilized a number of different methods to help them teach their students about traditional knowledge systems developed by Afrikan and Indigenous communities. Scholars learned about cultural history through the daily and weekly curriculum developed by the learning guides but they also learned directly from elders and other members in the community who visited the

school to share their cultural knowledge with students (Bilal, 2023). In the fall of 2023, scholars received a visit from the original Panther cub Mama Kim, BPP artist Gayle Asali, and daughter of the late freedom fighter Russell Maroon Shoats, Sharon Shoats. Visits like this were standard for Malcolm X Academy scholars. They were blessed with numerous opportunities to meet and learn from veterans of the Black Liberation Struggle and Indigenous elders from the community. Scholars also went on day trips around the city to learn more about Afrikan and Indigenous culture. They took trips to Diablo Valley Community college where they attended a workshop with the Umoja Program; they walked to the Brickhouse Art Gallery where Ms. Barabra taught them about curating art galleries and Afrikan art mediums; they even traveled to the Black Panther Party Museum in Oakland California to build on their studies of the party and the Oakland Community School (Bilal, 2023). Visits from community members and field trips to various locations around Sacramento and the Bay allowed students to better grasp cultural history lessons and also helped them to practice the skills they were learning about. Rather than treating Afrikan and Indigenous traditional knowledge systems as relics of the past, MXA learning demonstrated for scholars that these forms of knowledge were still functional and necessary to the foundation of liberation in our neighborhoods.



Figure 7.3 Image of MXA Day Trip to Brickhouse Art Gallery. Source: Malcolm X Academy Walking Archive, 2023.

Looking back, my favorite culture and history lesson at MXA had to be the day Miss Anaclara and the Black Cowboy Coalition brought horses to 4th Ave. In February of 2023, MXA scholars “got the chance to ride horses, learn about the history of Black cowboys and Afrikan horsemanship” (Neighbor Newspaper, 2023). When I spoke with Miss Anaclara about this experience, she had a beautiful reflection about this day and the importance of teaching the MXA scholars about the history of Black horsemanship:

When you hear the Western community talk about the history of horsemanship, it tends to be really, really whitewashed. Some of the biggest players in the history of horsemanship were the Black cowboys and they made huge contributions to horsemanship in America. A lot of faces like TV and media are not Black. It breaks my heart when a lot of kids don't get to see themselves represented in the community. There's an entire community of Black cowboys throughout the states. There's tons of organizations and just beautiful horsemanship that doesn't really get highlighted as much. Afrikan's were the first communities to domesticate horses, this history never gets told. In the Black cowboy community, they teach us about gentle horsemanship. There's a lot of like connection to nature; a lot of what you feed, how to take care of it, how to brush it. You work with the animal, not against it. This philosophy is not really found in all communities. Europeans tend to forcibly 'break' horses rather than build trust with them. They try to control the horse and force a relationship with this 1000-

pound creature. That's how you get explosive animals. You can't control the horse (Bilal, 2023).



Figure 7.4 Image of MXA scholar learning how to approach a horse. Source: Malcolm X Academy Walking Archive, 2023.

This experience allowed for the learning guides and students to build connections between the history of horsemanship and other themes they've discussed throughout their cultural history lessons. The history of horsemanship gave them another example of the juxtaposition between Afrikan and European cultures and their philosophical approaches to building relationships and community. Miss Anaclara continued her reflection:

When talking about Afrikan and Indigenous horsemanship, we have to first understand that horses are prey animals. So they're big, they're strong. But, inherently, their instinct is to run from everything and they're fearful of everything. In some ways, horses are a reflection of us. When someone binds with the horse or gets on top of a horse, it's an exercise in trust. You are trusting the horse to take care of you and the horse is trusting you to guide it. For kids, it is therapeutic. It helps build self-confidence, self-esteem, trust, motor skills, cultural knowledge, and it can be a social activity. For children with any sort of trauma or anxiety, riding horses can bring peace. When kids dissociate from their body a lot, horses can help them because they have to focus on what they're doing with their body; that's how they communicate with the

horse. It's such a good grounding exercise for a lot of kids. They are learning to work together with the animal. When you ride with other people. All the horses link up with their body language and energy. It becomes a trust building experience for the whole community. Teaching the kids of MXA about Black horsemanship was an important way for us to preserve traditions. Traditions that haven't been passed on to everyone. I think it's an important part of keeping Black horsemanship at the forefront and learning the cultural history as well (Bilal, 2023).



Figure 7.5 Image of MXA scholar feeding a horse. Source: Malcolm X Academy Walking Archive, 2023.

Miss Anaclara and the Black Cowboy Coalition brought so much knowledge into MXA even though their visit only lasted one day. I felt a lot of their lessons connected directly to militant education and the pedagogies of liberation we discussed as a team. For me, one of the central themes of liberation pedagogies is the idea of reciprocal relationships. Black horsemanship gave our students a tangible example of what reciprocal relationships can look like; they taught the MXA scholars about the importance of building trust and being connected with other living beings in a wholesome way, not a dominant way. We bond through trust. Much like horses, the Black cowboy coalition reminded

us that our children can only learn if they trust their environment and the people around them; they cannot learn if they do not feel safe.

Table 7.2 Malcolm X Academy Scope and Sequence Documents: Cultural History

Afrikan and Indigenous Culture and History Curriculum

- SWBAT understand the water crisis in Flint and Jackson
 - SWBAT understand and describe the history and culture of Dia De Los Muertos
 - SWBAT understand and describe the cultural history of Maroons
 - SWBAT understand the colonial history of Thanksgiving
 - SWBAT understand and describe the Tanzanian Revolution
 - SWBAT build connections between the Vietnam war and Anti-colonialism
 - SWBAT understand and explain the Grenada Revolution
 - SWBAT build connections between Hawaii, Aotearoa, and the Oceanic Region
 - SWBAT understand and describe the geography of North Afrika and the Arab World
 - SWBAT identify and describe the countries in West Afrika
 - SWBAT understand and describe the PAIGC militant schools
 - SWBAT build connections between Nipsey Hussle and East Afrika
 - SWBAT understand the South and the Great Migration
 - SWBAT understand and describe the Slave Coast in West Afrika
-

Farming and Food Forestry

When MXA officially made the move to the Shakur House, they lost access to the beautiful farm that the students had built and maintained throughout the first academic year. On my first visit to the new location, students ran up to me to tell me about what the new owners of our old building did to the farm. “They tore everything up Mr. Dejay! They ripped up our three sisters’ garden and threw away all the plants!” (Bilal, 2023). Rightfully so, our scholars were pissed off. After spending an entire year putting their own labor into maintaining the Assata Shakur Freedom farm; after learning about Afrikan and Indigenous sustainability practices that teach us about the importance of caring for the earth; after reading Assata Shakur tell them to love the plants and the animals; they could not

imagine why someone would knowingly destroy living plants with fruits and vegetables that brought life to creatures all over the farm. To this day, I have not driven past our old location on 4th avenue because I do not think I could deal with the emotions of seeing all of our hard work destroyed by the folks who moved into the building.



Figure 7.6 Image of MXA scholars discussing the layers of a food forest. Source: Malcolm X Academy Walking Archive, 2023.

In their first farming lesson of the 2022 school year, MXA scholars “explored the Assata Shakur Freedom Farm using their five senses; they also learned about mulch and compost as well as how to plant seedlings and how to water the base of plants,” (MXA Walking Archive, 2023). MXA’s farming and food forestry curriculum provided the scholars with tons of hands-on skills that they will be able to use in their future lives. The curriculum was structured to be progressive. In the beginning, the learning guides focused on plant science and took time to educate the students about the basic science of plants and farming. They learned about the life cycle of a plant, the parts of a plant, and the science of weather. During the fall season, scholars learned about what types of plants can grow during that time of year and spent a lot of time building the initial foundations of the Assata Shakur Freedom

Farm: they set up compost bins, in ground garden beds, and raised garden beds that surrounded the perimeter of the landscape. Scholars also spent time studying different farming methods. They learned about urban gardening, food forestry, and different Afrikan and Indigenous farming methods that have been used throughout the diaspora. Within these lessons they had critical discussion about the types of methods that would be most effective for the climate that they live in. MXA learning guides really pushed methods of food forestry to the forefront of the curriculum. Food forests are a sustainable way to grow a diverse range of food while fostering a robust ecosystem even in a small space like the Assata Shakur Freedom Farm. A food forest is designed to mimic a natural ecosystem, maximizing space and productivity by utilizing vertical growing. Here are the different layers that make up a food forest:

- Canopy Layer (Tall Trees): the Shakur Center had many tall trees around the exterior that provided a canopy for the rest of the landscape.
- Sub-Canopy Layer (Large Shrubs): There were two peach trees on the farm and the scholars helped plant two pomegranate trees as well.
- Shrub Layer: Scholars planted different types of berries like strawberries, blueberries, and blackberries
- Herbaceous Layer: Scholars planted shade tolerant plants like mint, rosemary, oregano, spinach, and kale.
- Ground Cover Layer: Scholars laid down wood chips to protect and feed the soil.
- Root Layer: Scholars planted beets, garlic, potatoes, carrots, and other root vegetables.
- Climber and Vine Layer: Scholars planted plants that took up vertical space like tomatoes, corn, and climbing beans.

Food forests, much like human communities, need the entire collective to participate in the sustainability of the ecosystem. This isn't just an aesthetically pleasing design, food forests are functional and remind us of the importance of collectivism. Each plant contributes to the health of the whole system, attracting pollinators, reducing weeds, and creating a natural habitat for beneficial creatures (Bilal, 2023).



Figure 7.7 Image of MXA students preparing the Assata Shakur Freedom Farm with mulch. Source: Malcolm X Academy Walking Archive, 2023.

During the winter season, scholars spent their time preparing the farm for the spring. In their first lesson as they transitioned from summer, to fall, to winter, students learned how to prepare a garden bed for cold weather and they spent time “harvesting the last of their summer vegetables for a future seed-sorting activity,” (MXA Weekly Newsletter, 2023). They learned about the science of soil and how to build a healthy soil for plants to thrive in the spring and summer. They learned about food forestry and the different layers of the forest. During this time, they received a donation of wood chips and spent weeks laying a thick mulch layer over the entire landscape of the farm. They learned about how this mulch layer would decompose overtime and feed the soil much needed nutrients that plants would need in the spring and summer. MXA scholars learned about different ways to build soil nutrients; they also learned about cover cropping and spent time planting different types of cover

crops over the in-ground beds of the farm. They planted beans, beets, radishes and other crops that can be tilled into the soil to release nutrients.

Scholars learned about different methods of cover cropping as well. On one in-ground bed they used the “chop and drop” method where they “chopped” all the plants off at the base, leaving the roots in the soil to die and decompose; they then “dropped” all the plant’s foliage on top of the soil to keep it protected from the sun. MXA scholars shared in their journals that this method fed the soil and kept it hydrated (Bilal, 2023). On the other in-ground bed they tilled the cover drops directly into the bed; churning in the foliage, the roots, and the fruits directly into the soil so that it can decompose before the spring season. MXA scholars also spent the winter season building up their compost pile. They learned about compost and how it can be used to feed nutrients into the soil while also providing our beds with a layer of mulch before the new planting season. They learned about carbon materials and nitrogen materials; the scholars practiced what they learned by breaking down and adding materials to the compost every morning during their morning chores on the Assata Shakur Freedom Farm. By the end of the winter season, they had over four cubic feet of compost that they created themselves using scraps from the grocery distribution program and leaves that had fallen from around the neighborhood (Bilal, 2023).



Figure 7.8 Image of MXA scholars planting seeds in their square foot garden beds. Source: Malcolm X Academy Walking Archive, 2023.

In preparation for the spring season scholars spent time experimenting with different greenhouse methods. They sprouted seedlings indoors with sunlight, indoors without sunlight, outdoors inside a greenhouse, and they even experimented with direct sowing seedlings into the ground. After weeks of experimentation, the students learned that starting the seedlings indoors with sunlight was the most effective method because it provided the weak seedlings with a nurturing environment during the early cycles of its life. Once the seedling matured, they would transition them to the outdoor greenhouse before planting them into the beds. Scholars also used this time to design their spring food forest. They studied different types of in-ground and raised bed gardening methods. Alongside their learning guides, MXA scholars decided that they wanted to try to implement no-till gardening methods into their food forest. They designed two fifty foot in-ground beds and, after

learning about the three sisters gardening method, they decided to build six three sisters garden beds. Scholars also “learned how to construct and incorporate square-foot gardening methods into their five raised garden beds,” and decided what types of plants they wanted to grow within each of them (Bilal, 2023).

Once the spring season hit, the students took lead on planting dozens of plants around the Shakur Center and a few of the scholars took pride in neatly curating the space. The three sisters’ garden beds and the tomato alley in particular received a lot of love and care from the scholars. Here is an excerpt from the essay one MXA scholar wrote about their time curating the three sisters garden beds and the tomato alley:

There are 6 plants of squash. The squash grows out and has big leaves so it could provide shade for the dirt under. This helps the dirt stay wet especially with how hot it is right now. There is one yellow baby squash coming in, it will take up to 80 to 110 days to harvest. And after 95 to 120 days it should be ready to eat. The squash needs water and shade so every day we go out and water the squash and check for dried leaves and make sure it is all healthy. There are 8 tomato plants in our no-till beds. Tomatoes need the pole so that they can stay stable because they grow 6 to 10 feet. This is called a trellis. It will take up to 60 to 85 days to harvest our tomatoes. And after 90 to 110 days it should be ready to eat all red and good. The tomatoes need water and need to stay stable so every day we go out and water the tomatoes and make sure they are growing up the trellis. Sometimes we need to add more twine. We check for dried leaves and make sure they’re healthy, (Neighbor Newspaper, 2023, pg. 6).

All in all, the MXAs farming and food forestry curriculum proved to be an outstanding success. During the spring season, scholars produced enough squash, tomatoes, and herbs to fill the weekly grocery boxes for over a month. Scholars took tremendous pride in being able to provide food for Neighbor Programs’ Free Grocery Program and they were excited to show their families which vegetables in the boxes came from the school’s farm. Towards the end of the school year, MXA

learning guides prepared different meals for the scholars using food from the farm and scholars voted on which food they liked the most. They reflected on this activity by critically thinking about how the taste of the food is a signal of its nutrients. They compared and contrasted their vegetables to store-bought vegetables and concluded that their vegetables had much more flavor!



Figure 7.9 Image of an MXA scholar trellising the tomato plants. Source: Malcolm X Academy Walking Archive, 2023.

Table 7.3 Malcolm X Academy Scope and Sequence Documents: Farming

Farming and Food Forestry Curriculum

- SWBAT design, build, and maintain an organic farm
 - SWBAT understand and identify the parts of a seed and a plant
 - SWBAT save fruit seeds for the farm
 - SWBAT sow seeds in the farm
 - SWBAT identify the parts of a pumpkin
-

-
- SWBAT meal plan using vegetables from our farm
 - SWBAT understand and describe the farms ecosystem
 - SWBAT build healthy soil in the farm
 - SWBAT understand and build a healthy compost pile
 - SWBAT map and investigate the state of the farm
 - SWBAT design and build mini greenhouses
 - SWBAT understand the survival of seeds on the farm
 - SWBAT identify and describe sprouted seedlings
 - SWBAT understand the role of pollinators on the farm
 - SWBAT design the farm for the Spring
 - SWBAT implement West Afrikan vertical farming techniques in the farm
 - SWBAT describe agroecology in Tanzania
 - SWBAT understand and describe Sharecropping and Tenant Farming
 - SWBAT understand and describe farming methods developed by the Māori and Hawaiians
-

Arts and Culture

MXA's arts and culture curriculum was developed, curated, and taught by the Minister of Arts and Culture, Dre T. Dre is one of MXA's core learning guides and he spent one to two days each week teaching the students various forms of music. For art, scholars typically studied an art technique that originated from a particular cultural region, social movement, or revolutionary artist they were studying on any given week. I want to start our discussion here focusing on the importance of music and storytelling within the MXA curriculum. MXA's Director, Jordan McGowan, wrote for an article for the UCLA Ufahamu journal where he discusses the importance of music, storytelling, and oral history:

Historically, Afrikans have used music in various healing and spiritual practices and as a source of oral history and form of literature. Specifically, for Afrikans within the death grip of euro-colonization, the oppressive conditions our People face have always been voiced in our music: from rebellion cries on the ships across the middle passage, field hymns & spirituals, the blues, soul, R&B, and hip-hop. Our People have always had the ability to find freedom in their voice, documenting our struggles in our music,

allowing music to serve as a historical record, a primary source of our community, our conditions, and our celebrations. Since its birth, hip-hop has been a storytelling medium, leading Hip-Hop to become the newest genre and iteration of our Afrikan literature. Given this, we should examine just how Hip-Hop can be used to teach Afrikan students and provide evidence of why learning how to teach students through hip-hop is critically important at this stage of struggle (McGowan, 2023).

Hip-hop, beat making, rhythm, and drumming circles were at the heart of MXA's music curriculum. Students learned how to write a chorus and incorporate it into a song; they learned how to engineer a beat using digital markers; they learned how to build a beat using live instruments; and they learned how drumming can be used to build community and nurture the spirit of the collective.



Figure 7.10 Image of MXA scholars' music lesson. Source: Malcolm X Academy Walking Archive, 2023.

Dre T designed a music curriculum that leaned on the work of Afrikan and Indigenous rappers, storytellers, and artists from around the world. He pulled knowledge from Afrikan figures the students were already familiar with and used their prior knowledge to build connections and educate

them about the history of hip-hop and its cultural connection to the Afrikan continent. This approach tapped into the scholar's cultural connections to hip-hop and led to them being more receptive to the material. They analyzed lyrics about history, liberation, and various social movements. Discussions like this sparked critical thinking and demonstrated ways the students could incorporate what they were learning from their cultural history lessons into their music class. For example, MXA scholars spent an entire week studying James Brown's, "I'm Black and I'm Proud."



Figure 7.11 Image of MXA scholars practicing piano. Source: Malcolm X Academy Walking Archive, 2023.

As we can see, everything within the MXA curriculum is interconnected; everything is taught to the students with a deep intentionality. These methods allow for students to see how core themes are interwoven between different subjects; nothing exists on its own island—everything is linked. In this environment, MXA scholars were empowered to express themselves and connect with the broader curriculum on a deeper level. Reading through lyrics students wrote, I found mentions of Malcolm X, Assata Shakur, Three Sisters Gardening, the Black Panthers, and Moana (Malcolm X Academy

Archive, 2023). It was clear that students used the knowledge they learned in class to inform their lyrics.

Table 7.4 Malcolm X Academy Scope and Sequence Documents: Music

Music Curriculum
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- SWBAT identify the parts of a song and a poem- SWBAT create music using drums- SWBAT write a hook for a song- SWBAT identify and implement specific instruments into a beat- SWBAT build a beat from scratch- SWBAT record a song- SWBAT identify the strings on a guitar- SWBAT identify important musicians in Afrikan History- SWBAT use their voice as an instrument within a beat- SWBAT export a beat and post on social media- SWBAT collaborate on a song with other artists

As I mentioned above, MXA’s art curriculum was directly connected to the topics scholars were studying during their cultural history lessons. As you explore the curricular items in Table 7.5, you’ll find that a majority of them have a connection to a particular region, culture, or historical time period. Studying art through a cultural lens served to open the scholars eyes to the rich, vibrant history of Afrikan and Indigenous art forms. Scholars were able to gain a deeper understanding of the traditions, values, and historical narratives that made up the different cultures and societies they were studying. Students were able to gain empathy and appreciation for different cultures and their art forms—challenging stereotypes they may have and promoting a greater connection to the Afrikan and Indigenous diaspora. At each level of the curriculum, we can see how MXA learning guides pushed

scholars to connect different struggles and ways of life with their own—helping scholars to foster a stronger identity and sense of belonging in the world.

Table 7.5 Malcolm X Academy Scope and Sequence Documents: Arts

Arts Curriculum
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SWBAT draw and describe an Indigenous medicine wheel - SWBAT draw sugar skulls - SWBAT create and weave an Ojo De Dios - SWBAT create Huichol Yarn paintings - SWBAT create a Dot Painting Inspired by Indigenous people of Australia - SWBAT create Amate bark paintings - SWBAT re-create traditional Mola cloth from Panama - SWBAT create geometric art designs from the Arab World - SWBAT create masks inspired by Burkina Faso - SWBAT design and outline a clothing business for community development - SWBAT demonstrate how Afrikan hairstyles are an art form - SWBAT create a Hawaiian wayfinding map using art

Self-defense and Martial Arts

Raiin and Hoos took lead on developing MXAs self-defense and martial arts curriculum. In a liberatory education system, the importance of self-defense and the ability to protect oneself is oftentimes the first thing we may consider as educators. Beyond the basics, the true power of self-defense and a disciplined practice of martial arts for the scholars of MXA lies in its ability to nurture well-rounded individuals. While martial arts is a physical activity that is good for the body and overall health, MXA learning guides utilized Muay Thai and a particular style of Kung Fu that offers scholars a unique blend of physical exercise, mental discipline, character development, and confidence building that works to shape them into confident, capable, and active members of their community.



Figure 7.12 Image of MXA scholars practicing their Muay Thai skills. Source: Malcolm X Academy Walking Archive, 2023.

One of the most important benefits of Kung Fu for MXA scholars is its ability to cultivate a sense of self-discipline and contribute to the holistic development of the scholars. Through repetitive practice of basic skills, students are urged to learn the importance of focus, patience, and perseverance. The drills and exercises implemented by Rain encouraged students to build their concentration skills while also helping them to master new techniques; this growth process requires a dedication to the craft and a willingness to overcome difficult obstacles. *We try hard things.* Thinking about holistic development, martial arts training equips MXA scholars with the tools they need to excel in the classroom, with their friends, and in the community. In a world where children are saturated with instant gratification, MXA learning guides are urging their scholars to invest time and effort into achieving long-term goals.

While there are a number of ways their practice of martial arts was important for self-improvement, MXA scholars also learned important lessons about defending one's community and the importance of avoiding conflict. These lessons were directly connected to Assata Shakur's poem, *R/evolution is Love*, where she writes, "R/evolution is not about blood shed. We will fight if we are forced to. But the fundamental goal of revolution must be peace," (McGowan, 2021). At MXA, scholars learn about the importance of avoiding conflict whenever possible; they learn de-escalation tactics and conflict resolution strategies that can prepare them for navigating potentially dangerous situations calmly and effectively. This focus on peaceful solutions—with the ability to defend themselves violently if necessary—equips MXA scholars with the tools they need to deal with conflict and violence in their communities.

Progress Assessment

As we've stated previously, Malcolm X Academy did not have grades or report cards for their scholars—so how did they monitor their progress as learners? The MXA team developed a progress report system for their scholars that would go home once a month. The scholars' progress reports consisted of eight different categories: (1) communicating their needs, (2) communicating their feelings, (3) working in community with friends, (4) literacy, (5) STEM, (6) culture and history, (7) arts and music, and (8) farming and food forestry.

The scholars' ability to work in community with other learners was the clear focal point of MXA's progress reports. Aligned with their methods and pedagogies of resistance, MXA learning guides felt that students could not properly learn and implement core skills like literacy and math if

they were not first able to exist in a healthy community with one another. This philosophy aligns with the community agreements they decided upon as a school. For the learning guides, if scholars could not first honor their community agreements with each other, how could they possibly implement skills like literacy and math in a liberatory way? There are plenty of adults in our society who are excellent at reading and math but lack any ability to build healthy relationships with the people around them. At so many schools around the country, academic grades take priority over socio-emotional skills like communication and teamwork. For MXA scholars, literacy and math lessons were frequently postponed if space was needed to host restorative and transformative conversations about communicating needs, feelings, and working in community with each other.

As each learning season came to an end, MXA learning guides hosted progress assessment meetings in three separate ways. First, they discussed the scholars' progress reports with them directly. Second, they would discuss the progress reports all together as a school and students would give praise and feedback to each other about their progress and areas for growth. Third, they would have a scholar-lead conference with families to share about progress and growth areas with their loved ones. These progress assessment meetings were led by the scholars and they were encouraged to share about their areas of strength and their areas of growth with their families from their own perspective. While learning guides were there to support the scholars, the children were encouraged to take lead so that they could continue to progress in their own ability to be a self-determined member of the school community.

Rather than receiving grades for each of the eight skills of focus, scholars were placed at three different progress levels: needs attention, progressing, or self-determined. By the end of the first school

year, each scholar was assessed as being self-determined at communicating their needs, communicating their feelings, and working in community with friends. While scholars undoubtedly made mistakes, they became self-determined in their ability to communicate those mistakes, their feelings, and develop solutions without much intervention needed from learning guides.

The progress reports had an additional section that listed each of the lessons and activities the scholars participated in within a given time period. This list of lessons was divided into the five curricular themes of the school. For each month, families could see the exact activities that scholars were completing during the school day. By the end of the school year, parents could see a broad list of each of the different activities their scholars participated in. Whereas traditional colonial schools typically list out the different subjects and the corresponding letter grade, families at MXA are provided with a detailed list of the different activities their scholars participated in and they could see whether their scholars completed the work or were still progressing. While MXA's progress monitoring system is still undergoing tweaks and adjustments, learning guides have felt that this form of assessment has proved successful because progress is determined by data gathered by every stakeholder within the community. Learning guides, scholars, and families come together to discuss the data and share their own perspective about the growth of each scholar. In this way, the students are able to demonstrate their growth as learners to their families rather than allowing a list of letter grades to exist as the end all be all of student assessment.

School Structure and Daily Practice

At MXA, the structure and daily practice of the school has completely shifted from year one to year two. Just like we saw with the True Education system of the Zapatistas, the PAIGC, and the Oakland Community school—there were many variations between the daily schedules of the different militant education projects because they were structured according to the context of the individual communities they served. Meaning, the daily structure and flow of the school day was shaped to fit the wants and needs of the particular community at a particular point in time. Between year one and year two, we saw variations of the school's structure and daily practice because the wants, needs, and capacity of MXA shifted over that time period. At the end of the day, the structure and daily practices that work for one school may not work for another—so as we look forward towards thinking about the development of liberations schools in different contexts on Turtle Island, it will be important for us to consider the ways in which daily schedules and school structure for militant education projects should be malleable to the communities they serve.

During the first school year, a typical day at MXA typically began at 8am for the learning guides. Depending on the day, either me, Hoos, or Jordan arrived early to accomplish daily chores and set up the learning space for the scholars. Children began arriving at the school between 9:00 and 10:00 am. In our initial conversation with families, many of them were displeased with the 7:30 am and 8:00 am mandatory start times at their local charter and public schools. Based on their requests, we decided to start our school day at 10:00 am. Scholars were invited to arrive at school anytime between 9:00 am 10:00 am where they could help with chores, prepare and eat breakfast, and engage in any free time activities of their choice. Oftentimes, MXA scholars would choose to play basketball or engage in

creative art activities from previous lessons. Once most of our students arrived, we would gather together in a shared space to begin our morning circle. During morning circle, students would recite their community agreements, review the agenda for the day, and respond to a reflection question that typically asked them to share about something that has brought them joy recently or something in life they are looking forward to.



Figure 7.13 Image of MXA scholars setting up their own art activity before the school day began. Source: Malcolm X Academy Walking Archive, 2023.

Following the morning circle the learning guides and scholars would head out to the baby blue basketball court to participate in some structured morning movement. This would involve light movement, stretching, and sometimes we would have the scholars lead us through their basic Muay Thai drills to warm our bodies and brains up for the day. Once morning movement was completed, scholars and learning guides would head into the neighborhood for their morning walk. On most days, students were able to decide the path of the morning walk and they often chose to explore new portions of the neighborhood we had not seen before. On these walks, learning guides would

frequently pause to ask critical thinking questions, explore native gardens throughout the neighborhood, and have conversations with elders throughout the community. When scholars arrived back to campus, they knew they were going to immediately transition into their morning learning session. During the morning block, scholars focused on their math and literacy skills with a variety of group lessons, paired work, and one on one sessions with learning guides. After the morning block was complete, scholars had free time to play outside before lunch.



Figure 7.14 Graphic of the MXA daily schedule during the first academic year in the Shakur Center. Source: MXA Walking Archives.

During the afternoon learning session, when lunch was finished, scholars would participate in a cultural history lesson, a music lesson, an art lesson, a STEM lesson, or a farming lesson. Earlier in the school year, the morning and afternoon sessions were flipped but after several meetings reflecting on the schools daily practices, both scholars and learning guides agreed that it would be beneficial to start the day focusing on their core skills like literacy and math—saving the more engaging lessons for the

afternoon block. This is just one example of the many ways MXA scholars and learning guides collaborated to adjust the schedule to meet the day to day needs of the community. Following the afternoon block students typically had some time before dismissal for some extra free time outside. On Fridays, this extra time would be reserved for a trip to the 4th avenue park—one of the scholars' favorite activities. This is what a typical day at MXA looked like during the first academic year.

At the start of year two, many obstacles forced the learning guides and scholars to shift what the structure of the school day looked like. For one, Mondays became half days because of the limited capacity of MXA learning guides heading into year two. As mentioned previously, I had to step away from working with the scholars everyday so we had one less person on campus to help guide the scholars through their learning. Even though Mondays were half days, scholars are still welcomed to arrive at the school during the normal times and help with the grocery program. With a smaller space, there was not room on campus for scholars to play outside for extended periods of time so the learning guides would walk them to the Big Park a few blocks away so students could run around, play basketball, and enjoy time outdoors.

I recently had a chance to spend a day at MXA in its new location and I was happy to see that the morning session looked rather similar to our sessions throughout the first year with a few subtle changes. It was amazing to see how much the scholars had grown in their expertise with deep breathing, circle time, and reciting the community agreements. In fact, scholars could now recite each of the community agreements from memory in both English and Swahili. Another addition to the morning circle was a recitation of Assata Shakur's *R/evolution is Love*. I almost cried during this portion of the morning circle. One of the youngest scholars who has been at the school since the

opening day led each of her classmates through this recitation of Assata’s poem. She recited the poem completely from memory. What a beautiful sight! Once the poem was over. Learning guides asked the scholars some reflection questions and led them through a discussion about how their school community has either uplifted or fallen behind at following through on these community agreements and Assata’ Shakur’s call to action. It was amazing to see young scholars reflecting on important themes like communication, land stewardship, colonialism, and sexism.



Figure 7.15 Image of MXA scholars conducting interviews at the Big Park for their journalism study. Source: Malcolm X Academy Walking Archive, 2023.

Following the morning circle, MXA learning guides incorporated a new block called “communal time.” During communal time scholars would spend time working on their Swahili Lessons, their math and literacy skills, and they would conclude the session with circle reading time. Communal time leads straight into the morning block. Instead of focusing on core skills during this block like they did during year one, scholars would spend an hour participating in lessons and group

activities involving Afrikan and Indigenous History, Literature, and Art. This was a small shift from the first school year. Core skills studies now happened during communal time and the morning block was reserved for a deepened study of Afrikan and Indigenous cultural history. After the morning block was complete, scholars would gear up for lunch and their daily walk to the Big Park. As I stated previously, the Big Park gave the scholars an opportunity to stretch their legs, run around, play structured games, and they even had some free time to explore the park and engage in some choice time. During choice time scholars could play sports, play lava tag on the playground, and so many other activities. Miss Sam and I met them at the Big Park one day and led them through a clay sculpting activity which included a lesson on mosaic art tiles.



Figure 7.16 Image from an MXA scholars photography portfolio. Source: Malcolm X Academy Walking Archive, 2023.

After arriving back at the Shakur House, the scholars prepared the learning space for their Afternoon session. During the afternoon block, scholars would participate in either journalism, farming, STEM, Art, Fashion, or Photography lessons! During this block learning guides would often

invite community experts to come in and share a particular skill with the learners. Based on my discussions with learning guides and scholars, the weekly photography lessons became one of their favorite moments of the week—the students generated some beautiful art work using various forms of photography. When the afternoon block was complete, students had free time to play around the Shakur House before dismissal.

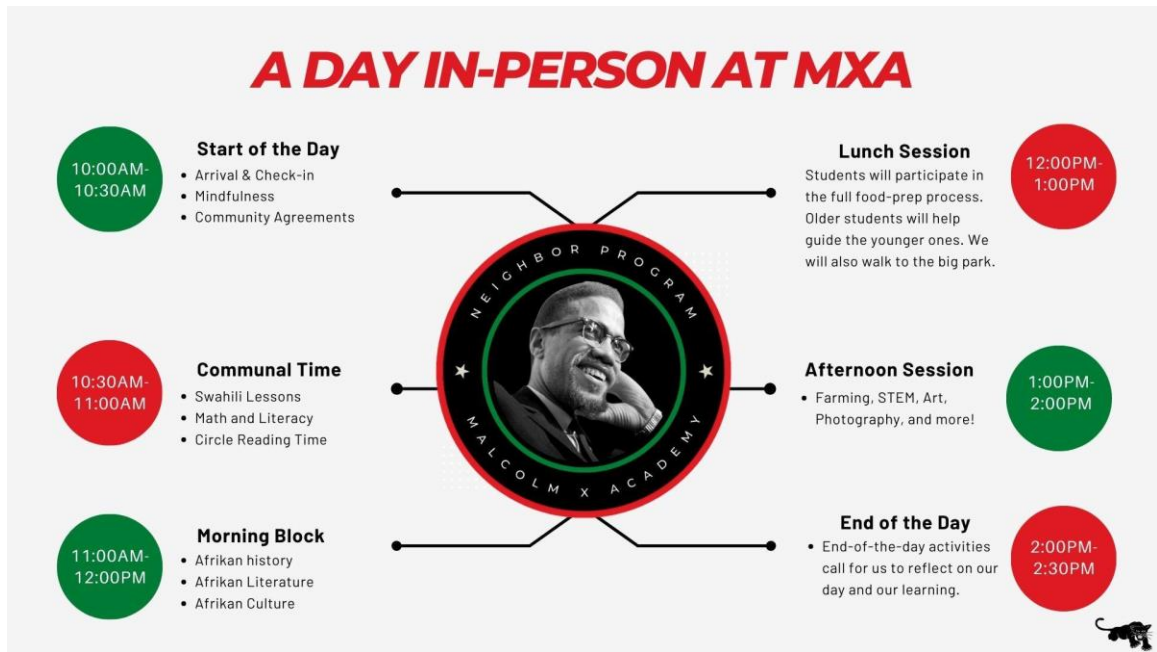


Figure 7.17 Graphic of the MXA daily schedule during the second academic year in the Shakur House. Source: MXA Walking Archives.

Chapter Eight—Conclusion: The Value of Militant Education

The more radical the person is, the more fully he or she enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he or she can transform it. This individual is not afraid to confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled. This person is not afraid to meet the people or to enter into a dialogue with them. This person does not consider himself or herself the proprietor of history or of all people, or the liberator of the oppressed; but they do commit themselves, within history, to fight at their side.

— *Paulo Freire*

As I try to conclude our narrative about Oak Park’s first liberation school, Malcolm X Academy for Afrikan Education, I feel that we have found at least some answers to the question that grounded this thesis project. This work has also sparked new questions and guided me in directions I could not have predicted when I first defended my dissertation proposal. When I initially read about the BPP’s Oakland Community School at the start of my doctoral journey, I could have never imagined I was going to be a part of a small team that brought a similar school to a neighborhood just south of downtown Sacramento. While there are a number of things I was unable to explore with the kind of attention to detail I had hoped—and there were interviews and conversations I was unable to have due to the repression of revolutionary organizations within the so-called United States and also due to the reality of the COVID-19 pandemic—I still feel I was able to tell a version of MXA’s story that can inform the development of future community schools.

Militant education refers to a type of educational practice that is grounded in anti-colonial and decolonial principles. It is connected to political education and liberation more so than anything involving the military. It is focused on the concepts and goals of Afrikan and Indigenous liberation. The purpose of militant education is to develop community members who can consciously contribute to the sustainable development of liberated communities. MXA emerged from within a specific

historical moment and it is informed by political movements and ideologies that have shaped Afrikan and Indigenous revolutionary movements for decades. While its programs have only existed for a brief moment in history, they have already offered an important lesson to the larger liberation struggle of Afrikan and Indigenous peoples throughout Turtle Island. The lessons offered to us throughout this project force us to leave the realm of the theoretical and hypothetical—urging us to understand how the ideals of liberation struggle can be put into practice within our daily lives and demonstrating how they can serve our children for future generations.

Given the current state of K-12 education for Afrikan and Indigenous students, I believe that Malcolm X Academy for Afrikan Education offers oppressed communities and grassroots organizations with a viable solution to the problems their children face within local state-run schools whose core practices are rooted in the settler-colonial mission school system developed by the occupying government of the so-called United States—a history we have explored and analyzed thoroughly throughout this thesis. Malcolm X Academy separates itself from the reality children and educators face within the state-run compulsory education system. Unlike these schools, MXA does not rely on grades, workbooks, rules, or school bells to guide its students through their learning day. The systems, methods, and curricular items that drive the school are “as organic as the vegetables in the school’s community garden,” (Childress, 2022). The learning guides of MXA are attempting to build an environment where scholars can “come back to their Afrikan and indigenous practices of being community based” with the intention of “leaving space for individuality,” throughout the school day, (Childress, 2022).

When considering curriculum and pedagogical standards, comparing MXA to traditional colonial schools is like “comparing apples to oranges” (Eid, 2023). Its ultimate purpose is to demonstrate for the community that it is possible to free Afrikan and Indigenous youth from the limitations of capitalist education. For MXA Director of Programs, Jordan said in an interview with Al Mayadeen (English) that “only through building independent Pan-Afrikan educational institutions will we be able to raise our children into the strong and liberated generation who will be able to unify and free The Continent and all Afrikans,” (Eid, 2023). With this being said, the goals and aims of the MXA curriculum and pedagogical practices are made very clear to the community, the families, and the scholars studying at the school. By deviating from the capitalist educational model, children at MXA are afforded the opportunity to build their literacy and math skills while also acquiring life skills that will empower them to give back to their community in a tangible way.

Afrikan and Indigenous children deserve healthy and nurturing learning environments. If we know that settler-colonial institutions are mechanisms used for the literal and cultural genocide of Afrikan and Indigenous people, then we must work to provide our communities with alternatives. The time to act is already upon us—and we are falling behind. As we witness a genocide being carried out against the people of Palestine, we are witnessing the steadfastness of a Resistance Axis that has developed an entire infrastructure from the ruins of their flourishing society. The resistance has proven that it is capable of withstanding the military attacks from two of the worlds most well funded militaries: the United States and Israel.

While we are not organizing within the same stage of warfare here on Turtle Island, there is a need for us to continue developing our own liberation struggle. How are we equipping our children

and our communities with the right tools, knowledge, and skills to liberate themselves from the same shackles that Palestinians are attempting to free themselves from? I believe this project demonstrates that militant education projects are an important place to start. According to MXA's Minister of Education, mel, education should be our starting point:

Education plays a huge role in the struggle because unfortunately, not everyone is aware that the ways we've been forced to live (barely surviving paycheck to paycheck, insurmountable debt, carceral systems from childhood, exploitation at work) are the result of a truly fucked up system that is only benefitting a very small amount of people. Lots of folks don't know that there are deep histories of people who have successfully organized to create spaces where they are not beholden to capitalism or colonization. I think that's part of what keeps people doing what they're doing and less willing to seek out or participate in working toward an alternative. The programs NP has only work because people volunteer their time, energy, and resources to contribute to them. Those are the same people who—to some extent—understand that we as a people do have the power to change and shape our conditions. That we can provide basic needs like food and shelter for ourselves. That we can provide protection for ourselves against violent forces. That we can provide healthcare for ourselves—essentially all the things any given person needs to survive. Our people (Afrikan people; indigenous people) have been surviving and organizing themselves for survival for centuries. And, it's not to say that in 2024 our way of organization is going to look the same way—but I think what education does is show people what is possible while simultaneously uncovering the lies that empire has taught us: that we have to live this way. Our goal with educating folks is to bring more folks to that understanding in hopes that they will join what it is we're building. And to bring whatever talents they have so that we can continue to grow and expand our programs. A community of 100 dedicated individuals who decide that they're going to commit themselves to organize to farm the land, grow food, distribute that food to people, build homes and shelters, provide entertainment, and take care of the sick would be huge for our communities. We're doing that with a small group of people and we've been able to develop some useful decolonization programs. Schools like this could genuinely impact the way people are living. The education piece, for me at least, is about getting people to see themselves as a valuable part of that work (charles, 2023).

Drawing on inspiration from the Black Panther Party, the PAIGC of Guinea-Bissau, and the Zapatistas' True Education schools, MXA is a welcomed addition to the robust history of Afrikan and

Indigenous struggle within the so-called United States. The question remains, is this model viable at a larger scale? How can community schools strive to serve more than just a handful of students?

From my experience with MXA, I believe that it is more than possible for Afrikan and Indigenous communities throughout Turtle Island to open small community schools for the purpose of liberation. In reality, the BPP, the Zapatistas, and the PAIGC have demonstrated for us that these individual institutions do not need to serve thousands of children within one school. In fact, that model of education is a regurgitation of settler-colonial logics. Our communities need small, accessible schools that are owned and operated by the people who are interested in the self-determination of their people. MXA has already set the example that anyone can do this! With the right intention, political education, and with the support of the community, anyone can start their own school. You do not need a large building or campus—you can operate a school out of someone's apartment, home, from the local park, or by utilizing existing community infrastructure. MXA went from a mansion to a trap house and they are still doing the work!

What is happening in Oak Park is something that can be taken to every community, inside of every city, and it can be used as a viable model of resistance. It takes a small group of dedicated individuals who want to create a safe space for the children in their communities. If we are interested in building a sustainable resistance movement, we need to have a network of liberation schools that are committed to the same goal: the liberation of Afrikan and Indigenous people and their lands from the shackles of settler-colonialism and imperialism. Within every community and within every organization, there are going to be people who disagree on the methods and practices needed to bring our people closer to liberation—we are not always going to have the same political beliefs and

worldviews. We see this reality within the Axis of Resistance in Palestine and beyond. Members of their organizations come from different tribes, religions, and political factions—but each of them, in this moment, unified for the liberation of Palestine. This should be our mindset if we hope to organize our people and children against the powers of European settler-colonialism, capitalism, and imperialism.

Towards the end of 2023, Neighbor Program became a branch of a national organization called Community Movement Builders (CMB). CMB is “a member-based collective creating sustainable, self-determining communities through cooperative economic advancement and collective community organizing,” (Community Movement Builders, 2024). They have chapters in Atlanta, Dallas, Detroit, Los Angeles, and now, Sacramento. By joining CMB, Neighbor Program has already begun having conversations with various chapters about potentially opening liberation schools within their neighborhoods—utilizing MXA as a blueprint. The dream of expanding this work across Turtle Island is no longer a far-off reality. While MXA may not be able to serve thousands of children within the Sacramento area, they have the opportunity to expand their work into cities across Turtle Island. Let us all do what we can to support this work within our own neighborhoods.

I hope this project can serve as a call to action and may it be a useful tool to those who carry on this work—my intention was to provide a space where the voices and experiences of everyday people’s resistance to terroristic oppression are uplifted and prioritized. This thesis is my attempt at making a historical contribution to the liberation of Afrikan and Indigenous people that centers the use of education as a necessary tool for liberation.

References

- AAPRP. (2014, August 7). *Pan-Afrikanism is the answer to Afrika's problems*. All-Afrikan People's Revolutionary Party.
- AAPRP. (2021, August 20). *Pan-Afrikanism Won't Fall into Our Laps – We Must Fight!* All-Afrikan People's Revolutionary Party.
- AAPRP. (2022, September 22). *What is Nkrumahism-Touréism?* Hood Communist.
- Adams, H. (1995). *A Tortured People: The Politics of Colonization (First)*. Theytus Books.
- Airy, C. (2023, May 12). 'We Walk Amongst Each Other, Not with Each Other': Seeking Common Ground in Sacramento's Oak Park. The Click.
- Al Mayadeen English. (2024, March 24). *170 days of Gaza genocide in staggering numbers*.
- Allen R. L. (1969). *Black Awakening in Capitalist America: An Analytic History*. First Edition. Doubleday.
- Alonso, J. (2014). *What Do You Learn at a Zapatista School?* Envio Journal.
- Anderson K. & Innes R. A. (2015). *Indigenous Men and Masculinities: Legacies, Identities, Regeneration*. University of Manitoba Press.
- Assensoh A. B. (1998). *Afrikan Political Leadership: Jomo Kenyatta, Kwame Nkrumah, and Julius K. Nyerere*. Krieger Pub.
- Au, Wayne (2018). *Marxist Education: Learning to change the world*. Haymarket Books.
- Austin, S. (2023, April 12). *California weighs how to improve outcomes for black students*. AP News.
- Autonomous Education in the Zapatista Communities: Schools to Cure Ignorance*. Glasgow Chiapas Solidarity Group's Blog. (2010, September 6).
- Bajaj, Monisha (2015) 'Pedagogies of resistance' and critical peace education praxis. *Journal of Peace Education*, 12:2, 154-166.
- Bilal, D. (Host). (2021). *A Conversation with From the Heart PNW* [Audio Podcast Episode]. In *The Comrades Classroom Podcast* [Audio podcast]. The People's Coalition.

- Bilal, D. (Host). (2022). *An Interview with Neighbor Program*. [Audio podcast episode]. In Comrades Classroom Podcast.
- Bilal, D. (Host). (2022). *Building a Liberation School*. [Audio podcast episode]. In Comrades Classroom Podcast.
- Bilal, D. (Host). (2022). *Neighbor Newspaper Live Report w/ Dr. Cornel West* [Audio Podcast Episode]. In The Comrades Classroom Podcast [Audio podcast]. The People's Coalition.
- Bilal, D. (2021). Field Notes and Journal.
- Bilal, D. (2022). Field Notes and Journal.
- Bilal, D. (2023). Field Notes and Journal.
- Bilal, D. (2024). Field Notes and Journal.
- Bilal, D. (2022). Personal communication [Personal interview].
- Bilal, D. (2022). Personal communication [Personal interview].
- Bilal, D. (2022). Personal communication [Personal interview].
- Bilal, D. (2022). Personal communication [Personal interview].
- Bilal, D. (2023). Personal communication [Personal interview].
- Bilal, D. (2023). Personal communication [Personal interview].
- Bilal, D. (2023). Personal communication [Personal interview].
- Bilal, D. (2023). Personal communication [Personal interview].
- Bilal, D. (2024). Personal communication [Personal interview].
- Bilal, D. (2024). Personal communication [Personal interview].
- Bilal, D. (2024). Personal communication [Personal interview].
- Bin-Wahad, D. (2017). *Look for me in the whirlwind: From the panther 21 to 21st-century revolutions*. Independent Pub Group.

- Bishop, J. (2018). *A Critical Case Study on (Anti)Blackness, Geography and Education Pathways in Twinsburg Heights, Ohio*. UCLA Electronic Theses and Dissertations.
- Black Past. (2019, September 25). (1970) *Amilcar Cabral, "National liberation and culture."*
- Bloom J. & Martin W. E. (2013). *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party*. University of California Press.
- Benford, A. V. (2021). *California education leaders discuss Black student disparities*. CapRadio.
- Borges, S. (2019). *Militant Education, Liberation Struggle, Consciousness: The PAIGC Education in Guinea Bissau 1963-1978*. Peter Lang.
- Borges, S.V. (2009). 'O trinómio terra, agricultura e camponeses na modelação revolucionária de Cabral', *Amilcar Cabral: estratégias políticas e culturais para independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde*. PhD diss.
- Borges, S. V., & César, F. (2022). *Militant Mangrove School*. In *Militant Mangrove School* (Vol. 1, Issue 7). University of Minnesota Press.
- Borges, S. V., (2022). *The PAIGC's Political Education for Liberation in Guinea-Bissau, 1963-74*. Tricontinental.
- Bowens, T., Carroll, B., Dowell, L., Everett, E., Fry, J., Hales, L., Hoskins, D., Maupin, C., & Strobino, D. (2013). *What is Marxism all about?* World View Forum.
- Bruce, C. (2023). *Rico and domestic terrorism charges against Cop City activists send a chilling message: ACLU*. American Civil Liberties Union.
- Burden-Stelly, C. (2020, July 13). *Modern U.S. Racial Capitalism: Some Theoretical Insights*. Monthly Review. Retrieved December 2022.
- Burton, O. (2023). *Tip of the spear: Black radicalism, prison repression, and the Long Attica Revolt*. University of California Press.
- Buti, A. (2002). *The Removal of Aboriginal Children: Canada and Australia Compared*. University of Western Sydney Law Review, 6, 25-38.
- Cabral, A (1969). *Revolution in Guinea: Selected Texts*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

- Cabral, A. (1972). *Our People are Our Mountains: Amilcar Cabral on the Guinean Revolution*. London: Committee for Freedom in Mozambique, Angola & Guiné.
- Cabral, A. (1973). *Return to the source: Selected speeches by Amilcar Cabral*. New York: Monthly Review Press with Afrika Information Service.
- Cabral, A. (1979). *Unity and Struggle: Speeches and Writings*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Cabral, Amílcar. (1979). *Análise de alguns tipos de Resistência*. Bolama: Imprensa Nacional.
- Cabral, Amílcar. (1979). *Unity and Struggle: Speeches and Writings*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Cabral, A. (2013) *Interview by Sónia Vaz Borges*. Personal interview. Praia Cabo Verde, 5 September.
- Cabral, A. (2016). *Resistance and Decolonization*. Translated by Dan Wood. New York: Rowman & Littlefield International.
- Callimachi, R. (2021). *Lost Lives, Lost Culture: The Forgotten History of Indigenous Boarding Schools*. The New York Times.
- Cesaire, A. (2000). *Discourse on Colonialism*. Monthly Review Press.
- charles, m. (2022). Personal communication [Personal interview].
- charles, m. (2022). Personal communication [Personal interview].
- charles, m. (2023). Personal communication [Personal interview].
- charles, m. (2023). Personal communication [Personal interview].
- Chavunduka. (2023, June 30). *Kwame Ture: Pan-Afrikanism, Revolution and Culture*. All-Afrikan People's Revolutionary Party.
- Chen, K. (2022, April 22). *New data shows emotional abuse increased among teens during pandemic*. Healthier, Happy Lives Blog - Stanford Medicine.
- Chew, B. (2022, June 17). *Scotus: Border agents can make warrantless arrests at homes under 100MI from the border*. WPDE. Retrieved October 2022.

- Chiapas Support Committee. (2020, January 3). *Femicide: Intolerable reality. Chiapas Support Committee*. Retrieved October 2022.
- Childress, J. D. (2022, November 4). *Neighbor program carries on Black Panthers' legacy*. The Sacramento Observer.
- Chomsky, N. (2016, June 23). *Noam Chomsky - the Educational System*. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tgXZuGIMuwQ>
- Clift, T. (2024, January). *Fact check: Has Sacramento County not spent 'a penny' of \$25 million homeless shelter fund?* Sac Bee.
- Community Movement Builders. (2023, April 13). *Our mission and values*.
- Cook, C. et al. (2004). *Stolen Youth: The Politics of Israel's Detention of Palestinian Children*. Pluto Press. London.
- Curry T. J. (2017). *The man-not : race class genre and the dilemmas of black manhood*. Temple University Press.
- Darder, A. (2017). *Reinventing Paulo Freire: A Pedagogy of Love (1st ed.)*. Routledge.
- Davies, C. (1994). *Black Women, Writing, and Identity: Migrations of the Subject*. New York: Routledge.
- Davis J. L. (2013). *Survival Schools: the American Indian Movement and Community Education in the Twin Cities*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Deloria, V. (1988). *Custer Died for Your Sins: an Indian Manifesto*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Domingos, B., & Khoury, G. M. (2020, July 18). *Commentary: It's time to end United States police training in Israel*. Tribune.
- Dowden, Elese B. (2019). *Colonial mind, Colonised body: Structural violence and incarceration in Aotearoa*. Parrhesia 1 (30):88-102.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. (William Edward Burghardt), 1868-1963. (2007). *Black Reconstruction in America: an Essay Toward a History of the Part which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880*. Oxford University Press.

- Duncan-Andrade, J. & Morrell, E. (2008). *The Art of Critical Pedagogy: Possibilities for Moving from Theory to Practice in Urban Schools*. Peter Lang.
- Ealy, S. (2016). *Black Panthers' Oakland Community School: A Model for Liberation*.
- Eid, H. (2023, September 29). Malcolm X Academy: Reviving the Panthers' legacy in 2023. Al Mayadeen English.
- Escalante, E., (2014). *Self-Determination: A Perspective from Abya Yala*. Restoring Indigenous Self Determination, 101-109.
- Estes, N. (2019). *Our history is the future*. Verso Books.
- European Research Council. (2018, January). *DNA can carry memories of traumatic stress down the generations*. Cordis.
- EZLN. (2014). *Autonomous Government II* (Ser. Freedom According to the Zapatistas). Escuelita Textbooks.
- Fernandez, J. (2017). *Structures of settler colonial domination in Israel and in the United States* Authors. Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, & Society, 6(1), 29–44.
- Fournier S. & Crey E. (1997). *Stolen from our embrace: the abduction of first nations children and the restoration of aboriginal communities*. Douglas & McIntyre.
- Freire, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum International Publishing.
- Freire, P. (1973), *Education for Critical Consciousness*. New York: Continuum International Publishing.
- Freire P. & Faundez A. (1989). *Learning to question: a pedagogy of liberation*. Continuum.
- Gahman, L. (2015, July 7). *Zapatismo*. Global Social Theory.
- Gallegos, E., Fensterwald, J., & Willis, D. J. (2023, January 25). *Critics say Newsom's proposal for low-performing students fails most black students*. EdSource.
- General Assembly. (1986). *Declaration on the right to development*. United Nations Human Rights (ohchr.org).

- Gilmore, R. Antipode Films. (2020). *Geographies of Racial Capitalism with Ruth Wilson Gilmore [Video]*. Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2CS627aKrJI>.
- Giroux, Henry A. *Teachers as Intellectuals: Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Learning*. London: Bergin & Garvey, 1988.
- Goodyear-ka'opua, N. (2018). *Indigenous Oceanic Futures*. Indigenous and Decolonizing Studies in Education.
- Gottesdiener, L. (2014). *A Glimpse into the Zapatista Movement, Two Decades Later*. Schools for Chiapas.
- Grande, S. (2003). *Red pedagogy: Native American social and political thought*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Grosz, E.A. (1994). *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. St Leonards, Allen & Unwin.
- Haiphong, D. (2015, November 11). *Self determination: What it is, what it isn't*. Black Agenda Report.
- Haley S. (2016). *No Mercy Here: Gender Punishment and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity*. University of North Carolina Press.
- Herman, E. (2012). *From the Indian Adoption Project to the Indian Child Welfare Act: The Resistance of Native American Communities*. Indigenous Policy Journal, No. 1.
- Hernandez, E. (2012). *The Journey Toward Developing Political Consciousness Through Activism for Mexican American Women*. Journal of College Student Development 53(5), 680-702.
- Hill G. (2018). *500 Years of Indigenous Resistance*. Camas Books.
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. London: Routledge.
- Hooks, K. (2022, January). *Sacramento's historically Black Oak Park neighborhood is losing black residents - and fast*. CapRadio.
- Hoover, J. (2024). *California has spent billions on homelessness. Audit shows we haven't been tracking it | opinion*. The Sacramento Bee.

- Howard, A. (2007, January). *Zapatistas Showcase Their Autonomous School System to the Nation and the World*. The Narco News Bulletin.
- Jackson G. L. (1996). *Blood in My Eye*. Black Classics Press.
- James C. L. R. & Kelley R. D. G. (2012). *A History of Pan-Afrikan Revolt*. PM Press; C.H. Kerr Company.
- Jaramillo, N., and M. Carreon. (2014). *Pedagogies of Resistance and Solidarity: Towards Revolutionary and Decolonial Praxis*. *Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements* 6 (1): 392–411.
- Johnson, G. & Lubin, A. (2017). *Futures of Black Radicalism*. Verso Books.
- Jones, A., & Ellis, N. T. (2023). 'A form of resistance': More black families are choosing to homeschool their children. CNN.
- Jones C. & Boyce Davies C. (2011). *Claudia Jones: Beyond Containment: Autobiographical Reflections Essays and Poems*. Ayebia Clarke Publishing Limited.
- Journell, W. (2009). *An incomplete history: Representation of American Indians in state social studies standards*. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 48(2), 18–32.
- Kaba M. Murakawa N. & Nopper T. K. (2021). *We do this 'til we free us: abolitionist organizing and transforming justice*. Haymarket Books.
- K'é Infoshop. (2019). *Settler Sexuality: Resistance to State-Sanctioned Violence, Reclamation of Anti-Colonial Knowledges & Liberation for All – An Indigenous Feminist Zine*.
- Kelley, R. D. G. (2017). *What did Cedric Robinson mean by racial capitalism?* Boston Review. Retrieved December 2022.
- Kim, J. (2023). *A black history month-themed police car in Miami draws criticism*. NPR. Retrieved February 2023.
- Kimmerer, R. W. (2015). *Braiding sweetgrass*. Milkweed Editions.
- Kom'boa Ervin, L. (2021). *Anarchism and the Black Revolution: The Definitive Edition*. Pluto Press.
- Kurlinkus, K. (2022). *What percentage of your nonprofit budget should salaries and administrative expenses be?* Grant Writing Made Easy.

- Ladson-Billings, G. (1998). *Just what is Critical Race Theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education?* *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 11(1), 7-24.
- Lee, A. L. (2020). *FBI, which spied on MLK, blasted after twitter tribute to Civil Rights Icon*. *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. Retrieved December 2022.
- Levy, M. (2023, November 22). *Burnout, low pay and politics are driving away teachers. Turnover is soaring for educators of color*. AP News.
- Lewis, T. (2022). *Working Definition of Ableism*. Retrieved from <https://www.talilalewis.com/blog>.
- Lincoln, Y. & Guba, E. (1985). *Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research*. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. 105-117.
- Lomawaima, K.. (1999). *The Unnatural History of American Indian Education*. *Next Steps: Research and Practice To Advance Indian Education*.
- MacNevin, K. (2016, November 1). *Shedding light*. Defense Logistics Agency.
- Madhubuti, H. (1994). *From Plan to Planet: Life Studies--The Need for Afrikan Minds and Institutions*, in "Four Reasons for Using 'K' in Afrika," *The Nubian Message* 2, no. 9. Digitized by the Special Collections Research Center, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC.
- Malcolm X (1992). *By Any Means Necessary: Malcolm X Speeches & Writings*. New York: Pathfinder Press.
- Malcolm X (1989). *Malcolm X Speaks: selected speeches and statements*. New York: Pathfinder Press.
- Malcolm X Academy. (n.d.). Retrieved February 2, 2023, from <https://www.malcolmxacademy.org/>
- Marcos, S. (1994). *The Southeast in Two Winds A Storm and a Prophecy*. EZLN.
- Marcos, S. (1999). *Teachers are a Mirror and Window*. EZLN.
- Marcos, S. (2002). *Prayers for a Dignified Life: a Letter to Schoolchildren about the Zapatista Uprising*. *Rethinking Globalization: Teaching for Justice in an Unjust World*, 321–322.
- Mariano, A. & Tarlau, R. (2019) *The Landless Workers Movement's itinerant schools: occupying and transforming public education in Brazil*. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*.

- Masunaga, S. (2023, November 12). *Two teachers at public charter school placed on leave over “lesson on the genocide in Palestine.”* Los Angeles Times.
- McGowan, J. (2021, February 5). *Assata taught me: Revolution is love.* Medium.
- McGowan, J. (2022). Personal communication [Personal interview].
- McGowan, J. (2022). Personal communication [Personal interview].
- McGowan, J. (2023). Personal communication [Personal interview].
- McGowan, J. (2023). Personal communication [Personal interview].
- McGowan, J. (2023). “*The Classroom Must be Turned into a Riot*”: *The Necessity of Teaching Afrikan Students in Afrikan Ways (A Pan-Afrikan View)*. *Ufahamu: A Journal of Afrikan Studies*, 43(2).
- McLaren, P. (2000). *Che Guevara, Paulo Freire and the Pedagogy of Revolution*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- McLaren, P. (2004). *Life in schools: An introduction to critical pedagogy in the foundations of education*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- McVeigh, R. & Rolston, B. (2021). *Anois Ar Theacht an Tsamhraidh: Ireland, colonialism and the Unfinished Revolution*. Beyond the Pale Books.
- Merriam, S. (2017). *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*. Sage Publications.
- Mingus, Mia. (2014). *Re-envisioning the Revolutionary Body by Mia Mingus* [Video]. Youtube.
- Mingus, Mia. (2022). *You Are Not Entitled To Our Deaths: COVID, Abled Supremacy & Interdependence*. Leaving Evidence Blog.
- Moisés, S. (2023, December 2). *Novena parte: La Nueva Estructura de la Autonomía Zapatista*. Enlace Zapatista.
- Morris, M. W. (2016). *Pushout: the criminalization of Black girls in schools*. New York: The New Press.
- Murray, J. (2023). *Looking at the racial and ethnic dimension of school closures in California*. The Thomas B. Fordham Institute.

- Munoz, M. (2019). *River as Lifeblood, River as Border: The Irreconcilable Discrepancies of Colonial Occupation From/With/On/Of the Frontera*. *Indigenous and Decolonizing Studies in Education*. 62-81.
- Muntaqim, J. (2000). *We Are Our Own Liberators: Selected Prison Writings*. PM Press.
- Mwangi, N. (2022, December 8). *Steps to a Socialist Pan-Afrikan Movement*. Hood Communist.
- MXA Walking Archive. (2023). MXA Weekly Newsletters Collection. Copy in possession of Malcolm X Academy for Afrikan Education.
- Myers, J. (Guest). (2020, June 21). *Cedric Robinson, the Black Radical Tradition and Racial Regimes with Joshua Myers* [Audio podcast episode]. In *Millennials Are Killing Capitalism*.
- Myers, J. (2021). *Cedric Robinson: The Time of the Black Radical Tradition*. Polity Press.
- Navarro, L. H. (2004). *Zapatismo Today and Tomorrow*. Interhemispheric Resource Center.
- Nkrumah, Kwame (1970). *Class Struggle in Africa*. Panaf Books.
- Nothing, E. (2013). *Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries: Survival, Revolt, and Queer Antagonist Struggle*. Untorelli Press.
- Neighbor Program. (2020, May). *About Neighbor Program*. Neighbor Program Website.
- Neighbor Program. (2020). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 1.
- Neighbor Program. (2020). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 2.
- Neighbor Program. (2020). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 3.
- Neighbor Program. (2020). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 4.
- Neighbor Program. (2021). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 5.
- Neighbor Program. (2021). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 6.
- Neighbor Program. (2021). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 7.
- Neighbor Program. (2021). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 8.

Neighbor Program. (2021). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 9.

Neighbor Program. (2021). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 10.

Neighbor Program. (2021). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 11.

Neighbor Program. (2021). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 12.

Neighbor Program. (2021). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 13.

Neighbor Program. (2021). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 14.

Neighbor Program. (2021). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 15.

Neighbor Program. (2021). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 16.

Neighbor Program. (2021). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 17.

Neighbor Program. (2021). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 18.

Neighbor Program. (2022). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 19.

Neighbor Program. (2022). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 20.

Neighbor Program. (2022). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 21.

Neighbor Program. (2022). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 22.

Neighbor Program. (2022). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 23.

Neighbor Program. (2022). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 24.

Neighbor Program. (2022). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 25.

Neighbor Program. (2022). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 26.

Neighbor Program. (2022). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 27.

Neighbor Program. (2022). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 28.

Neighbor Program. (2022). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 29.

Neighbor Program. (2023). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 30.

- Neighbor Program. (2023). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 31.
- Neighbor Program. (2023). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 32.
- Neighbor Program. (2023). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 33.
- Neighbor Program. (2023). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 34.
- Neighbor Program. (2023). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 35.
- Neighbor Program. (2023). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 36.
- Neighbor Program. (2023). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 37.
- Neighbor Program. (2023). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 38.
- Neighbor Program. (2023). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 39.
- Neighbor Program. (2023). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 40.
- Neighbor Program. (2023). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 41.
- Neighbor Program. (2024). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 42.
- Neighbor Program. (2024). *Neighbor Newspaper*. Vol 43.
- Newton, H. & Seale, B. (1966). *The Black Panther Party 10 Point Program*. Black Past.
- Newton, H. P. (1970). *Revolutionary intercommunalism*. Abolition Notes.
- Newton, H. P. (1973). *Revolutionary suicide*. [1st ed.] New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Newton, H.P. (1999). *To Die for the People: the writings of Huey P. Newton*. Writers and Readers Publishing.
- Niesz, Tricia & Korora, Aaron & Walkuski, Christy & Foot, Rachel. (2018). *Social movements and educational research: Toward a united field of scholarship*. Teachers College Record. 120.
- Nkrumah, K. (1966). *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*. International Publishers.
- Nyerere J. K. & Jihad Productions. (1971). *Ujamaa: the basis of Afrikan socialism*. Jihad Productions.

- O'Brien, J. (2010). *Firsting and lasting writing Indians out of existence in New England*. University of Minnesota Press.
- On Canada Project. (2022, September 9). *What is the Truth and Reconciliation Report?* The On Canada Project.
- Osuna, S. (2017). *Class Suicide: the Black Radical Tradition, Radical Scholarship, and the Neoliberal Turn*. *Futures of Black Radicalism*, 21-38.
- Perry, K.-K. Y. (2013). *Black women against the land grab: The fight for racial justice in Brazil*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Piepzna-Samarasinha L. L. (2018). *Care work: Dreaming Disability Justice*. Arsenal Pulp Press.
- Pottiger, M. (2023, July 11). *The Top 3 Challenges Facing Black Teachers*. The Seattle Medium.
- Ramchand, R. et al. (2021). *Trends in Suicide Rates by Race and Ethnicity in the United States*. JAMA Network Open.
- Recollet, K. (2016). *Gesturing indigenous futurities through the remix*. *Dance Research Journal*, 48(1), 91-105.
- Santos Perez, C. (2014, June 6). Looking at the "Tip of the spear". Hawai'i Independent.
- Richards, A. (2020). *Raising Free People: Unschooling as Liberation and Healing Work*. PM Press.
- Rickford R. J. (2016). *We Are an Afrikan People: Independent Education, Black Power and the Radical Imagination*. Oxford University Press.
- Rico, A. (2014, January 2). *Educate in resistance: The Autonomous Zapatista Schools*. ROAR Magazine.
- Roberts, D. (2002). *Shattered Bonds: The Color of Child Welfare*. Basic Books, New York.
- Roberts, D. (2022). *Torn Apart: How the Child Welfare System Destroys Black Families and How Abolition can Build a Safer World*. Basic Books, New York.
- Robinson, C. (2000). *Black Marxism: The making of the black radical tradition*. London: Zed.
- Robinson C. J. (2007). *Forgeries of Memory and Meaning: Blacks and the Regimes of Race in American Theater and Film before World War II*. University of North Carolina Press.

- Robinson, C. (2017). *Preface*. *Futures of Black Radicalism*, 1-8.
- Robinson, R. (2020). *Until the Revolution Analyzing the Politics, Pedagogy, and Curriculum of the Oakland Community School*. City University of New York. *Space, Time and Education*, Vol. 7, pgs. 181-203.
- Rodney, W. (1972). *How Europe underdeveloped Afrika*. London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications.
- Rodríguez, D. (2006). *Forced Passages: Imprisoned Radical Intellectuals and the U.S. Prison Regime*.
- Rose, G. 1997. *Situating knowledges: Positionality, reflexivity, and other tactics*. *Progress in Human Geography*, 21(3), 305–332.
- Sabzalian, L. (2019). *Indigenous Children's Survivance in Public Schools*. Routledge.
- Salanga, J. (2022). *New Malcolm X Academy in Oak Park continues tradition of Black Panther Liberation Schools*. CapRadio.
- Savage, D. (2022, June 23). *Supreme Court Shields Police from being Sued for Ignoring Miranda Warnings*. Los Angeles Times.
- Schools for Chiapas. (n.d.). *Mayan Schools of Dignity*. Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional. Retrieved October 14, 2020, from <https://schoolsforchiapas.org/advances/schools/>.
- Seale, B. (1991). *Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton*. United Kingdom: Black Classic Press.
- Serpeloni, F., Radtke, K., de Assis, S. et al. (2017). *Grandmaternal Stress During Pregnancy and DNA Methylation of the Third Generation: An Epigenome-wide Association Study*. *Translational Psychiatry*. 7th ed.
- School Pulse Panel. Institute of Education Sciences. (2023). <https://ies.ed.gov/schoolsurvey/spp/>.
- Shakur, Assata. (1988). *Assata: an Autobiography*. Lawrence Hill Books.
- Shear, S. B., Knowles, R. T., Soden, G. J., & Castro, A.J. (2015). *Manifesting destiny: Re/presentations of Indigenous peoples in K-12 U.S. history standards*. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 43(1), 68–101.
- Shenker, S. (2012). *Towards a world in which many worlds fit? Zapatista autonomous education as an alternative means of development*. *International Journal of Educational Development*, Volume 32, Issue 3.

- Sherman, M. (2022, June 25). *Supreme Court overturns Roe v. Wade: states can ban abortion*. AP News.
- Shoats, R. (2012). *Autonomous Resistance to Slavery and Colonization: two essays by Russell “Maroon” Shoats*. Not Yt Cister Press.
- Sins Invalid. (2019). *Skin, Tooth, and Bone—The Basis of Our Movement Is People: A Disability Justice Primer*. Second Edition.
- Sista II Sista. (2016). *Sistas Makin’ Moves: Collective Leadership for Personal Transformation and Social Justice. Color of Violence: the INCITE! Anthology*. Duke University Press.
- Small, P., Barker, M., Gasman, M., (2020). *Sankofa: Afrikan American Perspectives on Race and Culture in US Doctoral Education*. SUNY Press.
- Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies* (2nd ed.). Zed Books.
- Smith, L. T. et al. (2019). *Indigenous and Decolonizing Studies in Education: Mapping the Long View*. Routledge, an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group.
- Solorzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2002). *Critical race methodology: Counter-storytelling as an analytical framework for education research*. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8, 23-44.
- Sojoyner, D. (2016). *First Strike: Educational Enclosures in Black Los Angeles*. University of Minnesota Press.
- South Chicago ABC Zine Distro. (2020). *Racial Capitalism and Prison Abolition*. True Leap Press.
- Spade, D. (2020). *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next)*. Verso Books.
- Spade, D. (2020). *Solidarity Not Charity*. *Social Text*, 38, 131–151. Duke University Press.
- Stanley, E. (2021). *Atmospheres of Violence: Structuring Antagonism and the Trans/Queer Ungovernable*. New York, USA: Duke University Press.
- Stout, C., & Wilburn, T. (2023, November 9). *CRT Map: Efforts to restrict teaching racism and bias have multiplied across the U.S.* Chalkbeat.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

- Tarlau, R. (2015). *How Do New Critical Pedagogies Develop? Educational Innovation, Social Change, and Landless Workers in Brazil*. Teachers College Record 117 (11): 110304.
- Tarlau, R. (2017). "Gramsci as Theory, Pedagogy, and Strategy: Educational Lessons from the Brazilian Landless Workers Movement." In Antonio Gramsci: A Pedagogy to Change the World, edited by Nicholas Pizzolato and John Holst. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.
- Taylor, R. (2021). *Indicted Victime: Black Males and Sexual Vulnerability*. Medium.
- They Schools. (2000). *On Let's Get Free* [CD]. Dead Prez.
- Thomas, D. (2005). *The Black radical tradition—theory, and practice: Black studies and the scholarship of Cedric Robinson*. Race & Class. 47(2):1-22.
- Thuma, E. (2019). *All Our Trials: Prisons, Policing, and the Feminist Fight to End Violence*. University of Illinois Press.
- Trennert, R. (1982). *Educating Indian Girls at Nonreservation Boarding Schools, 1878-1920*. Oxford University Press. Western Historical Quarterly, Jul., 1982, Vol. 13, No. 3 (Jul., 1982), pp. 271-290.
- Tuck, E. & Guishard, M. (2013). *Uncollapsing Ethics: Racialized Sciencism, Settler Coloniality, and an Ethical Framework of Decolonial Participatory Action Research*. Challenging Status Quo Retrenchment. 3-27.
- Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W. (2012). *Decolonization is not a metaphor*. Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society, 1(1).
- Ture, K. (1973). *Nkrumahism: The Correct Ideology for the Afrikan Revolution*. Special Collections: Oregon Public Speakers. 107.
- Ture & Hamilton. (1992). *Black power: The politics of liberation in America*.
- Ture, S. (1977). *Strategy and tactics of the revolution*. State House.
- Umoja A. O. (2013). *We Will Shoot Back: Armed Resistance in the Mississippi Freedom Movement*. New York University Press.
- Vaught, S. E. (2017). *Compulsory: Education and the dispossession of youth in a prison school*. University of Minnesota Press.

- Visweswaran, K. (1994). *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Walia, H. (2020). *Border and Rule: Global Migration, Capitalism, and the Rise of Racist Nationalism*. Haymarket Books.
- Walia, H. (Guest). (2021, March 20). *Harsha Walia's Border & Rule on Racial Capitalism, Border Imperialism and Global Migration* [Audio podcast episode]. In Millennials Are Killing Capitalism.
- Wan, W. (2018, June 19). *What Separation from Parents does to Children: 'the effect is catastrophic'*. The Washington Post.
- Washington, Shirley (1978) "Educating the Masses: The Guinea-Bissau Approach." *New Directions: Vol. 5: Iss. 4, Article 8*.
- Woo, A., Lee, S., Prado Tuma, A., Kaufman, J. H., Lawrence, R. A., & Reed, N. (2022). (rep.). *Walking on Eggshells—Teachers' Responses to Classroom Limitations on Race- or Gender-Related Topics: Findings from the 2022 American Instructional Resources Survey*. Rand Corporation.
- Woolford, A. (2013). *Genocidal Carcerality and Indian Residential Schools in Canada*. SAGE Journals, Volume 18, Issue 4.
- Wolfe, P. (2006). *Settler colonialism and the elimination of the Native*. *Journal of Genocide Research*, 8(4), 387–409.
- Wolynn, M. (2017). *It didn't start with you how inherited family trauma shapes who we are and how to end the cycle*. Penguin Books.
- Zibechi, R. (2012). *Territories in Resistance: A Cartography of Latin American Social Movements*. AK Press.
- Zibechi, R. (2013). *The Little Schools Below*. La Jornada.
- Zibechi, R. (2013). *The Art of Building a New World: Freedom According to the Zapatistas*. Mira: Feminisms and Democracies.
- Zigzag. (2006). *Colonization and Decolonization: A Manual for Indigenous Liberation in the 21st Century*. Warrior Publications.

Zimmermann de Moraes, M., & Witcel, E. (2014). *The "Responsibility" of being Educators in a Social Movement School*. *Postcolonial Directions in Education*, 3(1), 42-56.