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teachers talk

Community Fault-lines: Teaching and Learning about Power, Institutions, and Change

THERESE QUINN AND ERICA R. MEINERS

A conversation with Karma R. Chávez, Julia Gutierrez, Charles Preston, and Craig Willse.

In July 2016, to capture a snapshot of the scope of justice-centered teaching and learning at colleges and universities, and to build shared analysis, Therese Quinn and Erica R. Meiners spoke with four organizers about their participation in movements on their public university campuses:¹

¹ We recorded, transcribed, and have merged and edited these conversations, which were held on two dates.

- Karma Chavez, who, after leaving a position teaching rhetoric at University of Wisconsin–Madison, started as an associate professor in Mexican American and Latino Studies at the University of Texas in fall 2016.
- Julia Gutierrez, a third-year doctoral student in Feminist Studies at Arizona State University, which has four campuses in the Phoenix/Tempe area.
- Charles Preston, an undergraduate in African American Studies at Chicago State University, a historically Black institution of higher education.
- Craig Willse, an assistant professor in the Cultural Studies program at George Mason University in Virginia, just outside of Washington, DC.

At this political moment, like many others before, campuses across the United States and beyond are rising up. From Mizzou (University of Missouri), Eastern Michigan University, and East Tennessee State, to West Point and the

universities of Puerto Rico, campus mobilizations mirror struggles in our streets and offer insights into the ways communities coalesce, identify their contours, debate, and dissent.

While these movements are often constructed as outside of “real” classroom learning, and sometimes even as “disruptive” and distractions to the actual work of higher education, we argue that these mobilizations are sites of generative and transformative learning and teaching for campus participants—faculty, staff, and students—and, increasingly, for those outside the university. And these uprisings often illuminate key tensions and fault-lines in the prevailing narratives about community that circulate on campuses and beyond.

The on-the-ground manifestations of these mobilizations and their affiliated social movements, sometimes chronicled in newspapers, tweets, and blogs, are often ephemeral. Archived, but rarely analyzed as moments of critical learning about how futures are imagined and made possible, these records can offer useful, powerful insights. We know that the struggles are both of the moment and that they unfold over years, heightening the importance of documentation. With that context, we offer this conversation.

We invited these participants from diverse and geographically dispersed public schools to grapple with the same questions. The group is not meant to represent the wide range of US campus mobilizations or all the constituencies activated in their struggles. Our framing questions included:

- What are the struggles in your campus community?
- What tactics are you engaging?
- How has the institution responded?
- What coalitions or connections have emerged as useful?
- What practices of community emerge from these mobilizations?
Why? What is at stake?
- What hasn't worked? What goals (and histories) shape your work?

These questions come from our own struggles at our worksites. As faculty members at public universities, we have experienced how our institutions continue to “restructure,” reflecting global trends in higher education, including austerity budgeting, precarious employment, erosions to organized labor, and more. The punitive costs of this endless restructuring are borne by those most marginal, or those who occupy and produce what Stefano Harney and Fred Moten have called the “undercommons” of the university:

Maroon communities of composition teachers, mentorless graduate students, adjunct Marxist historians, out or queer management professors, state college ethnic studies departments, closed-down film programs, visa expired Yemeni student newspaper editors, historically

black college sociologists, and feminist engineers. And what will the university say of them? It will say they are unprofessional. (29)

In the fault-lines, often marked and plumbed by those who, in Harney and Moten's view, have exceeded and escaped professionalism, struggles over power and knowledge emerge, distinctions between university and community are problematized, and, sometimes, possibilities for coalition and action are sparked.

In our contexts, every semester, if not every week, we participate in and/or learn about small and large uprisings connected to "community" on campus. For example, on one campus, graduate employees who have organized for decades finally get their first contract, while on another campus, faculty refuse to support graduate student attempts to unionize. A Latinx candidate for a "social justice" faculty hire is rejected after their community-based research is derided as "too local" by a senior member of the search committee. A university department broadcasts its support for economic justice and hosts meetings of the national Fight for \$15 movement, while refusing to pay its own student workers more than minimum wage. White faculty members regularly describe their only Black faculty colleague as "angry" and "unreasonable."

The universities' relations with communities marked as external are also potent and, for those most marginal, frequently toxic: Both of our universities forefront a mission of "community," yet use eminent domain to remove neighboring low-income families and small businesses, overwhelmingly people of color, to provide the appropriate services (generally privatized) and lifestyle for their paying students. Our universities capitalize on our highly diverse student populations, featuring shiny students of color in brochures and advertising materials, but there is a resounding institutional silence surrounding the persistence of white faculty members teaching from all-white syllabi and organizing all-white speaker series, or all-white departments refusing to hire faculty of color, citing "quality" or "fit." Diversity is used as an external selling point by universities, often with little impact on their daily practices.

While some facts surrounding these and related fault-lines are documented—for example, the enrollment of Black students at research-intensive universities hasn't increased in twenty years (McGill), student evaluations of faculty of color and women faculty members are routinely lower (Flaherty; Huston), women of color are disproportionately represented in the contingent labor market even as they are commodified (Duncan), and there is a burgeoning field of "critical university studies" (Ferguson; Newfield)—other fissures are hidden, or only faintly visible, and still too rarely archived. In this conversation, we hoped to learn more about how organizers and educators in varied locations navigate their terrains, define their terms, and create possibilities.

This dialogue confirmed for us that organizing is educative; that insight is triggered by action; that struggles in the “undercommons” of the university are inseparable from movements for liberation in our communities.

“In Conversation around Issues of Importance”: Contexts and Campaigns

KARMA R. CHÁVEZ (KC): It’s been an interesting couple of years at Wisconsin.

I have been involved in everything but scholarship lately. A large part of this past year was organizing [with another faculty member] around trying to protect the tenure system. Over the last year, we’ve worked with Black organizers in town on local jailing and policing issues through a kind of amorphous institution that we created called Comparative US Studies—a place to do American Studies on campus at Wisconsin, because there isn’t an American Studies department. We revitalized this thing to try to bring academics, activists, and artists into conversation around issues of importance.

And 2014–15 was a big year. We happened to select the topic of racial justice and incarceration for Comparative US Studies right when Ferguson happened [community response to the killing of Michael Brown, an unarmed Black man by white police officer Darren Wilson], so we just jumped in full force with the community people we already had relationships with.

JULIA GUTIERREZ (JG): In response to the Ferguson, Missouri, protest in November, the Ethnic Studies Working Group faculty members at Arizona State approached student organizations and invited them to participate in their meetings to discuss the special needs that students might have and situations that we might like to address, experiencing any type of discrimination, racism, things like that. I’m part of the Latino Graduate Student Alliance.

That organizing fell apart, unfortunately, but I think positive things did come out of it, including organizing with the community in Phoenix, and now we’re in the process of organizing a three-day retreat for folks who identify as LGBTQ and who are undocumented, in the cabins that ASU owns.

CHARLES PRESTON (CP): I was involved in a Save CSU [Chicago State University] campaign precipitated by the fact that our school was facing closure because the Illinois state government hasn’t signed a budget. I got into the fight not only because my academic career was at risk, but also because my mother was working at the institution as well. For most of the student mobilizations—protests and our rallies—along with several campus leaders from different sororities and fraternities on campus, people tapped me to lead because I’ve had experience in direct actions and civil disobediences with Black Youth Project 100 [BYP 100], a group that is part of the broader movement for Black lives. They have been mobilizing and organizing around police brutality.

CRAIG WILLSE (CW): I'll talk about a recent campaign we had at George Mason regarding the renaming of our law school after Antonin Scalia. I worked with a group of faculty, staff, and students to try to stop the name change. We weren't successful in the sense that the law school was renamed, but it was a really productive campaign on our campus. I'm excited about some of the things it put in place for us moving forward dealing with other issues on campus.

"It's a Very, Very Racist Institution": The Contexts for Campus Organizing

CP: CSU isn't in a silo. It's in a community, Roseland, where we can see what divestment looks like. CSU is located on 95th Street, a low-income area, therefore CSU is a resource not only for students but also for the community. We realized that saving CSU meant getting the community involved. Our first protests and rallies were concentrated on 95th Street and basically raised awareness in our community that our school is facing closure.

Since I had been organizing outside of the school, I was already connected to a network of organizations that were willing to assist in the fight to save CSU. For example, BYP 100 contributed to mass mobilizations and rallies in support of the Chicago Teachers Union and public higher education. Other groups, including Assata's Daughters and Fearless Leading by the Youth [FLY], contributed by initiating banner drops on highways to let people know to Save CSU. They even did a banner drop in New York that connected the closing of CSU to police violence. Since CSU serves a majority low-income Black population, we are also the most at-risk for police violence. We made the connection that our kids can't even go to college to escape intercommunal violence—the so-called "Black-on-Black" crime—or police violence. We can't even go to school because the government won't sign a budget to let us keep our institution. When you rob kids of education and rob kids of resources, what do they have left in their communities to combat violence?

CW: I've really seen a major shift on our campus in the four years that I've been there in terms of the culture of political activism.

Historically, George Mason University is a commuter school. We have around 30,000 students, but only around 6,000 live on campus. We have a large adult population, a lot of people who are working. Our commuters are coming from an hour or two hours away sometimes, making campus-based activism a challenge.

And although George Mason is a public institution, it doesn't really identify itself or narrate itself as a public university, unlike CUNY, where I did my graduate work, which has a strong tradition of political work within the various campuses. George Mason has really conceptualized and branded itself as this neoliberal laboratory for entrepreneurs across all fields.

Yet, this culture has been interrupted by campus organizing. For example, when Students Against Israeli Apartheid first started doing their work four years ago, they were the only visible political entity on campus. That challenging position also amplified the work that they were doing; it was happening in a bit of a vacuum, so it got a lot of attention and drew a lot of people in. Since then, probably on all of our campuses, we've seen the impact of Black Lives Matter on the consciousness of students coming in, on their sense of social movements and activism, and on their understanding or involvement.

Within that neoliberal culture, GMU faculty have not been very involved in the political life of campus, generally. But then the university announced, unbeknownst, really, to anybody, that the law school was being renamed after Scalia; the information was presented to the campus community as a done deal. The campus found out along with the larger public when it was announced.

This renaming provoked a reaction from faculty that I haven't seen before. The decision raised questions about shared governance: how can this major decision be made without any faculty input? It also touched on issues of racial justice and queer and trans justice, given Scalia's judicial opinions and track record. The renaming also connected to an issue that I know is relevant to lots of public universities, certainly to ours: the impact of private donors on our campus culture and curriculum. The Koch brothers [conservative billionaires Charles and David Koch] have a longstanding relationship with a few departments and programs at George Mason. The renaming took all these different issues, brought them together, and ignited a response.

Faculty who wanted to do something about it benefited from a politicized campus culture that was built and maintained by undergraduate and graduate students at GMU over the last couple of years.

KC: We had money [through Comparative US Studies at U-Wisconsin] and realized that we could do things like reserve space on campus or ask for more money from the university. And we really weren't supposed to be able to do that through this program but nobody ever questioned us, and so we just kept doing it. Academic year 2014–15 was the second year of the Comparative US Studies program and we were getting off the ground with this series, Racial Justice and Incarceration.

Typically, we would host three or four major events throughout the year, involving speakers who were usually academics, activists, artists, and community members. We had had one event in the fall, just kind of a small event, and then our second event was scheduled for December 4. And this just happened to be a week after Darren Wilson's nonindictment in the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri.

Usually these events would bring maybe a hundred people. UW–Madison is about 90 percent white, and it's a very, very racist institution. Out of that series of events we decided we wanted to launch something much bigger

for the rest of the year. We had this money and so we provided a lot of resources and space for Freedom Inc and this coalition they created called the Young, Gifted, and Black Coalition, which was hosting weekly protests against policing in Madison and also fighting the building of a new Dane County jail. We ended up adding several speakers and events, including two community debates on whether the proposed renovations to the county jail would really protect some of the most marginal people warehoused in the jail. The debates featured the sheriff, David Mahoney, and a physician and retired UW clinical professor, Dr. Douglas Kramer, who were on the affirmative side, and M. Adams of Freedom Inc and Young, Gifted, and Black, and Nino Rodriguez of the MOSES Jail Taskforce, who argued that these renovations would not protect vulnerable communities.

For the debates, we put Black and brown community leaders—Adams and Rodriguez—up against essentially the white mainstream—the sheriff and Kramer. In early January, we hosted one on body cameras and policing, where the community was organizing against body cameras. This was a successful event, but the sheriff, the chief of police in Madison, and the chief of the UW police showed up. The community challenged the sheriff to a debate about the Dane County jail, and he accepted publicly, probably because he had to. Two months later—and that actually turned out to be just days after a Madison police officer murdered Tony Robinson on Willy Street in Madison—we had this debate with the sheriff. About 350 people, including students but also many local residents, showed up to watch this debate.

The debate became a big part of the organizing that was already going on against the building of the jail. At the time, we stopped the jail from being built. It's back on the table now. But we stopped it for the time being. What was really amazing was Black and brown audiences on UW's campus owning it as their space, which was really important to us, putting community organizers up against people with advanced degrees like the sheriff and a local psychiatrist. My ex-partner and I, because we're both trained in rhetoric, trained the community organizers in formal debate tactics. We helped them do all the research and put together their arguments so that they could stand. They did better than the "elite" folks. We had several community forums [on other related topics] to advance the agenda of the movement.

You never know whether what you do makes a difference, but I know for sure that the conversation about the jail changed. We were finally able to use the university in service to the community.

JG: ASU has over 70,000 students enrolled. A good chunk of that number are students who take online courses. In 2014, ASU implemented a new program with Starbucks where their employees can take free online classes at ASU if they are full-time workers. In my first year as a teaching assistant, 100 students were enrolled in my online course. While that's a separate issue, it's

also related to just how big our campus is, and this is an organizing challenge for undergrad and grad students.

In the wake of the Missouri protests, the Black Graduate Student Alliance, the Latino Graduate Student Alliance, the Indian-American Graduate Student Alliance, and the undergraduate organizations decided to come together in order to compile a list of concerns.

The Ethnic Studies Working Group, led by faculty of color, invited all of us to come to their meeting for support and to discuss our concerns. We wanted to talk about the lack of graduate and undergraduate student voices in events that happened on campus. For example, some students are currently advocating for a Pride Center that we do not have.

More specifically, we came together as an organization because of an incident at our Polytech campus. An African American woman was racially and sexually assaulted in her dorm. Young men called her the “N” word and told her that she’s lucky that we have a good agriculture school because she will be working as a slave for them one day. The Polytech campus does not have a high representation of African American students, so the student’s mom emailed the student organization at the Tempe campus asking us to show solidarity and support for her at the Tempe campus. While we were organizing, the president of the undergraduate student organization passed away. Because of her death, and another death of an international student, our organizing fell apart.

We decided that it wasn’t the right time for us to continue organizing. Currently, we are depending less on the institution. We decided to be more community focused and to build from naturally made friendships with community organizers who are part of the undocumented queer movement here in Phoenix, Arizona. They reached out to us and asked us if we are interested in organizing a retreat, and specifically talking about racial justice and sexuality. We’re in the process of organizing that with folks from Black Lives Matter.

“We Created a Lot of Work for Them”: Institutional Responses

CP: I’ll say a little more about the trajectory of our activism at George Mason to give some context for what we got and what we didn’t get from administration. The beginning of this was an open letter that I wrote and circulated, asking faculty and staff, in particular, to sign.

I wanted something from faculty and staff, knowing (1) that students were going to be doing some of their own organizing, but (2) because I felt like it was important for us to say, as people who work at the university, that we recognized that honoring Scalia was in direct contradiction with the values of a public institution, given Scalia’s stance on affirmative action and his comments about Black students, specifically around the case at UT Austin.²

I wanted us to send a message to students that we recognized the impact of giving this honor to Scalia on our students of color and particularly on

2 During the 2015 arguments for the Supreme Court case challenging affirmative action policies in higher education, *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin*, Justice Antonin Scalia appeared to publicly question the ability of African American students to succeed at restrictive enrollment universities such as the University of Texas.

our Black students and that it was our responsibility as faculty and staff to respond and to push back.

The story about renaming the law school blew up in the media, and especially on social media, because the acronym, the Antonin Scalia School of Law spells ASSLaw or ASSoL, and it became this social media joke, overnight, which I have to say was a little satisfying to watch, and it caused a hassle for the school.

This discourse coalesced pretty quickly, not just around it being a joke, but also the idea that George Mason was already a conservative university, and so it was appropriate that our law school would be named after Scalia. Of course, that's not true. While our law school is quite conservative, that reputation has been engineered through Koch funding over the last 15 years that has shaped faculty hiring and research. I didn't want to even accept, in the first place, that GMU is just a naturally conservative place. It felt important to counter this naturalization of the conservativeness of our law school, but also to act against the association of our whole campus with what is really a small entity. The letter took off in a way that I couldn't have anticipated, and within two weeks, we had 150 faculty and staff sign on to the letter.

When I first started circulating the letter I got some pushback from faculty because the letter refers to Scalia as racist and homophobic. While they shared this opinion, they thought putting that in the letter might alienate people and that we might want to use a different kind of language. For me, this was really key: if we don't call Scalia what he is, which is racist and homophobic, nobody will.

And it made me think about this important article by Paula Rojas called "Are the Cops in Our Heads and Hearts?" In that piece, she looks at how in social movements we internalize norms of policing. And what I thought about in this context was: are the administration in our heads and hearts? Sometimes as faculty we internalize all the things the administration have told us aren't possible or are inappropriate or are impractical.

I thought, what's most important is that we put out a statement and organize around our true sense of who Scalia was and what it meant for us to associate ourselves—and our university—with him. We were able to mobilize people quite effectively with this message that people initially thought wouldn't gain real traction. We were able to throw a wrench in the cog and stop what they presumed would be an easy and automatic process.

In the end, the name change was brought before a state board that is supposed to approve it. The day before that meeting, the Attorney General decided that that state board actually didn't have any authority over this decision because it was *de facto* done already, so the entire process was undermined.

Throughout, the administration kept giving us the same kind of generic, empty rhetoric like, "we support diversity," and that means a diversity of opinions. We [at GMU] could support Scalia, but it didn't mean we supported all the things

that Scalia thought. Of course, that's nonsense. Linking ourselves to Scalia is an acceptance and endorsement of his ideas, and it's an acceptance of the idea that those targeted by Scalia—especially Black students, students of color, women, LGBTQ students—that those students are not the primary concern of our university, are not who we imagine our university community to be.

We found the response from the administration mostly pretty empty. But, at the same time, we created a lot of work for them. They had to come to these meetings. The university administration had to put out several statements defending the decision. So, we forced them to engage with the consequences of it, and I think that was significant.

A big win was also that we shifted the national media discourse. What started out as just a joke about this acronym, ASSLaw turned into, in the mainstream press, a real conversation about Scalia's legacy, about Scalia's racism, about his stance on affirmative action, and about the impact of private funders, especially the Koch brothers, on public higher education. None of that was part of the discourse initially. So, we were really pleased with our ability to shift the conversation.

And, despite the university's refusal to take seriously the concerns we were raising, we had faculty, staff, and students working together, sharing strategies, building analysis together, attending these meetings together. And in my time at George Mason, that configuration of faculty, staff, and students working together hasn't taken place before, and so we built some new relationships that are going to be really productive for us in the coming years.

JG: The response from the institution, at least for us at ASU, wasn't enough. In the Polytech campus incident, they just moved the young man from one dorm into a different one. The Black student who was harassed still had to take classes with him because they were in the same program. Through this work we also found out that there was no campus record or police record that stated specifically that a racial and sexual assault occurred. So, we're trying to work on compiling our historical record of campus-based incidents of sexual assault and racially motivated harm.

The institution can do more to hear what the students have to say, especially when over 54 percent of the funding for ASU comes from tuition, and ASU increasingly relies on student tuition. At the Women of Color Caucus forum about racial justice on campus, university president Michael Crow participated. We felt there was not an emphasis at all on the actual incidents that happened on our campus. And, interestingly enough, he left early. He didn't stay there until the end. There was no space for students to ask questions. Again, our voices were not heard.

KC: The initial institutional response [to our organizing at U Wisconsin] was to try to co-opt everything that we did, which was perfectly predictable. But

then, as it got more and more radical, and we were resistant to being co-opted, then we became heavily monitored.

For example, we would host these events at the LVM [Elvehjem] Building because it's right on the edge of campus. People know where it is; they can park conveniently. The problem is that it also houses the art museum, and the Art History department runs the building. Normally, when you host an event there, you have a single sort of Robocop security guard there—no big deal.

But eventually we noticed there would be three, four, five, six, not just security guards now but actual UWPD officers. And very regularly before the events I would get a call from the chief or the assistant chief of police just trying to get a sense of what the plan was for the event that night because sometimes there would be a protest after too. I would have to let them know that we couldn't have police officers at this event because we're dealing with communities who are traumatized by the police, and we want people to feel safe there. There was this constant negotiation in that regard.

Right after Tony Robinson was murdered by the police, we, along with Everett Mitchell, did a lot of behind-the-scenes support work for what we were doing. He was the director of community relations at the university until this year, and then he is going to be a judge in Dane County—he's this badass Black dude.

We held a teach-in for youth to figure out how to respond to Tony Robinson's murder. And kids were upset, parents were upset. And we asked that there be no media there. And the media flipped their lid. They went directly to the chancellor and tried to get Everett's job.

At that point, I found myself having to write directly to the chancellor to explain what had happened. How this was radical indoctrination, but not problematic indoctrination. And then we were regularly in conversation with the administration to justify what we were doing.

The Art History Department tried to take away our access to the building after one event that got a little bit rowdy. And I had to buy the dude who runs the space \$30 worth of beer so he would give it back to us. I was using every resource I could to try to keep the space.

We had tons of media coverage, in part because our practice was to teach the community how to do press releases that would get picked up by the media for events. This also, of course, made the university nervous because it was putting a spotlight not only on racial disparities and racism in the community, but also on the university.

So, we never got shut down, and we continued to get money because we, up to that point, still had faculty governance at UW–Madison. We no longer do. But it was a constant negotiation.

Probably the most interesting tension was around the debate against the sheriff about the Dane County jail. I got a message from the Dean of Students

that said, “Oh, we’ve moved your event.” And I was like, “What?” She responds, “Oh, the chancellor wanted to move your event because she thought the space you selected would be too small, and she plans to be there.” I said no, you’re not moving the event. I said, we have the event there because people know where it is, and if it ends up being too small, that is just the way it is.

At that point we knew we were being closely monitored. And this is one of the great values of tenure because I didn’t give a fuck. So, we just kept pushing. We kept upping the ante and also negotiating the relationships that would allow us to maintain access to the stuff we needed in order to get the community on campus and have access to campus resources.

CW: Karma, I was wondering if you would say anything more about what the attempts at co-optation looked like? This is obviously a really common strategy on campuses. At George Mason, this last semester, in response to some of the student activism, the president put together a diversity commission without consulting any of the groups actually doing any of this work on campus—without working with the Office of Diversity and Multicultural Education. All the existing entities on campus that had been working on social and racial justice were sidestepped, and then they put together this big commission with a vague, unclear agenda.

KC: It’s a good question. Essentially there were about six of us—three faculty from my department and three faculty from history and a few other peripheral folks. And this white woman who found us the initial pot of money wanted to turn it over to women of color leadership, which meant that me, my friend Cindy Chang, and my friend Laurie Lopez were pretty much given free rein to do whatever we wanted to do.

And Cindy and I and Laurie, and also my ex-partner, who’s a white woman, Sarah McKinnon, we all shared an analysis, in part because we all worked closely with this community organization. We all knew we were on the same page.

In terms of the co-optation, initially the university—because all this crap was happening in town and at the university with regard to race—started this new initiative which at first was just a website (Diversity.Wisc.edu), where they would feature some of these stories on the home page of UW.

One of our events was on the home page as one of the featured diversity events. And I immediately sent a letter to the chancellor, saying, “You do not have permission to use this event for your diversity initiative.” The chancellor responded, “Oh, I’m sorry, we just look for events,” and she made up some excuse. And after that, whenever she wanted to post something, she would ask, and we made decisions based on whether we thought it was good for press because we wanted the events to be heavily covered.

"It's All Linked": Positionality and Connections to External Justice Movements

KC: When we started this work, I was untenured and it really didn't change when I was tenured. I've always been involved in community organizing. I'm most interested now in putting university resources toward the community in whatever ways that I can.

I take a cue from community leaders, mostly Black, queer, and trans women who I trust, about what kinds of things they need resources for, what kind of things they need political education for, and then I can marshal resources for that work. What motivates me through this project is to take cues from what I think is important for the community, and then to be willing to put my neck on the line if there is any backlash. I can stomach that, I can handle that, and other folks who are in more vulnerable situations don't have to.

Wisconsin was a very depoliticized campus in terms of faculty. An anecdote: on the day that the Board of Regents voted to essentially end tenure in Wisconsin's state university system, about 15 out of a couple thousand UW–Madison faculty were present for that vote. Faculty wouldn't organize around even that issue, let alone racial justice.

I also felt like it was important to model mostly behind-the-scenes work, because I wasn't really out front, I was just putting stuff together to highlight other people and to highlight other people's work, and their viewpoints, and to uplift their voices. I also had the privilege of hosting a radio show every week when I was in Madison, and so I could, on Wednesdays, invite whoever I wanted to talk about our events. The analysis would be on Wednesdays, and then we'd have an event on Thursday or Friday or Saturday.

CW: I come to the kind of work that I've been talking about on my campus out of experience organizing, especially in the queer, LGBTQ context as a white queer person who's often been brought into organization by people of color movements and people.

The relationship of the campus to the community is really important. A part of what I see us doing at George Mason is defining our campus as part of the public community. A consequence of the depoliticization that the administration has enacted—in the context of all the demands on our students including their need to work to pay increased tuition—is that the idea of our campus as a public campus has been eroded.

The border between a campus community and the larger community is very permeable. Our students are also living and working off campus and are part of communities that are doing organizing and activism. A part of what we're trying to do is to make and hold space for that work on our campus.

We have a very large Arab and Muslim population on our campus. A lot of our students who are doing [Palestinian justice] work on campus are

also involved in the DC area Justice for Palestine movement. The work that we do on campus is part of, attached to, and informed by the work that the members of our community are doing elsewhere. Our campus can be a place for bringing that outside work in and also a place to help develop skills and relationships that can move out.

In terms of my own position, I've been doing this organizing on campus as an untenured faculty member, but I'm white, and I'm a man, and I think that protects me in a bunch of different ways. I also love doing this work. The campaign that we did around Scalia is the most fun I've had so far. And my relationship with the Students Against Israeli Apartheid group has been so important for me as a way to feel connected to people on what can be a pretty isolating, alienating campus.

I get so much out of these experiences and this work, personally. For me the university is interesting as a place to struggle, and a set of resources to struggle over. There may be some risks attached, and we'll find out next year, I guess, when I go up for tenure, how risky.

In the academy, we're often told you get to do what you want later. First, it's because you're a grad student, and then it's because you're looking for a job, and then it's because you don't have tenure. And I think this is the time that we have, this is the time that I have, and so I'm trying to use it in the ways that feel most meaningful.

JG: What motivates me is I know I can learn outside of the classroom as much as I can learn inside of the classroom. Academia does not encourage any type of activism, really. And it's something that I don't want to miss out on because there are very important issues, and as the next generation in academia, it's important for us to learn how to come together on things.

I have a great advisor at ASU. She's amazing, and she noted that the majority of the political and organizing work that happens on campus is mostly done by women of color graduate students. Being the great advisor that she is, she said, "I totally understand that it's important, it's very passionate of you, but I also don't want you to forget that you're here to get your degree, right?" I know that many of the women of color graduate students I work with want to graduate and get a PhD.

One of the challenges for me is to try to figure out a balance and be strategic about how I can incorporate the work that I'm doing in the community and on campus in my own scholarship and my own intellectual development because the reason why I'm in Arizona is to get my PhD and to become a professor!

Another thing I learned through my organizing was to be skeptical of identity politics. Just because I share the same identity based on race, for example, does not mean that other folks who I share the same identity with have the same politics or are interested in social justice. We learned this the

hard way. Nonetheless, students focused on organizing were able to come together in different ways, through politics rather than through identity.

And when I say “we,” I’m talking about my friends, other graduate students, and specifically other women of color. We’re also interested in closing the gap between activism and academia. Because we definitely see connections, both are interrelated for us, and because we’re willing to learn. This is where I am. Hopefully, I will continue to do the work that I do, but at the same time, sustain my academic standing so I can also finish my degree.

CP: Chicago State U already had connections with the Nation of Islam, with Honorable Minister Louis Farrakhan, and Jesse Jackson and Rainbow PUSH. We use these platforms to act to save CSU. Whether students agree or disagree with their politics, their platforms were necessary for us getting out our message and keeping our message out. We also had a coalition with other schools that were impacted by the budget crisis. We started talking to students from Eastern Illinois University, Northeastern Illinois University, and I think Southern Illinois University, and others.

We understood the connections between Chicago State and the Chicago Public School [CPS] system. A lot of the Black women who serve as teachers in CPS had graduated from Chicago State. If we had more capacity, more people, and more time, we could have probably explored how to organize around that more. But we were pressed for time, and we were just doing everything rapidly. I’m in school still, and I’m trying to maintain an education *and* protest. I was missing days of class because I’m out here on the front lines, fighting for my teachers’ jobs.

To me, it’s all linked because we don’t live—well, I know I don’t live—a single-narrative life. I know higher education is linked to police violence and to the violence in my home communities and to poverty. And these are things that I’m facing daily. So, for instance, right now, I’m a low-wage worker. I’m also pursuing higher education. And I live in a low-income community that is impacted by violence and violent crime. All these struggles are linked. I see higher education as a kind of Band-Aid on some of my problems, but I have to have the opportunity to even go to school to get that type of education. So, saving CSU was important so that low-income residents can get that type of education, to get more of a fair shot at employment. This is what saving CSU meant to me. When people say, “Black lives matter,” I think about their lives holistically. We’re talking police violence, employment, education. That’s what we’re talking about when we say—when I say—“Black lives matter.” The fight to save CSU is as important as the fight to combat gentrification in our communities. It’s as important as the fight to hold police accountable in our communities because we’re really trying to live safe lives and lives where we don’t have to struggle with everyday poverty.

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