Pedagogies of Dispossession, Imaginaries of Repossession: The Storied Landscape of
Lane Community College

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It is early Sunday morning when I take a wrong turn and drive through an unfamiliar neighborhood. Proceeding along this slight detour to my destination, I continue through residential streets noticing landscaped lawns. Slowing down, I locate a little red kiosk in a front yard. The sign above it reads, "Little Free Library." Encased under the sign are two bookshelves lined with texts. I stall for a moment, my car idling in the street, pondering the significance of this small monument and the vision and collaboration of the people that built it and what it means for those that frequent its use. Resembling a red schoolhouse, this structure symbolizes public education, public space, free and the exchange of resources and ideas. The "little free library" can be theorized as part of a growing movement to sustain public space and the encounters they produce. As a tangible space and place-based public resource, this free library and the resources invested in and around it serve as an articulation of this particular neighborhood and community. Akin to the grassroots mobilizations such as community gardens and medical clinics, this free library is a testament to the way individuals and communities come together, interact with, and transform, spaces to demarcate and reflect cherished values.[1] Simultaneously in the act of transforming spaces, individuals and communities transform themselves and the ways they live together.[2]

As I continue through the neighborhood, foreclosure signs demarcate a contrasting symbol of re-appropriation where futures are foreclosed upon and dreams repossessed. I arrive at an intersection and notice a bank on the corner. Reflecting on the juxtaposition of the lending library and a transnational bank, I linger at the intersection—struck by the vast differences in scale and impact these institutions have. Each contrasting institution embodies a constellation of values, beliefs, and discourses about ways of living, working, co-existing and creating the future. I continue thinking about the two spaces and the messages they convey; What futures and possibilities do they offer and for whom? A few turns later, I am back on course and within moments arrive at our local community college where an oversized billboard propped alongside the entry proclaims, albeit ambiguously, "You Can Get There From Here!" Tucked on the outskirts of town, this community college where I teach and witness students navigating the quotidian realities of underemployment, wage stagnation, and political and social marginalization with hopes of upward mobility.

I use this narrative and point of arrival to chart another departure wherein I ask, in an era of staggering inequality and austerity, amidst dwindling public spaces and increased privatization, what role does community college access and education play in promoting democracy and perpetuating divestment? Like my circuitous route to my community college, many students find their way here through complicated pathways and negotiations. While their pathways and negotiations are far too broad and nuanced to generalize, many students arrive at community college with the desire to transform specific conditions in their lives.

This project contextualizes and theorizes what I am referring to as pedagogies of dispossession and imaginaries of repossession by documenting how the ideals of neo-liberal democracy and the realities of dispossession are negotiated, internalized, embodied and narrated by nontraditional community college students. I argue that community colleges are sites where

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[1] The Little Free Library is an international project to promote reading, sharing, and community. As of March 1,2013 there are over 6,000 Little Libraries worldwide serving hundreds of thousands of people. "The Little Free Library" http://www.littlefreelibrary.org
[2] See Michel Foucault "Of Other Spaces and Heterotopias" in "Des Espace Autres," published by the French journal *Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité* (1984) trans Jay Miskowiec. Accessed http://foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en.html and Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995)

the ideals of meritocracy, democracy, citizenship, and nationhood (i.e. The American Dream")
collide with the realities of what I refer to as dispossession—material, spatial and psychological
loss emerging from chronic precarious labor, surveillance, vulnerability, social abandonment and
debt.

In what follows, I use a series of terms that I will briefly define here. Following the work
of post-colonial theorists, beginning with but not limited to, Edward Said (1995), Aime Césaire
(1972) Stuart Hall (1996), Chandra Mohanty and third-world and indigenous feminists such as
Gloria Anzaldúa (1982), M. Jacqui Alexendar (2006), I use the term dispossession to signify
geographic, social and psychological forms of displacement and loss. Following the canonical
association of dispossession as the loss of land and identity (Said, 1979), I take up the term to
discuss the geographic, material, and affective experiences of loss. I will elaborate on these
aspects of dispossession later in my proposal. I use the term democracy to evoke the idealized
virtues of social and civic membership, self-hood, representation, and access to human rights and
resources. This term is relevant to my work because access to public education is deeply
embedded in notions of democracy, selfhood and civic membership.   I use the term neo-liberal
democracy to refer to the economic, social, political and cultural movement to privatize public
resources and protect and privilege the generation of capital. Privatization is a critical component
of my work because it dismantles and erodes the public sphere through divestment in social
services and spaces. Neo-liberal democracy is made visible in policies that uphold privatization
and competition in the market place by enhancing the façade of consumer choice while
diminishing the legitimacy and role of the state in providing and protecting public rights and
resources.

I place this work within a growing body of scholarship addressing the diverse and
contradictory aspects of neo-liberalism that impact higher education. Specifically, this project
addresses the dimensions of neoliberalism that shape discourse (and subsequent) policies around
public education, namely, community college education. To do so, I turn to key bodies of work at
the intersection of education, sociology and cultural and political geography (see Davis, Gilmore,
Harvey, Lipman Valentine).   I find this work vital in contextualizing the stakes and struggles
over public education while advancing a vocabulary to address the ubiquitous and intersecting
aspects of neoliberalism from a human rights and social justice perspective. Among these
scholars, Pauline Lipman's work has been formative in my conception of the social and
psychological impact of neoliberalism. Lipman (2011) refers to the social imaginary of
neoliberalism as an ideological project to "change the soul" whereby "competitive individualism
is a virtue and personal accountability replaces government responsibility for collective social
welfare".[3] Lipman stresses that the power of neo-liberalism lies in its saturation of practices and
consciousness, making it difficult to think otherwise. Engaging Lipman's framing of the social
imaginary of neoliberalism, through the course of this research, I will trace the linage of these
terms and chart the connections between austerity, precarious labor, surveillance, and
abandonment, as they pertain to neo-liberalism and higher education. It is my hope that
theorizing pedagogies of dispossession and imaginaries of repossession, will invite new

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[3] Paula Lipman pg. 11

conversations and considerations regarding the role of and rights to public education and social welfare in the context of neo-liberalism.

This project is a critical institutional ethnography of the people, services, needs and negotiations that occur within the site of community colleges. In what follows, I will approach community colleges as institutions of higher education as well as a series of ideals, practices, policies and promises that serve as the axis of the American education system. Towards these ends, I situate community colleges as one of the few remaining publicly accessible and semi-subsidized social institutions integral to the democratic ideal of higher education. In other words, community colleges uphold the ideological, spatial, and material conviction in the democratic ideal of higher education and social mobility. This is because community colleges provide the geographic place where the social majority accesses higher education, vocational skills, non-credit community education, and social services. In what follows, I will argue that community colleges are sites where the ideals of meritocracy, democracy, citizenship, and nationhood (i.e. The American Dream") collide with the realities of what I refer to as dispossession—precarious labor, surveillance, vulnerability, social abandonment and debt.

From their inception in the 1890s, and made apparent in the aftermath of the economic collapse in 2008, community colleges are receptacles of diverse needs and desires. I use the term receptacle to evoke the imagery of holding sites or outlets for economic refugees, displaced individuals, aspiring university transfers, etc. The vast array of welfare needs that surface at community college are evident in the growing social services offered at community colleges, such as food pantries, medical aid, veteran services and warming centers for houseless individuals. In the most literal sense, for some, the physical space, shelter, financial aid, and basic services are a stopgap and last place to go. This is reflected in the characteristic applied to community colleges as "last chance" institutions.

Lingering on the characteristic of a "last chance institution," my argument is that within community colleges some of the most politically and economically vulnerable and invisible populations, women, minority students, economically disadvantaged, first-generation, and returning students, who are characterized as "nontraditional," absorb the punishment of austerity, namely unemployment, underemployment and dislocation that are normalized as inevitable experiences. I turn to community colleges as forgotten places where normative discourses of meritocracy collide with contradictory experiences. I use the term meritocracy to refer to the belief that we live in a society where success is the result of hard work and merit. Commonly referred to though the adage, "just pull yourself up by your bootstraps," meritocracy refutes the existence of any historical, legal or social barriers to success. Because meritocracy operates as an ideological foundation and salient promise, of both, neoliberalism and higher education, students at all levels of education are inundated with messages of meritocracy. For example, messages of meritocracy permeate the community college mission statements[4], branding and billboards ambiguously announcing, "Secure Your Future," "Success Starts Here" and "You can get there from Here" saturate the environment. I believe that these messages permeate the curriculum,

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[4] In "Neoliberal ideology in community college mission statements: A critical discourse analysis," Franklin D. Ayers, demonstrates how college mission statements refashion meaning to reproduce class inequalities and the discursive mechanisms to legitimate them. See Ayers, D. Franklin. "Neoliberal Ideology in Community College Mission Statements: A Critical Discourse Analysis." *Review of Higher Education*, no. 4 (2005): 527-49.

assessments and policies and disproportionately affect students of color, women, first generation and re-entry students by imposing discourses of success that are divorced from reality.

This project will interrogate the aforementioned discourses of individual ascent, upward mobility, grit and deficit to analyze their material and ideological underpinnings and effects. To do this, I will engage in a discourse analysis of the messages and branding of the sites I am working in. Contextualizing social services within the discursive field of meritocracy, this research interrogates the diverse trajectories and negotiations that occur within this locale. I use the term discursive field of meritocracy to interrogate, in Foucauldian terms, not simply what meritocracy means but what it produces in the context of higher education. In other words, this project attends to the collision and contradictions that occur within community colleges. Namely, how various forms of social and economic abandonment, that surface at community colleges as last chance institutions, collide with the discursive narratives of meritocracy that circulate within and beyond the institution.

As institutions on the frontlines of responding to an increasing range of basic human needs, I approach community colleges as "forgotten places" that can be characterized through compounding contradictions. Following the work of Ruth Wilson Gilmore, I use the term "forgotten places" to evoke the spatial and political dimensions of abandonment that pertain to institutions and populations that are overlooked and underrepresented in public discourse—in this case adult learners often referred to as non-traditional students.[5] This project considers how those deemed as non-traditional traverse institutional margins. "Nontraditional" is a broad categorization for students who have not followed a sequential path moving from K-12 schooling directly onto college near the age of 18. In addition, the term applies to students who attend college part-time, are single parents, first generation college attendees, immigrants, racial minorities, veterans, displaced workers, and students with disabilities. The term, "non-traditional" represents a potent irony and contradiction because the majority of students who attend community college are non-traditional. Through this categorization, the particular dimensions of student experiences are generalized as "non" or "less than" traditional. The consequences of this overgeneralizing and problematic category take shape though social policies and curriculum that disenfranchise non-traditional students. This is best exemplified in a recent study reporting that over 60% of non-traditional students were directed to one or more remedial education courses (American Community College Association, 2014). Through my application of "forgotten places," I consider community colleges as an understudied institution as they pertain to increasing social justice, equity and democratic membership.

Towards these ends, I have come to understand community colleges as what I am theorizing as transfer-sites as they are not final destinations insomuch as they are places where people pass through. I use the term transfer-sites to refer to institutions that direct individuals from one place toward other destinations and by extension futures. The term brings to mind not merely where one is going but, where one can go and what other possibilities exist. Moreover, transfer-sites serve as a potent metaphor and reminder of the multiple spaces and legacies of movement—forced, constrained, and mediated by colonialism and imperialism. In naming these legacies, I offer a framework to attend to the spatial, discursive and pedagogical dimensions of

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[5] Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. "Forgotten places and the seeds of grassroots planning." *Engaging contradictions: Theory, politics and methods of activist scholarship* (2008): 31.

long and short-term transfer-sites. It is my contention that transfer-sites are inherently spatial in the routes and directions made available; as individuals and items move and or pass through a transfer-site they are directed to do so in particular ways. They are discursive as they produce particular ways of being and knowing based on underlying epistemic assumptions and orientations that inform their logic. As these forces mediate passage in particular ways, resistances develop.   Intentionally and unintentionally oppositional ways of moving, being, and thinking emerge. I argue that transfer-sites are pedagogical and storied landscapes in the explicit and unspoken messages that circulate particular paths of movement.[6]

Returning to my original point, community colleges are transfer-sites where the physical, cultural, material, and discursive imaginary of upward mobility, possessive individualism, and democratic inclusion are re-produced and contested. While the negotiations between the espoused virtues of democratic capitalism and the realities of dispossession occur in various locales, it is my speculation that something profound occurs in how this negotiation is experienced and articulated at a "last chance institution." Ultimately this work is about possibility—how it is articulated, where it echoes and surfaces, and what we can learn from those who traverse institutional margins. It is my belief that it is is increasingly necessary to cultivate the imagination, determination and courage to re-conceptualize the meaning and purpose of higher education, success, and well-being. What follows is an attempt to initiate the process by attending to how these desires are negotiated and articulated by historically underrepresented populations within community colleges.

My engagement with possibility as an object of study is informed by critical education scholarship. I use this term to refer to scholarship that recognizes and critiques the ways in which education has and continues to be, the primary mechanism to (re)produce dominant conceptions of our social world while at the same time silencing, dismissing and eradicating localized, indigenous, and alternative ways of knowing and being that exist outside the grand narrative of western history.[7] Responding to questions of power, political purpose, and emancipation; critical education scholarship, and by extension critical pedagogy, challenges the ethical, epistemological and ontological premise of education, teaching and schooling. I use the term critical scholarship to refer to the bodies of work inspired by and emerging from Paulo Frerie's literacy campaign and seminal text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* according to Cornel West, was "a world-historical event for counter-hegemonic theorists and activists in search of new ways of linking social theory to narratives of human freedom."[8] As such, critical scholars of education work toward the ideological and institutional conditions for empowerment and self-determination.[9]

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[6] I use the term pedagogy in a Freirian sense to which extends beyond the popular connotation teaching method to address the social, political and philosophical context of learning as a social theory and method. Pedagogy in this context is a means for generating analysis over the condition of our lives and the emergent constraints placed by social systems. Central to this process what Freire posits as literacy   See, Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the oppressed.* New York: Continuum International Publishing Group. (1970), Alexander, M. Jacqui. *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred.* Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2005, Moraga, Cherríe. "I transfer and go underground," In *This Bridge Called My Back : Writings by Radical Women of Color.* 2nd ed. New York: Kitchen Table, Women of Color Press, 1983.
[7] DeLeon, A. P., & Ross, E. W. (Eds.). (2010). *Critical theories, radical pedagogies, and social education: New perspectives for social studies education.* Sense Publishers.
[8] Cornel West, Preface in *Paulo Freire A critical encounter,*
[9] 9 H. Giroux http://www.perfectfit.org/CT/giroux2.html

Premise and Rationale

My interest in how non-traditional community college students negotiate and narrate their experiences is inspired by years of witnessing how discourses of ambivalence, apathy, deficit and meritocracy circulate around community colleges. Tropes of apathy and ambivalence have an insidious legacy of pathologizing non-traditional students under the rhetoric of deficit-based theories.[10] I use the term deficit theories to evoke discourses that view genetic or cultural deficiencies as the cause for inequality, poverty, and suffering. The legacy of biological and cultural deficit theories can be traced to the Western Enlightenment where the codification of deficit theories were instrumental in colonial occupations and the political and pedagogical regimes that followed. Today deficit theories permeate every arena of public life through social Darwinism, socio-biology, and the racialization of poverty, deviance, grief and illness.[11]

In the education system, deficit theories are constructed through the rhetoric of under preparedness, low achievement, and lack of cognitive skills.[12] Attributing chronic inequality, low achievement, and failure in schools to individual and cultural deficit and dysfunction, deficit theories negate the impact of history, social institutions, laws, and ideology on students' success and struggle. In other words, deficit theories do the work to displace the role of history, racism, sexism, and institutional neglect onto individuals. In, *The Evolution of Deficit Thinking: Educational Thought and Practice* (1997), Valencia stresses that deficit thinking has a powerful hold on contemporary politics and culture. One example of this is the rise of remedial education programs, which commodify deficit. Within remedial education programs student deficit is naturalized, managed, and lucrative. Recent federal data indicates that 68 percent of all community college students and 40 percent of students at public, four-year colleges take at least one remedial course.[13] This statistic is much higher when considering the students who are referred and never enroll or drop out before completion. In the context of this project it is relevant to consider what narratives circulate within remedial education courses regarding efficacy, possibility and place. By tracing the connection between the genetic or biological pathology thesis and culture of poverty model to discriminatory policies in education, Valencia illustrates the pervasiveness and resurgence of deficit thinking. According to Daniel Solórzano, cultural and biological deficit models are cited as the leading cause of low socioeconomic status and educational failure of students of color.[14] So gross. Really important that you engage this to show where you are intervening though.

As such, deficit-based discourses of apathy and ambivalence are all too often imposed on non-traditional student behaviors. They are operationalized such that disengagement, attrition,

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[10] Valencia, Richard R. *The Evolution of Deficit Thinking: Educational Thought and Practice*. London: Falmer Press, 1997. See also, Michael W Apple, "The Text and Cultural Politics." *Educational Researcher*, no. 7 (1992): 4-19; Herbert J. Gans, *The War against the Poor: The Underclass and Antipoverty Policy*. New York: BasicBooks, 1995.
[11] Gans, Herbert J.,. *The War against the Poor : The Underclass and Antipoverty Policy*. 1995. Also see, Kelley, Robin D. G. *Yo' Mama's Disfunktional! : Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1997.
[12] Ibid.
[13] American Association of Community Colleges, "What We Know About Developmental Education Outcomes," Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University, Research Overview (January 2014).
[14] Solorzano, Daniel. "Critical Race Methodology: Counter-Storytelling as an Analytical Framework for Education Research." *Qualitative Inquiry*, no. 1 (2002): 23-44.

and silence in the classroom are pathologized and punished.[15] These overgeneralized and under-interrogated characterizations displace the distress associated with dispossession (i.e. precarious labor, surveillance, vulnerability, social abandonment and debt) onto perceived student behaviors—rather than acknowledge the reality wherein students negotiate loss upon loss. Moreover, it channels the responsibility and blame achievement gaps to individual deficit rather than structural violence and the catastrophic impacts of capitalism. The trope of apathy operationalizes deficit frameworks and us deployed to rationalize the dwindling resources and support services for the basic of means for survival.

By contextualizing deficit theories within the discursive field of neoliberalism, my research takes into consideration narratives of success, struggle, and social mobility that circulate within and beyond community colleges. I use the term neoliberalism to refer to the historically generated state strategy to respond to the crisis of capital by defending the "rights" to private profits and interests.[16] For the purpose of my research, I will examine the material, spatial, and ideological dimensions of neoliberalism. As a movement that is both a process and condition, neoliberalism is an all-encompassing doctrine to restructure markets, geographies, labor, and the intimate domains of day-to-day life.[17] The pervasive dimensions of neoliberalism is poignantly captured in Margret Thatcher's emblematic phrase, "there is no alternative" a philosophy that came to be known by the acronym T.I.N.A., neoliberalism maintains ideological and material dominance through circulating a narrative of inevitability (i.e. there is no alternative) and eliminating alternatives in the social imaginary. Thus, neoliberalism surfaces in the way ordinary people imagine the world—the common understandings, myths and stories that make possible generalized practices and the overall legitimacy of a particular social order. Pauline Lipman (2011) refers to the social imaginary of neoliberalism as an ideological project to "change the soul" whereby "competitive individualism is a virtue and personal accountability replaces government responsibility for collective social welfare".[18] Lipman stresses that the power of neo-liberalism lies in its saturation of practices and consciousness, making it difficult to think otherwise. Similarly as Wendy Brown notes,

> neoliberalism is a constructivist project: it does not presume the ontological "givenness" of a thoroughgoing economic rationality for all domains of society but rather takes as its task the development, dissemination, and institutionalization of such a rationality.[19]

[15] Kelley, *Yo' Mama's Disfunktional!: Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America*.
[16] I use the term crisis to refer to physical geographic, economic, psychic conditions under neoliberal capitalism that manifest in sm as the continuous manifestations of colonialism and imperialism, and war. The racialized and gendered legacies of political, economic and environmental spheres. Moreover, I locate the contemporary crisis under neoliberali these histories surface in nearly every contemporary crisis. See Paula Lipman, *The New Political Economy of Urban Education Neoliberalism, Race, and the Right to the City*. New York: Routledge, 2011; Mike Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream: Politics and Economy in the History of the US Working Class*. London: Verso, 1986; David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005; Subcommante Marcos, "The Seven Loose Pieces of the Global Jigsaw Puzzle." trans. Cecilia Rodriguez in Chiapas Revealed, May 2007.
[17] Tamara Lea Spira, "Neoliberal Captivities: Pisagua Prison and the Low Intensity From" Special Issue on "Genealogies of Neoliberalism" in Radical History Review. Eds. Mark Soderstrom (112): 127-146.
[18] Paula Lipman pg. 11
[19] Wendy Brown, "Neoliberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy, "Theory & Event 7, 2003. Pg 23

The project to re-structure subjectivities in accordance with neoliberal market values is fundamentally about the making of the modern idealized neoliberal subject.[20] This process seeks to transform the psycho-affective realm of feelings, desires, ethics and emotions. Drawing upon the extensive body of literature on the cultural, linguistic, and psycho-affective embodiment of neoliberalism, this project demonstrates how neoliberalism is ubiquitous and penetrates every domain of contemporary life—particularly higher education. Foregrounding my research in the political and cultural politics of neoliberalism is an effort to add complexity to public and scholarly discourses about non-traditional students, curriculum and policy reforms as well as the contemporary stakes, future, and rights to higher education.

Neoliberalism as the Accumulation of Dispossessions[21]

As I have discussed thus far, community colleges are unique sites of material and ideological contradiction where the promise of democratic inclusion via higher education collides with the embodied realities of underemployment, debt, and divestment. Negotiating this collision, non-traditional community college students, many of whom are politically and economically vulnerable, absorb the punishment of austerity through neoliberal narratives that explain their struggles as inevitable results of individual deficit. Tracing the material and ideological character of neoliberalism, requires a pedagogical and political framework capable of responding to that which is naturalized and made inevitable in education reform. In this section, I present a framework of dispossession to characterize the challenges that face non-traditional community college students. I use the term dispossession to refer to the condition of precarization and loss of—access, ownership, and agency.[22] I locate dispossession (and its undersides / counter-stances etc.) as taking shape in three areas; through geographies of spatial exclusions that shape where people and bodies are able to travel, gather, and exist, through material repossessions of property and land, and through the psychological condition of loss.

Through this application, dispossession captures how the manifestations of the economic recession materialize in a series of physical and psychological foreclosures. Foreclosures are evidenced in the loss of homes, jobs, and social services—all of which are naturalized discourses of neoliberalism that suggest that the global financial crisis and austerity are inevitable conditions. However, these foreclosures are not merely bound to the material realm; they extend to the embodied and affective psychological foreclosure on futures predicated on homes, jobs, and the material means of survival. Thus, my application of dispossession captures how the loss of the material conditions for survival (e.g. housing, employment, and safety) intersects with the loss of the potentiality of obtaining the material conditions for survival (e.g. the future of securing permanent housing, employment, and safety). I will argue that dispossession as both a process

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[20] Ibid.

[21] Accumulation by dispossession is a term associated with David Harvey to discuss "the plundering and robbing other people of their rights." Harvey stress that the transitions occurring within the global economy for the past thirty years, can be analyzed as accumulation by dispossessions. Harvey uses the term in the context of the New Imperialism. See "A Conversation with David Harvey." *Logos Journal* 1, no. 5 (2006).

[22] Following the work of Noelle J. Molé precarization refers to the condition of permanent uncertainty, short-term contracts and unmaking of the worker-citizen that is synonymous with neo-liberalism. See Noelle J. Molé "Precarious subjects: anticipating neo-liberalism in Northern Italy's workplace," *American Anthropologist,* Vol. 112 Issue 1, pg. 38-53. How are you engaging the global in your discussions of neoliberalism and what does this mean?

and condition of neoliberal transformation exists as material and psychological loss and lament for possibilities which never actualized.[23]

Amidst these material and psychological foreclosures exists a process of enclosure—evidenced in the erosion of social practices that are outside the purview of capital exchange—that is the decline of the public institutions that support civil society. Apparent through increased surveillance, criminalization, privatization, and the proliferation of poverty, there are fewer spaces and places for living, communicating, and aligning with one another. Moreover, spatial exclusion refers to the material and ideological dispossession of the rights to social space. This can be seen in the manifestation of securitized zones at borders, gated communities, the pervasive turn to "sit-lie" laws. Sit-lie ordinances prohibit and criminalize sitting or lying on the sidewalk or other public space.[24] They regulate how public space can be inhabited and by whom. As such sit-lie laws and similar practices extend the policing and surveillance of public space. The privatization and commodification of space are additional ways in which geographic exclusion and dispossession occurs.

While the manifestations of dispossession are apparent nearly everywhere, as a sociology instructor at a rural working class predominately white community college, the material and psychological loss brought on by the economic recession permeate through our classrooms and campus. Dislocation and dispossession are evident and a defining condition faced by populations turning to community college for support services, retraining, and reeducation. Community colleges are particularly relevant spaces of contradiction and irony, as the promise of neoliberalism and myth of meritocracy are preached to a population grossly effected by its forces. In other words, the populations who turn to community colleges as a means for survival are those who have historically carried the burden of dispossession as well as the recent arrivals—those for whom the burden of dispossession was unanticipated specifically white working class, able bodied, men and women. As I will discuss in a later section, the racialized, gendered and age based forms of dispossession that manifest nationally at community colleges are driving significant policy reforms. Most recently President Obama's support for free two-year community college can be read as a response to protect the interests of white working class college bound students.

Advancing a framework of dispossession is in part an invitation to think differently about this historical conjuncture and the meaning we can attribute to spatial, material, and affective dimensions that comprise our daily lives. Thus dispossession provides a conceptual tool to interrupt received ways of knowing (i.e. deficit based and individualized theories). To clarify, the framework I have outlined above is not a means to document narratives of pain, loss, and damage.[25] Rather, dispossession provides an analysis to locate and push beyond naming exploitation, domination, and contemporary brokenness and concomitant injury and serve as a catalyst to facilitate the rebuilding, redefining and re-possession of civil society and democracy. I

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[23] Liz Philipose, "The Politics of Pain and the End of Empire" International Feminist Journal, 2007, 9:1 and Tamara Lea Spira, "Neoliberal Captivities: Pisagua Prison and the Low Intensity From" Special Issue on "Genealogies of Neoliberalism" in Radical History Review. Eds. Mark Soderstrom (112): 127-146.

[24] Sit-lie laws have passed in Portland, Oregon and San Francisco, California.

[25] Eve Tuck and Wayne K. Yang, "R-words: Refusing research." In D. Paris & M. T. Winn (Eds.) *Humanizing research: Decolonizing qualitative inquiry with youth and communities* (Thousand Oakes, CA: Sage Publications, 2013) 223-248.

situate community colleges as central to this process because community colleges are one of the few remaining social institutions that can afford a sense of belonging and re-imagination.

Methodological Considerations

In doing so, I engage the epistemological and methodological convictions presented by Gloria Anzaldúa in *Borderlands/la Frontera* (1987). As discussed in Norma Cantu's introduction to the fourth edition of *Borderlands,* geographical location provides aperture for theorizing about power, experientially situated knowledge, and justice. Cantu writes, "theorizing from social location allowed Anzuldúa to account for various registrars of experiences—shifting from the material, to that which is felt, heard, remembered, and imagined.[26] As an epistemological and methodological framework, Borderlands upholds the extraordinary knowledge that accompanies surviving in the margins. In what follows, I will draw from *Borderlands/la Frontera* as I advance a framework to facilitate a different kind of thinking regarding the power to produce knowledge and the knowledge that power produces.

In this section, I advance a methodological approach that works toward an expansive theorization of the role community colleges play and the lives of students who attend them. Non-traditional community college students are historically under-studied and under-valued as narrators of their own experience.[27] The little that is known about their experience is further problematized by historical patterns within social science research to collect stories of pain and humiliation in the lives of those being researched.[28] Referring to this legacy as "damage centered research" and "inquiry as invasion," Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang, identify the preoccupation within social science research to document and empirically substantiate pain, loss, and oppression.[29] Their critique, which can be traced to third-world indigenous feminist scholarship, critical race theory, and post-colonial studies, challenges the foundation of Western empiricism and the authorial omniscience of objectivity. In the context of education research, damage centered approaches are operationalized in work that supports deficit theories.

Challenging the pervasiveness of deficit thinking in education research, Solórzano, advances critical race methodology. Critical race methodology is a framework to conduct research grounded in the experiences and dignity of students of color. The aims of critical race methods are to identify, analyze, and transform the structural and cultural conditions that perpetuate racism and oppression.[30] Critical race methodology, an extension of critical race theory works at the intersection of legal studies, sociology, ethnic and women's studies to illustrate the "inercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination" in order to eliminate oppression.[31] To achieve anti-racist and transformative goals, critical race methodology

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[26] Norma Cantu, pg. 3
[27] Cohen, A. M. *The American community college handbook.* (New York, NY: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 21. See also, Herideen, Penelope. *Policy, Pedagogy, and Social Inequality: Community College Student Realities in Post-Industrial America. Critical Studies in Education and Culture Series.* (Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, Greenwood Publishing Group;1998).
[28] Daza, Stephanie L. "De/colonizing, (Post)(Anti)Colonial, and Indigenous Education, Studies, and Theories." *Educational Studies,* no. 4 (2014): 307-12. Smith, Linda Tuhiwai,. *Decolonizing Methodologies : Research and Indigenous Peoples.* London ; New York : Dunedin, N.Z. : New York: Zed Books ; University of Otago Press ; Distributed in the USA Exclusively by St. Martin's Press, 1999. Tuck, Eve, and K. Wayne Yang. "Unbecoming Claims Pedagogies of Refusal in Qualitative Research." *Qualitative Inquiry* (2014)
[29] Tuck, Eve, and K. Wayne Yang. "R-words: Refusing research." *Humanizing Research* (2014): 223-248.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.

emphasizes stories, parables and narratives as a means for challenging dominant ideologies and the foundations upon which biased reforms and policies are built. As Richard Delgado writes, "stories create their own bonds, represent cohesion, shared understandings, and meanings."[32] Stories can challenge complicity, hegemony, and the status quo. However, they can only do so when they are shared, co-produced, and mobilized. It is my belief that stories can circulate as collective property—a collective asset that when mobilized give way to symbolic economies of domination and resistance.[33]

For emancipatory projects and their methodologies, specifically referring to women of color feminism and critical race theory, poetry and narrative form, when mobilized, are an interstice for analysis and praxis. Stories narrated from the margins can be transgressive and illuminate dimensions of survival and resistance. According to Anzaldúa, those who navigate between and negotiate multiple social worlds such as cultures, languages, social classes, sexualities, and nation states, develop the faculty to survive within and challenge mono-cultural and mono-lingual conceptions of social reality.[34] Anzaldúa's expression of borderlands extends to "any physical manifestation where power takes shape, sites that are patrolled and regulated, militarized borders between nation states, street corners, and underground asylums."[35] Articulated by Maria Lugones (2006) as the "limen," borderlands exist at "the edge of hardened structures, a place where transgressions of the reigning order is possible…it is a place populated by economic refugees—those who are dispossessed of access to the means of survival."[36] Theorizing from social location, Anzaldúa advanced a method to "account for various registers of experiences—shifting from the material, to that which is felt, heard, remembered, and imagined."[37] As an epistemological and methodological framework, Borderlands charts radical interventions by valorizing people's capacity to understand their own lives and give voice to their experiences. The epistemological and ontological theorization of Borderlands is an expansive theorization of how counter hegemonic knowledge, geographic location, and power shape the physical and psychological contours of experience. Applying Anzaldúa's prolific insights to my theorization of transfer-sites broadens the scope of assessing and responding to the proliferation of contradictions that seekers of justice must attend to.

I recall how vividly I felt this realization the first time reading Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's, *Racism without Racists: Colorblind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America* (2009) in which Bonilla-Silva examines contradiction between the post civil rights color-blind racial ideology employed by white people and the persistence and rise of racial disparity. Arguing that all ideology, racial or otherwise, is produced and reproduced in communicative action, Bonilla-Silva stresses that,

> Storytelling is central to communication. To a large degree, all communication is about telling stories. We tell stories to our spouses, children, friends, and coworkers. Through stories we present and represent ourselves and others…when we tell stories, we tell them as if there was only one way of telling them, as the ''of course'' way of

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[32] Delgado, Richard. "Storytelling for oppositionists and others: A plea for narrative." *Michigan Law Review* (1989): 2411-2441.
[33] By economies of resistance, I am referring to the exchange and transfer of stories as well as the way stories exist materially and symbolically. In the context of contemporary movements from Black Lives Matter to Prison Abolition, stories ……. I will refine and develop this – considering how stories and memes are mobilized
[34] Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands: the new mestiza: la frontera* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 25.
[35] Ibid. pg. 25.
[36] Lugones , Maria. "On complex communication." *Hypatia*, *21*(3) 2006, pg. 78.
[37] Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands: the new mestiza: la frontera* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 25.

> understanding what is happening in the world. These are moments when
> we are ''least aware that [we] are using a particular framework, and that
> if [we] used another framework the things we are talking about would
> have different meanings.''[38]

Stories become the basis for political openings for new ways of looking at and understanding a collectively shared American mythology around racism. Bonilla-Silva's work reminds audiences that stories continually do the work to operationalize and resist hegemony. Bonilla-Silva bases his study on interviewing and archiving two kinds of stories; storylines and racial testimonies to illustrate the quotidian and naturalized ways in which whiteness is produced and transmitted through narratives. Prefacing this project, he urges his audience to consider that "all social scientists ought to aspire to change the world they live in. To do so usually requires that one goes against the grain, to show how power hides beneath the facade of beautiful smiles, and to be willing to take some heat for speaking truth to power."[39]

Revisiting Bonilla-Silva's work, ten years after my first reading, I am drawn to the dimensions of his scholarship that facilitate a critical and intimate witnessing of how racism persists amidst the façade of color-blindness. It is this critical and intimate witnessing that I believe Carolyn Forché refers to in discussing a poetry of witness. Forché writes "I have been told that a poet should be of his or her time. It is my feeling that the twentieth-century human condition demands poetry of witness. This is not accomplished without certain difficulties; the inherited poetic limits the range of our work determines the boundaries of what might be said."[40] Locating the capacity to push beyond inherited limitations and constraints requires more capacious ways of observation, witness and accounting for. In contrast to social scientific empiricism that casts the belief in objective conceptions of observation and witness, Forché posits poetic witnessing as a necessary skill to understand the human condition. I locate her insights in alignment with Paulo Freire's emblematic challenge that our ontological vocation is to become more fully human.[41]

Lingering here, it is important to discuss how specifically borderland knowledge, counter-stories, and narrative structure achieves the ontological orientation to become more fully human. I locate the crux of the epistemic and ontological intervention brought by Anzaldúa in the privileging of poetic knowledge as an antidote to the confines of positivistic doctrines of empiricism and objectivity. In the opening chapter to *Freedom Dreams* (2002), Robin D.G. Kelly underscores that the most successful progressive social movements do not simply produce critiques, statistics or narratives of oppression. Rather, the most successful movements are able to do "what great poetry does; transport us to another place, compel us to relive horrors, and more importantly, enable us to imagine a new society."[42] This tradition of *radical imagination* Kelly positions as poetic knowledge. Moreover, he suggests that poetry offers "the revolt; a scream in the night, an emancipation of language and the old way of thinking." [43] Poetic knowledge, Kelly writes, is the only way to achieve the analysis we need to move beyond the perpetual states of crisis because poetic knowledge can transport us to new places, new feelings, and new

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[38] Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. "Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism And The Persistence Of Racial Inequality In America (2009): 75.

[39] Ibid. pg 11.

[40] Forché, Caroline, "ElSalvador: A Aide-Memoire." *In Praise of What Persists*. ed., Stephen Berg (New York: Harper & Row) 1938, 93-108.

[41] Freire, Paulo,. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 30th ed. New York: Continuum, 2000.

[42] Robin D.G. Kelley. *Freedom dreams: the Black radical imagination*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002) pg. 23. Also see John Holloway, *How to Change the world without taking power*. (London: Pluto Press, 2010).

[43] Ibid., 8.

possibilities. The emancipatory, transgressive and aesthetic capacity of poetic knowledge gives life to new subjectivities and new ways of seeing and being.

Kelly derives his conception of poetic knowledge from the seminal works of Aime Césaire. Specifically, to his insights in "Poésie et connaissance" (Poetry and Knowledge), first delivered in Haiti at the Congrès de Philosophie in 1944 and published a year later in *Tropiques*[44], and in *Discourse on Colonialism* published in 1955. In these texts, Césaire illuminates the binary between self-knowledge (poetic knowledge) and Western Scientific knowledge (colonial knowledge). In his opening passage "Poésie et connaissance," Césaire writes, "Poetic knowledge is born in the great silence of scientific knowledge." He follows this provocation with an indictment of the science of colonialism and a way to move beyond. For Césaire, scientific knowledge is a project that flattens the world and is a means to "depersonalize, measure, classify, and kill." The dismemberment of life, knowledge, and experience that Césaire attributes to the epistemological and ontological parameters of scientific knowledge is countered by poetic knowledge. Here Césaire writes, what presides over the poem is not the most lucid intelligence, the sharpest sensibility or the subtlest feeling, but the experience as a whole. It is the capacity and sensibility of poetic knowledge that brings me back to my earlier reference of Forché's conception of a poetry of witness.

Poetic witness and knowledge push beyond the inherited limits through the deliberate theorization of the role of language and writing as a practice of resistance. In the preface to the second edition of, This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color (1983), Moraga positions,

> the political writer, then, is the ultimate optimist, believing people are capable of change and using words as one way to try and penetrate the privatism of our lives. A privatism which keeps us back and away from each other, which renders us politically useless.[45]

The bodies of literature I have briefly reviewed approach writing and by extension research as a political act—one full of possibility that transcends the inherited limits and boundaries that render us politically useless. Central to each of these bodies of work is the use of stories as a site for anti-oppressive and emancipatory work. Stories reflect the transference, production, reproduction and co-production of knowledge. As I have reviewed, stories are co-productions that shape our values, social relations, and identities. Stories inform how we make sense of and define our location, how we relate to and differ from others as well as how we envision what is possible versus what is inevitable. In other words, stories shape the way resistance, and solidarity are both conceptualized and actualized. It is the terrain where new subjectivities are articulated and actualized. This is particularly evident in post-colonial movements from third-world and black radical traditions that located the need to decolonize our conceptions of self and our stories in order to decolonize our imagination.[46] In light of this project, I ask what stories are told and challenged in order to make sense of contemporary neoliberal transformation such as privatization and commodification of public resources such as education, social welfare, and

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[44] *Tropiques circulated as a* journal "of cultural renewal" between xxxx-xxxx and was founded by Césair, his wife Suzanne and René Ménil

[45] Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade. *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures.* (Rutledge Chapman: New York, 1997); xi.

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space? And what is the role of documenting these stories in terms of movement building and social transformation?

Considering the implications of what Césaire, Anzaldúa, and critical race theory can bring to bear in my scholarship on narratives of negotiation at community colleges, I will conclude this section with a review of the material I have covered and a research proposal. In an effort to establish my position and trajectory within narrative/story based research, I introduced Tuck and Yang's critique of damage centered research and inquiry as invasion to frame the long and insidious reign of deficit models in education. Turning to the extensive scholarship in critical race theory, I reviewed deficit frameworks and critical race methods of resistance. Tracing the connection between critical race theory and methods to Gloria Anzaldúa's Borderlands, I established a lineage of radical and emancipatory theorization from which I will draw from and contribute to. Establishing this lineage, I delved further to locate poetic knowledge as the foundation for the epistemological work of Borderlands and critical race theory.

Drawing from the critical anti-oppressive narrative based work I have reviewed; I will utilize Borderlands and critical race methodology to structure an oral narrative project. Utilizing oral based story work, I will center and amplify the experiences of non-traditional community college students.[47] As I have discussed, anti-oppressive oral narrative work is grounded in the belief in people's ability to narrate their own lives and give voice to their experience. Approaching community colleges as storied landscapes, I will conduct 30 oral narrative interviews at three community colleges in the Pacific Northwest. Attention will be given to the way agency, possibilities, and constraints are narrated with regards to participation and membership in community college. Interviews will capture the values, beliefs, norms, challenges and constraints that circulate within community colleges. Transcripts of the interviews will be made available online as a searchable archive for the purpose of advancing further research. As I have discussed, both Borderlands and critical race methods position counter normative stories as a vital platform for analysis and action. Moreover, it is my belief that poetic knowledge is tied to a future orientation and ontology of possibility. Thus my turn to poetic knowledge via Borderlands and critical race theory facilitates my intention to structure a methodology to make possible new and different conversations and conceptions of possibility and solidarity. In doing so, I will, in the words of Cherrie Moraga, advance "the language to clarify" the daily forms of resistance and recovery that take place within a cross section of transfer-sites.

Ultimately this project intervenes on a specific site of instability and possibility. However, I argue that these inquiries extend beyond the location I have chosen and can be applied to other transfer-sites and forgotten places. I focus on community colleges as significant outposts where, as I have already discussed, growing populations turn for a variety of needs and services. This project is guided by a desire to draw attention to the social encounters and practices that community colleges facilitate. This is to say that community colleges provide a profound social and spatial architecture for cross-cultural and cross-class communication. This project will draw attention to forms of sociality and contact that occur within community colleges while contributing to ways scholars locate how neoliberal discourses perpetually work toward the erosion of social practices, subjectivities and spaces where interclass communication takes place.

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[47] I use the term amplify rather than document to locate this project as both descriptive and transformative. I will unpack this further in my proposal

Contextualizing community college education and the discourse that circulates within and beyond in the continuous trajectory of neoliberal "reform" is an imperative to understanding what constitutes racialized-democratic reforms in education.

The importance of this work is especially urgent in light of the national movement for community college tuition reform. This is most apparent in President Obama's recent unveiling of, "America's College Promise Proposal: Tuition-Free Community College for Responsible Students." The highly contested proposal is modeled after the "Tennessee Promise," which will provide high school graduates a "last-dollar scholarship" to cover tuition expenses after all other federal, state and institutional financial aid have been applied. The Tennessee Promise, paid entirely with an endowment based on the state's lottery, guarantees high school graduates who are documented citizens access to two-years of higher education without incurring tuition fees. Approximately 25,000 students representing 40 percent of graduating seniors are expected to apply.[48] The plan, which is expected to launch in 2015, is only available for first-time and full-time community college students.

Mississippi, Chicago, and Oregon have presented similar programs to their state legislatures. The momentum behind alternative models to college financing reflects social investment for first-time college students who have recently graduated high school. While America's College Promise Proposal directs much needed attention to issues of education equity and democratic inclusion for recent high-school graduates, it grossly denies inclusion to the majority of community college attendees—nontraditional students. Over 13 million students attend the nations' 1132 community colleges, of these students; the majority are returning/ non-traditional students (American Community College Association, 2014). "Nontraditional" is a broad categorization for students who have not followed a sequential path moving from K-12 schooling directly onto college near the age of 18. In addition, the term applies to students who attend college part-time, are single parents, first generation college attendees, immigrants, racial minorities, veterans, displaced workers, and students with disabilities. The term, "non-traditional" represents a potent irony and contradiction because the majority of students who attend community college are non-traditional. Through this categorization, the particular dimensions of student experiences are generalized as "non" or "less than" traditional. The consequences of this overgeneralizing and problematic category take shape though social policies and curriculum that disenfranchise non-traditional students. This is best exemplified in a recent study reporting that over 60% of non-traditional students were directed to one or more remedial education courses (American Community College Association, 2014).

In a historic moment, led by market driven imperatives of privatization, downsizing, and free market policies, the commodification of education as a private good occurs under the banner of reform. The movement towards tuition-free community college raises significant questions about the target-population directed toward and given access to higher education. In the context of the American Promise Proposal for "Responsible Students," the target population that meets the eligible criteria are able-bodied, non-parenting, high achieving, recent high-school graduates. As such, this progressive model for tuition reform denies opportunities and debt relief to

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[48] Paul Fain, "Reaction to three states' proposals for tuition-free community college" In *Reaction to three states' proposals for tuition-free community college*. Retrieved from insidehighered, 2014.

nontraditional students. Moreover, it renders the majority of community college students (i.e. nontraditional students) invisible under the banner of post-racial higher education reform. Thus my research explores the current community college movement through the historic and pervasive tensions that shape public education—the values of racialized-capitalism democracy, disenfranchisement and segregation.[49]

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[49] Pierre Bourdieu, and Jean Claude Passeron. *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. 1990 ed. London: Sage, 1990; Henry A. Giroux, "Rethinking Cultural Politics And Radical Pedagogy In The Work Of Antonio Gramsci." *Educational Theory* 49, no. 1 (1999): 1-19; Bell Hooks, *Teaching to Transgress.* New York: Routledge, 1994. Pauline Lipman, *The New Political Economy of Urban Education Neoliberalism, Race, and the Right to the City*. New York: Routledge, 2011; Mike Rose, *Possible Lives: The Promise of Public Education in America*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1995, Lipsitz, George. *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998. See also, Angela Y. Davis, "Narrating the Mute: Racializing and Racism in a Neoliberal Moment 1 2." *Souls : A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society.*