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Introduction

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This has been a year of terror. The new presidential administration used 2025 to wage war on immigrant communities and queer and trans people, seeking to erase the remaining gains of the Civil Rights and Power movements. Nearly every day the administration demonstrated its authoritarian grab for power by issuing executive orders targeting particular groups, weakening social and political rights, militarizing the streets, and widening the wealth gap. In response to these assaults there have been incredible acts of resistance from Los Angeles to Chicago, Portland, New York, and Charleston. From mutual aid groups rising to support neighbors to ICE patrols and local and national demonstrations, neighbors have stood in solidarity against violent state measures aimed at ripping apart families, dividing communities, and bolstering capitalist white supremacy. Such everyday and collective activism is a reminder that communities have deep histories of resistance that build from collective knowledges, histories, and experiences.

There are multiple roots and branches of critical ethnic studies. Its seeds and sprouts are everywhere from classrooms, homes, bars, clubs, community spaces, kitchen tables, and picket-lines (to name a few). Centuries of struggles for land, liberty, autonomy, and liberation by Indigenous, Black, and communities of color have created liberated spaces that serve as inspirations for ongoing and future struggles. Such resistance and critical analyses of structures of capitalism, settler colonialism, racism, and cis-hetero patriarchy have also thrived in communities for hundreds of years outside the gaze of colonizers, enslavers, and others holding up the structures and ideologies of inequality. These analyses have numerous influences, including and not limited to Marxist approaches, Third World revolutionary struggles in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the U.S., radical feminist movements, and popular education projects in working-class and rural communities.

As the backlash against Ethnic Studies PK-University intensifies throughout the U.S., it is more important than ever to nurture these diverse genealogies and spaces where critical education takes place. Likewise, as some school districts in California and elsewhere respond to the national attack on education, attention to the specificity of place, histories, and experiences are important for avoiding homogenized, canned curriculum that undermines the power and possibilities of ethnic studies.

Within this context, we received powerful contributions from educators, organizers, cultural workers, interdisciplinary scholars, students, and community members who are rooting and nourishing critical ethnic studies approaches that interrogate and aim to restructure power in classrooms and communities. Reflecting the depth of commitment to ethnic studies and generations of struggle, we received many more submissions than unfortunately could be included in this issue. Informed by a feminist ethnic studies ethos, we worked with contributors and followed a transparent and supportive review process leading to the publication of sixteen works that take a variety of forms, including but not limited to research and praxis articles, reflections, poetry, visual art, archival histories, creative writing, film, and photography. They offer

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multifaceted and inspiring frameworks and examples of community and resistance, including in less written about places.

As we looked for cover images to help introduce this issue and the breadth of contributions, we kept returning to the photo of this tree because it encapsulates some of the context and themes of the issue. Firmly rooted on the land of the Tongva-Gabrielino people, this tree stands in the courtyard of Martin Luther King Hall at California State University, Los Angeles. Enrique took this photo during an April 2025 Building Bridges, Not Walls encuentro we helped organize with community members, faculty, and students from Juntos Podemos/Together We Can, the Claremont Colleges, Cal State Fullerton, Cal State Los Angeles, and Nikkei Progressives. The gathering focused on building community, sharing knowledge, and imagining other possibilities across generations, campuses, and communities.

Wanting an open, inclusive, and dialogical space not constrained by physical classrooms, we planned to meet outside at a community park with trees as our shelter. However, as the federal government increased ICE raids and inflamed hateful rhetoric, we worried about the safety of participants and moved the gathering to Cal State LA. While we are under no illusion that universities will save us, they have been important places of activism and resistance thanks to community pressure, and as the largest working-class public university in LA, Cal State LA has been no exception. Likewise, across the U.S., the latest federal attacks on academic freedom; research; Middle East, Queer, gender and ethnic studies departments; and Trans, Muslim, Palestinian, and immigrants have once again made colleges and knowledge production overt sites of contestation.

Refusing to normalize multiple forms of state violence and have their voices silenced, high school and college ethnic studies students created zines, films, and art installations such as the ones surrounding the tree calling out the devastating tolls of racial capitalism, multinational corporations, and the power elite on communities and the planet. Meanwhile, outside of the camera's lens were the everyday actions needed to organize the gathering and the many people who united that Saturday to myth-bust, storytell, and strategize. Amidst this work, there was dancing, eating, and conviviality. Some left early to attend demonstrations in support of Palestine and others stayed afterward to clean up. Each of these actions are crucial parts of larger forms of resistance.

Like the contributions in this issue, this picture and the stories behind it call upon us to name and change structures of power collectively and cross-generationally. This involves forming alternative spaces that allow us to imagine and to practice a more just education. Other times, this involves direct confrontation. It is similar moments and possibilities that this issue's contributors recount through research, pictures, poetry and storytelling in places from New York, New Mexico, California to Michoacán. Many of these contributions are also collaborative—embodying collectivist approaches that draw on ancestral, familial, and community knowledges and histories.