Ethnic Studies Pedagogies
2023, Vol. 2, Issue 1
www.EthnicStudiesPedagogies.org ISSN 2993 - 3609

They Buried Seeds: The 10-Year Unfolding of the Xican@ Pop-Up Book

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Abstract

This article looks back at a decade to evaluate the education activism, pedagogy, and arts allegories of the Xican@ Pop-Up Book (XPUB) movement. In 2012, the XPUB responded to Arizona's attack on the Mexican American Studies department—and the accompanying book ban—by proclaiming, "You can ban Chicano books, but they still POP UP!" Through explorations in paper engineering, pop-up book manifestos, curriculum versatility, exhibitions, media imagery, and lectures, XPUB spread its message widely. Consciously employing presence effects and allegories—like the revolutionary "seeds"—XPUB contributed conceptually and visually to an Ethnic Studies movement and its vision of survival, perseverance, and building. Ten years later and book banning is back as Republicans target critical race theory, *The 1619 Project*, LGBTQ+ young adult literature and Ethnic Studies broadly. Via a "Liberated Ethnic Studies," the XPUB re-enlists its dynamic arts curriculum in service of resistance, cultural affirmation, and building Ethnic Studies community.

Keywords: Ethnic Studies, Chicana/o/x Studies, book bans/ censorship, artivism, allegory, presence effects, paper engineering (pop-up books).

Look at Us, We Were Building

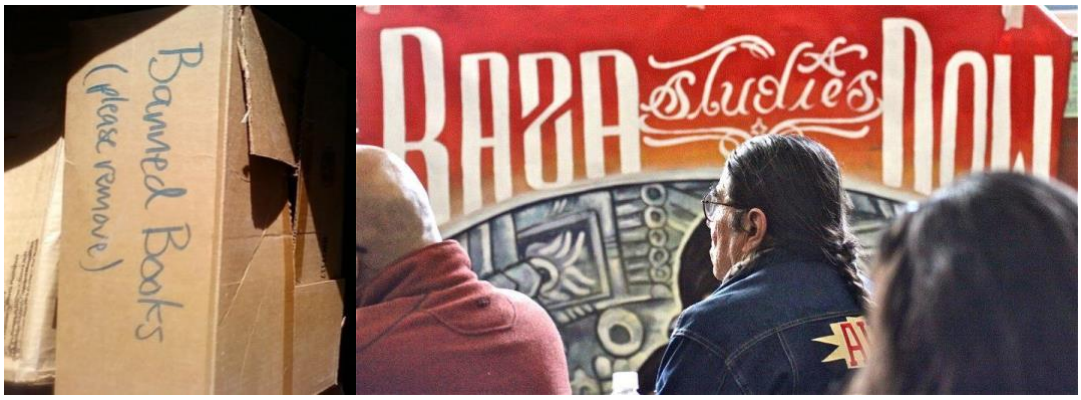
A little over a decade ago, Arizona Republican legislators attacked and destroyed the remarkable Mexican American Studies Department (MAS) of the Tucson Unified School District. Animating their instruction with Indigenous and Mesoamerican teachings, Chicana/o/x Studies, critical race theory, and employing Freirean and critical pedagogy methods, the department had turned education outcomes around. The MAS department essentially *inverted* the achievement gap (MAS student test scores were higher than those of White students in the district) and energized student learning and activism. This was enough to catch the attention of Arizona conservatives who launched a political assault on the program.

The political tempest over Chicana/o Studies in Arizona drew the attention of education activists nationally, eventually leading to a movement for spreading Ethnic Studies throughout California and the nation. While supporting the lawsuit MAS teachers brought against the state of Arizona, Chican@ educators in Southern California formed alliances with the embattled Tucson community—*"the Eagles and the Seagulls*" (Serna, 2013). Influenced by earlier Zapatista principles, a campaign to "Save Ethnic Studies" evolved into a movement to "Spread Ethnic Studies." The Xican@ Pop-Up Book (XPUB) movement emerged from this activism, contributing artistic production, messaging, manifestos, happenings, curriculum and allegorical visions of Ethnic

Studies futures. This article revisits and evaluates some of these contributions and conjurings and connects past lessons to current book bans across the country suggesting ways to turn crisis into opportunity.

When Arizona passed HB-2281 in 2011, essentially outlawing Chicana/o Studies, Tucson teachers, the community, and students organized protests which kept MAS alive; in April, students took over a packed school board meeting, chained themselves to the council chambers and proclaimed "When your education is under attack—What do you do? Fight Back!" Footage of the protest went viral. Finally, after the state threatened to defund Tucson schools, the district officially dismantled the program in January of 2012. Students were enlisted to remove MAS books and put them in boxes marked "banned books" that were shelved by administrators. Students walked out of schools, but the damage was done (Biggers, 2012).

In this political maelstrom, the Xican@ Pop-Up Book emerged as an art protest curriculum, proclaiming, "You can ban Chicano books, but they will still pop up!" Like our counterpart in Texas—the *Librotraficante*—our performative protest allegory called for the return of the Mexican American Studies department while it helped raise funds and awareness for the teachers' racial animus lawsuit (which was eventually won in 2017). Alongside groups like Raza Studies Now, AMAE, Ethnic Studies Now, Peoples Ed Movement, Pico Youth & Family Center, the Association of Raza Educators (ARE), XITO, NACCS, Chicana/o Studies departments, and Liberated Ethnic Studies, a movement developed to raise consciousness about Ethnic Studies and helped propel campaigns to spread Ethnic Studies to schools and colleges in California and beyond.



Note: On the left Chicano books banned in Arizona, 2012. On the right: Raza Studies Now banner (by Raul Gonzalez), American Indian Movement at Mission High School, San Francisco, 2014. Photo by author.

Xican@ Time: Nurturing a Quincentennial Consciousness

Today's attempts to ban books about critical race theory, Black Studies, and LGBTQ+ youth literature has recent and ancient roots. The politics of current book bans are directly linked to the right-wing attack on Chicano Studies in Arizona a decade ago, and are argued on the basis of Eurocentric patriotism, morality, homophobia, and conspiracy, having great effect in states dominated by conservatives. Book banning on this hemisphere, however, began with Christian book burning 500 years ago in 1530, when the Inquisition arrived on these shores. The motives

are eerily similar. As 2019 approached, XPUB produced its 2nd manifesto, "El Pop-Up Vuh," which included an essay preparing readers for the coming quincentenary of Europe's arrival on the Mesoamerican mainland, with a pop-up of Tenochtitlan on the last page. Like during the Columbus quincentennial of 1992, our aim was to promote connection to and recovery of Indigenous Mesoamerican knowledge and critical thinking around Europe's colonizing invasion of Mexico and the Americas. In short, we sought to incite a quincentennial consciousness.

In 1530, when the first bishop of Mexico, Juan de Zumaraga, set the torch to the sacred libraries at Texcoco across the lake from the plundered Tenochtitlan, the Aztec island city, natives understood the message. The Indigenous audience was stunned according to accounts. This destruction of knowledge erasing their legacy was a prerequisite to settler colonialism's violent, genocidal subjugation of Native peoples. It was physical, psychological, and civilizational violence. Grosfoguel (2013) calls this destruction of knowledge an *epistemicide*, a requisite counterpart to genocides committed during colonization, as well as a basis to asserting white supremacy ideologically.

"The most powerful weapon in the hand of the oppressor, is the mind of the oppressed," stated Steven Biko a South African activist in a 1971 speech ("Steve Bilko calls for Black Consciousness," 2018). Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz (2021) points out that settler colonialism's goal of controlling land, labor, and resources was always accompanied by genocide, erasure, and an ideological project of white supremacy.

This was the *auto da fe*—"acts of faith"—the Inquisition's public ceremonies performing the stamping out of non-Christian texts and rituals. Arabs, Jews, and women knew this well on the Iberian Peninsula. In the Americas, the "sword opened the way for the cross" (Ruiz, 1992, p. 124) establishing European supremacy over the newly subjugated urban Indians of Mesoamerica. Soon large numbers of enslaved Africans were forcibly brought to the Americas as demand for labor grew. Grosfoguel (2013) argues that these four epistemicides of the long 16th century – of Arabs/Jews, women, Africans, and Native Americans – established an empirical and intellectual white supremacy globally.

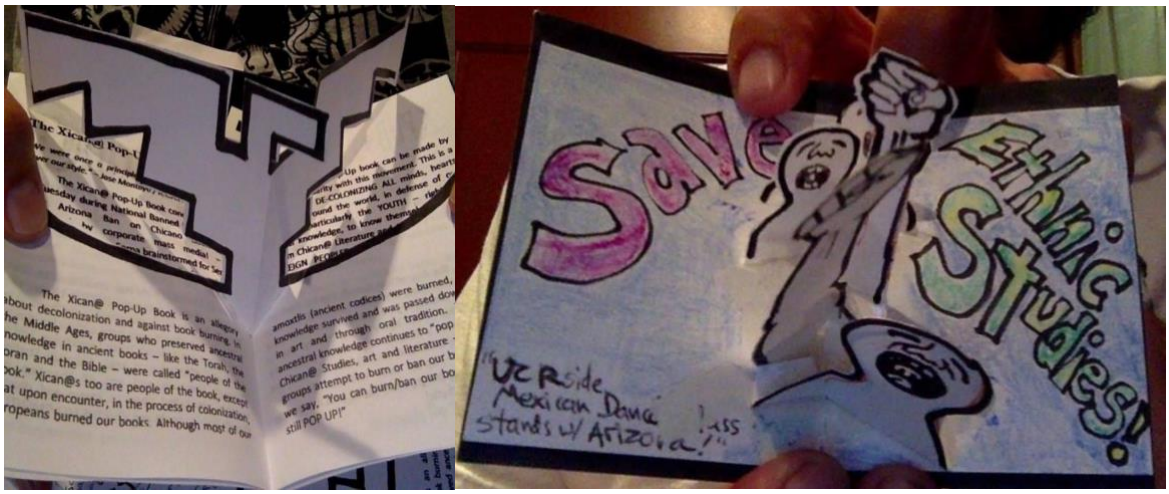
During Arizona's attack on Chicana/o Studies a decade ago, University of Arizona Mexican American Studies professor Roberto "Dr. Cintli" Rodriguez compared the book banning of Chicana/o literature to the colonial book burning five centuries before, particularly Fray Diego de Landa's book burning of Maya codices at Mani, Yucatan in 1562. The Eurocentric colonizers were back, and they were here to erase us again. And again, we resisted.

Before passing into the spirit realm last year, Dr. Cintli had proposed and helped popularize valuable organizational tropes and indigenous concepts to the movement to defend Chican@ Studies such as: Maiz knowledge (that ancient knowledge and mythology traditions were tied to civilizational corn cultivation); that history would record the Chicano Movement as an Indigenous rebellion; creation in destruction; and how the Indigenous humanity debate of 1524 was relevant today (we continue to be institutionally dehumanized). During the MAS struggle, he proposed that the racist policies against Mexicans in Arizona were an attack on our bodies (SB 1070, Indigenous racial profiling) and on our minds (HB 2281), and that these politics were akin to civilizational warfare not unlike the colonization of Mesoamerica 500 years prior.

 ISSN 2993 - 3609

In recent years, Dr. Cintli established a "Xican@ Embassy" on grounds adjacent to the ancient urban center at Teotihuacan, envisioning it as a sort of pilgrimage destination for Chican@s, Latinxs, and other Native Americans in the U.S. reconnecting to their Indigenous heritage and worldview. The Xican@ Pop-Up Book collaborated on a virtual talk held there during the 500-year anniversary of European arrival and invasion at Tenochtitlan, the Aztec island capital during 1519-1521. The XPUB had earlier issued its 2nd manifesto, titled "El Pop-Up Vuh," reminiscent of the ancient Maya creation story. El Pop-Up Vuh contained a polemical message reminding readers of what Omi and Winant (2015) named "perhaps the greatest racial formation project" (p. 114). The last page featured a pop-up of Tenochtitlan's Templo Mayor, a pyramid rising from the island in the lake, a reminder that the quincentennial of colonial invasion (1519-1521) was an opportunity to rebuild Indigenous identity, reclaim legacies and retrieve Indigenous technologies. We aimed to complement and deepen *El Plan de Santa Barbara's (*Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education, 1969*)* call for "historical consciousness" with a quincentennial consciousness and incite a critical atmosphere through a decolonial awareness not unlike the early 1990's.

During 2018 in my Cal State Dominguez Hills Chican@/Latinx Culture class, students read David Carrasco's *The Aztecs* (2011) and Graciela Limón's *Song of the Hummingbird* (1996) and created pop-up books, excavating Mesoamerican urban planning, structures on the island city, or taking a closer look at themes or scenes from Limon's novel. When Armando Lawrence of the Compadres Network came to our class as a guest speaker, he revealed that through dreams and ancestral research across borders, he believed he was a likely descendant of an Aztec noble, a character in Limon's novel. We had essentially excavated the island city, and now before our eyes a living relative of Aztec history was speaking to us. After class students prompted a class picture. These are what Gumbrecht (2004) calls presence effects (when literature or art go beyond meaning), high impact memorable learning experiences, moments which can transform a student's consciousness.



Note: Xican@ Pop-Up Book Manifesto, 2013. An anti-book ban pop-up by Xican@ Pop-Up Book (design by author), 2014.

Conjuring the Future: Prophecies & Presence Effects in the *Plan de Santa Pop-Up*

The unprecedented wave of book bans nationally has precursors in the decade-old movement to defend Ethnic Studies in Arizona, and reminds us that education access and racial justice takes organization and struggle. The attack on the successful Chicana/o Studies program in Tucson was more widely understood when the concept of a "book ban" of Chicano books spread nationally. Educators, students, and community responded with *Raza Studies Now* conferences, *Librotraficante* (to "smuggle" criminalized books back into Arizona schools), *Xican@ pop-up books*, and other happenings. In 2014, Raza Studies Now collectively authored and issued *El Plan de Los Angeles*, calling for a widespread movement in California and nationally to develop Ethnic Studies instruction in high schools.

Then the *Ethnic Studies Now* campaign re-invigorated a push for a culturally relevant curriculum, passing an Ethnic Studies graduation requirement in districts, then taking the proposal to the state legislature. Chicana/o books returned to popularity, and interest in the field rejuvenated Ethnic Studies. The ideas planted by the fledgling movement were sprouting.

By now, XPUB issued its 3rd most ambitious manifesto, a 5-page, 10-Point plan titled *"El Plan de Santa Pop-Up*," reminiscent of the *Black Panther 10-Point Plan* (1966) and *El Plan de Santa Barbara* (Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education. (1969). The 3rd manifesto—hand-made pop-up multiples created from an original design—called for the regeneration of Xican@ Indigenous identity, quincentennial consciousness, the return of MAS to Arizona, Black and Brown Unity, local demands for justice for UC Riverside's ballet folklorico, and a call for Raza and Ethnic Studies in all high schools.

In his text *Production of Presence* (2004), Gumbrecht challenges the preeminence of interpretation and meaning in literary studies and proposes a stronger acknowledgement of what he calls "presence culture," the dimension of literature, art, or culture that invokes material or visceral responses from our senses or bodies. The sensation of opening a pop-up book, for instance, delivers the sensation that the reader has witnessed a kind of "happening"—that out of nothing, *something* made itself happen. In the Spring of 2014, the XPUB collaborated with Animo South LA instructor Ron Espiritu and his African American & Chicano/Latinx Studies students. We introduced the pop-up book allegory as an art protest against the attacks on Ethnic Studies and instructed them on the 90-degree pop up technique. Their assignment was to create pop-up books to accompany their "hidden histories" research assignment, lifting up stories of solidarity and resistance struggles by people of color commonly left out of the standard curriculum.

We purposely orchestrated a hyperbolic "pitch" for the class, to inspire students to really put an effort into the pop-up book designs, assuring them that we had a movement going, that "the stage was set," the opportune moment would come, and that perhaps, if we did all the right moves, our masterpieces would be so amazing and transformative that *thousands* if not *millions* of people would be reached, their minds and souls transformed.

After several visits to the class, the pop-up projects took shape beautifully, structurally uplifting the stories of the Filipino-Mexican alliance during the 1965 UFW Grape Strike, the Black Panthers

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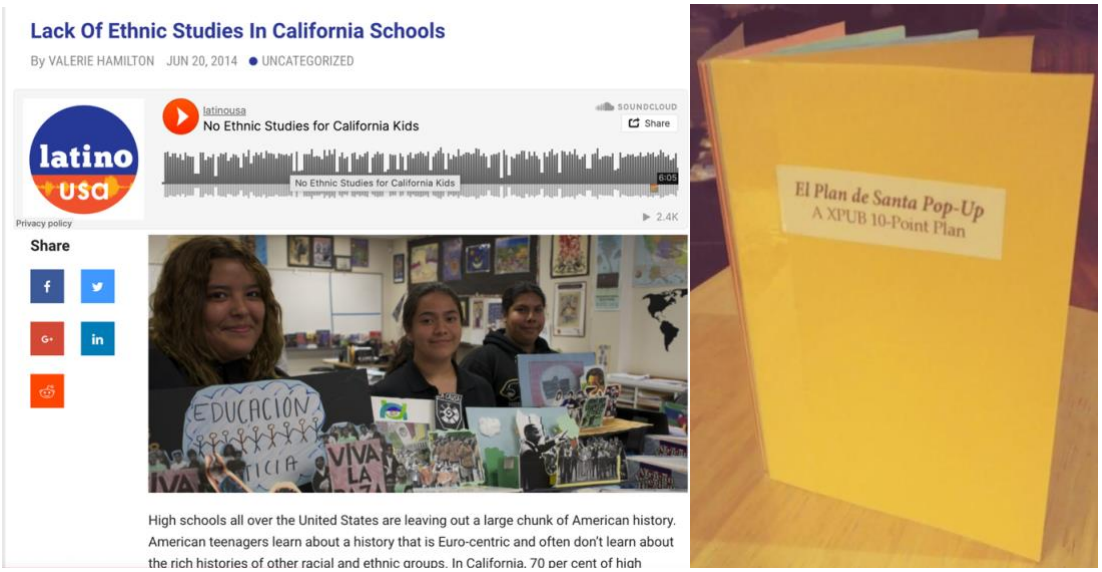
and the Brown Berets, Emma Tenayuca and the Pecan Strike, the Birmingham Children's March, etc. Around the time the books were completed, a National Public Radio (NPR) reporter from Maria Hinojosa's show "*Latino USA*" called me looking for high school Ethnic Studies educators. I connected her to Ron. An interview was followed with a classroom visit by an NPR photographer. In a few weeks NPR's *Latino USA* broadcast the story nationally[1]. Suddenly, the pop-up book masterpieces had a national audience, reaching thousands, perhaps a million. The word spread. A "happening" had happened.



Note: On the left: Lack of Ethnic Studies in California Schools, Valerie Hamilton (2014, June 20). https://www.latinousa.org/tag/ethnic-studies/ On the right: Photo by author, El Plan de Santa Pop-Up (2015).

They Tried to Bury Us, But We Were Seeds

During this time, the Xican@/Mesoamerican concept of the seed re-emerged and began to circulate widely. My own earliest reference was reading an Ernesto Cardenal poem, then later the UCLA Xinachtli program in early 2000s, offering tutoring and mentorship to high school students. In the film *Precious Knowledge* (Palos, 2012), teacher Jose Gonzales eloquently explains how Chicano Studies critical thinking is "a seed" that grows in the mind of a young person, shaping future cultural dignity and actions.

My Chican@/Latinx literature classes frequently read a version of the seed metaphor in Ernesto Cardenal's elegiac 1954 poem to an early martyr of the Sandinista revolution, his *"Epitafio para la tumba de Adolfo Báez Bone*." It was a Guevarean leitmotif of Central American revolutionary perseverance and tenacity; "you can kill the revolutionary, but you can't kill the revolution" (p. 104). The poem concisely describes the disappearance and likely execution of Báez Bone after a failed coup attempt of dictator Somoza. Wherever his body is not buried, he is resurrected. The poem ends by proclaiming "they thought they buried you, and what they did was to bury a seed."

[1] https://www.npr.org/2014/06/20/324005304/lacking-latino-studies

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Several of my students re-created the theme in pop-up books. As the poem and symbol spread in movement circles, some on social media wrongly attributed the allegory to a Greek poet in the 1970's. Dr. Cintli believed the original concept came from the grandmothers in the ancient *Popol Vuh*; the Lords of Xibalba threw the bones of the defeated Hero Twins into the river only for them to resurrect later to vanquish the arrogant lords (Rodriguez, 2023).

In 2014, the National Association of Multicultural Education (NAME) conference was held in San Francisco dedicated to the MAS struggle, and a large group assembled at Mission High School to hear speakers, including the final keynote speech by Larry Lopez, representing the Tucson teachers suing the state. He explained the case, conditions in Arizona, and envisioned a victory in the spreading of Ethnic Studies. He ended his speech saying, "They thought they buried us, but what they did was they buried seeds."

Regardless of the origin, the metaphor sprouted into an allegory of the tenacious regeneration of Ethnic Studies. They thought they buried Chicano Studies in Arizona, but they spread seeds for Ethnic Studies throughout the United States.

The buried seeds metaphor became a synecdoche of the spreading Ethnic studies activism rooted in the Arizona MAS struggle, seemingly dispersed by the winds of protest. In Atlanta, Georgia, DACA activists taking over a street held up a similar sign. Mexican students spray-painted the slogan on walls after the cartel-allied government military disappeared and reportedly assassinated 43 students in 2014. Medical students for Black Lives Matter held up the slogan. As Ethnic Studies classes and graduation requirements grew throughout the state, the prophetic allegory began to manifest.

In 2021, after much controversy and ongoing struggle over defining Ethnic Studies curriculum, Governor Gavin Newsom signed the Medina Bill (CA AB2820), guaranteeing that all California high school students take an Ethnic Studies course starting in 2029, providing young adults with a critical cultural literacy and systemic awareness of the state and nation's complicated history with race.

Note. Cartoon upper left: Ethnic Studies: 2281 by Lalo Alcaraz (2014). Used by permission. Pop-up books by Chicano/Latino Studies students (2016). California State University Long Beach.

Art Fights Back: Allegories of Regeneration

Allegory works like a capsule of principles and ideology, emitting revelatory sensations upon interpretation. Literary allegory has roots in priesthoods worldwide, as during a Catholic mass when the priest follows the liturgy with the homily, interpreting the symbolic "Jesus stories" for the audience, making meaningful connections to the present. Those attending the mass are intended to experience a feeling of awe in the sermon, a sensation of wonder upon hearing the ancient book's relevance to the moment. Ancient Mesoamericans also tied allegory and its characters to a cosmological narrative. Unique expressions of allegory emerged during the Tucson struggle.

Following Mesoamerican tradition, Tucson MAS teachers in their innovative efforts to re-purpose public schooling employed their own pedagogical allegory through their central methodology titled the Xican@ Paradigm, illustrated with the 5 suns imagery within the Aztec Calendar. The teachers described the educational process moving through 4 stages, guided by 4 energies: self-reflection (Tezcatlipoca, "the smoking mirror"), precious knowledge (Quetzalcoatl, "the feathered serpent"), the will to act (Huitzilopochtli, "hummingbird on the left"), and transformation (Xipe Totec, "the flayed skin god").

Cartoonist Lalo Alcaraz produced several hard-hitting satirical political cartoons depicting the racist policies of Arizona, in particular his representation of the book ban with allusion to witch trials and colonial-era book burning. His image depicts a book tied to a stake upon a pyre set atop the map of Arizona. The book however features an Indigenous face, possibly a woman, whose anthropomorphic scale resembles a person tied to the stake. The layered image evokes Grosfoguel's (2013) work—tying the medieval execution of women during the Salem Witch Trials to earlier epistemicides of Indigenous knowledge by Spaniards – and Dr. Cintli's (2023) comparison of Arizona's book bans to colonial book burning.

One of the most marvelous literary allegories composed during this period came from rhetoric scholar Aja Martinez, herself a former student of the Tucson Mexican American Studies classes. Her Allegory on Arizona titled "Critical Race Theory Counterstory as Allegory: A Rhetorical Trope to Raise Awareness About Arizona's Ban on Ethnic Studies" (2013) took cues from foundational critical race theory scholar Derrick Bell and reflected on the historical consciousness called for in *El Plan de Santa Barbara*. Through composite characters—based on political figures, statistical data, cultural archetypes, or personal experience—Martinez eloquently composes a futuristic tale of Rosette Benitez, a talented first generation Mexican American fully invested in assimilation and the American Dream. Dismissive of her more political *Chicana* cousin Alejandra, Rosette moves along successfully through U.S. institutions of learning and science, ultimately bioengineering the formula for immortality. When right wing politicians from her home state hijack the invention, they devise a quota system based on "history" – only those who have made the nation great, whose ancestors have contributed to society and who uphold the values of the Protestant nation will be administered the "immortality treatment." Rosette, realizing too late how important Mexican American history is now, cannot recall learning a single topic of Mexican American achievements or contributions to the nation. Regretting her incapacity, she recalls news reports of the lawsuit by Chican@ teachers fighting for the right to teach the histories and literatures of Chican@s.

If immortality stands for nationalist scientific success, then the wretched pay for it with their shortened/belittled lives. Immortality may stand for the racially illusive (and exclusive) status of the American Dream. When the mom teases Rosette that immortality science is "*puras tonterias*" (foolishness), the metanarrative moment reveals the fiction as a game, but one that deploys CRT counterstory's "destructive aspect" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, pp. 49-50) deconstructing the racial myths of U.S. benevolence, exceptionalism, assimilation's promise, and inferiority complexes. When Rosette buries her face in her hands saying, "What have I done?" the dialectical irony of assimilation, its Chicano contradiction—captured eloquently in the opening lines of Corky's "I am Joaquin"—is front and center. Rosette exists now "in the grasp of American social neurosis, sterilization of the soul and a full stomach," (Gonzales 1967, p. 3) having won the economic battle, she has lost the struggle of cultural survival.

In the end, Rosette's academic over achievements are troubled by her loss of community. The allegory functions internally on readers. Like Martinez' futuristic allegory, or Alcaraz' historical illustrative allusions, the Xican@ Pop-Up Book created symbolic stories from investigations past and present, vigilant against systemic racism and ***envisioning a Xican@ futurity.***

Seeds Sprouting, Movement Building

Another of the powers of the pop-up book curriculum is that it remains relevant. Conservative efforts to control the nation's narrative and censor Ethnic Studies continue, now on a national scale. The Xican@ Pop-Up Book continues to develop lessons for this struggle.

During the Trump presidency, conservatives took aim at critical race theory, wrongly framing it as ideological "victimology" and in other misinformed terms. At the end of his term the Trump's administration proposed the *1776 Project* to contest the widely circulating, Pulitzer prize-winning *The 1619 Project*[2], a public pedagogy journalism initiative on the 400th anniversary of the beginning of slavery in the U.S. Soon after, Florida Republicans (led by presidential candidate Ron DeSantis), not to be outdone, censored the African American Studies high school AP course, removing literature by Angela Davis, Robin Kelley, Ruth Gilmore, and Black Lives Matter. Florida and Texas led other red states in book bans targeting Ethnic Studies and LGBTQ+ young adult literature, labeling the latter "obscene."

Even in California, censorship and hijacking have been ongoing. Starting in 2019, the California Legislative Jewish Caucus led an attack on the Ethnic Studies model curriculum, effectively removing and slandering the authors as "anti-Semitic" on the basis of an Arab American Studies lesson featuring a song about Palestinian resistance in Israel. The Jewish Caucus essentially moved to remove Arab Studies, Palestine, and lessons on settler colonialism. The authors pushed back, removed their names from the model curriculum's document and formed the autonomous *Liberated Ethnic Studies*. Since then, state officials have moved on with a watered-down curriculum, and discouraged school districts from engaging *Liberated Ethnic Studies* curriculums.

Zionist and right-wing conservative groups like the Deborah Project have used the courts to attack Ethnic Studies. A lawsuit by conservatives in San Diego prompted the California Department of

[2] https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-america-slavery.html

Education to remove *In La Kesh* (based on a Luis Valdez poem on Maya philosophy) claiming it was tied to Aztec sacrifice rituals; they also removed the "Ashé" affirmation based on Yoruba traditions (Arce & Montaño, 2022). Conservatives tied to the Deborah Project filed frivolous "anti-Semitism" lawsuits against *Liberated Ethnic Studies* Chicana and Filipina leaders for teaching about Israel's settler colonialism project in Palestine (this was prior to the October 7, 2023, Hamas assault and ensuing and ongoing—as of this writing—genocide in Gaza). The death toll in Gaza—reaching 36,000 Palestinians killed in nine months—calls the anti-Semitism argument into question[3].

In this context, the Xican@ Pop-Up Book launched a campaign to enlist itself in current struggles and dialogues against book bans and censorship of Ethnic Studies. In October 2023, during Banned Books Week, XPUB held lectures, panels, and book displays at Cal State University Channel Islands, San Jose State University and UC Berkeley. The XPUB rose in support of the Tampa 5, five female members of University of South Florida's Students for a Democratic Society, arrested for defending the Queer Studies and diversity programs, Ethnic Studies and the right of students to protest in Florida. In the Spring of 2024, XPUB joined a panel on book bans sponsored by the National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies Conference (NACCS), which also plans to write an *amicus brief* in support PEN America's lawsuit against book banning in Florida.

Today, self-determination, the role of students, and historical consciousness matter. The Xican@ Pop-Up Book lessons continue to "analyze/confront/and intellectually dismantle historical and institutionalized forms of racism and settler colonialism" as stated in the UC Ethnic Studies Faculty Council letter (9/8/2023). My CSUCI students and I looked at *Gender Queer: A Memoir* (Kobabe, 2019), a book at the top of book bans, discussing the importance of representation, identification, exposure and empathy. We questioned the basis of conservative fears. As with *The 1619 Project*, some popularly held beliefs about our country, sexuality, and race are socially constructed narratives, that if challenged cause what Frantz Fanon (1952) called cognitive dissonance—the violent disbelief and psychic disruption caused by a challenge to a deeply held belief. We considered how most LGBTQ+ individuals do *not* say, "I was perfectly straight my entire life… UNTIL I READ THIS BOOK!" No—that doesn't happen.

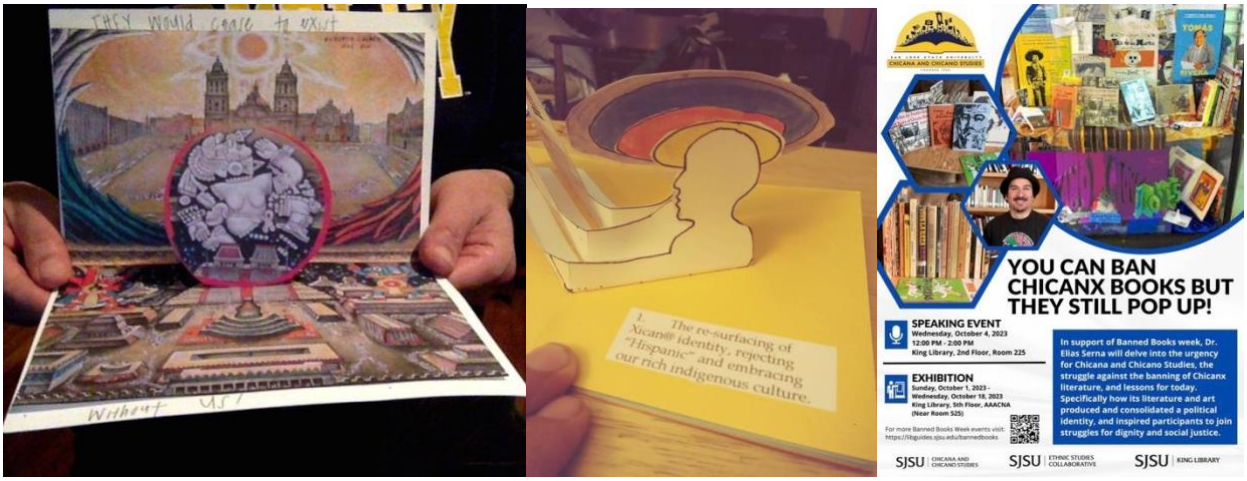
The book plays a role in a young person's identification. One sees oneself—finally!—in a book, and is made to feel more connected, given representation, depth, given a voice, perhaps guided or enlightened, through the narrative. Or it helps a reader develop empathy for another's unique experience; a young person sees another for the first time. A book can be a mirror—In Lak'ech—or a new idea to question.

The Xican@ Pop-Up Book participated in the conjuring of Ethnic Studies today. We helped build Ethnic Studies and the movement taught us lessons. It is ours, or it doesn't exist. It is ours because we don't ask permission. And self-determination for us Chicanas/os/x is not written by someone else. Culturally relevant curriculum is not enough. Self-determination in Ethnic Studies content and pedagogy must continue developing critical thinking skills and a historical consciousness, which is what engaged students in Tucson. It is what engages students in Ethnic Studies classes, alongside

[3] https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israeli-airstrike-rafah-kills-12-palestinians-gaza-medics-say-2024-05-30/

the building of communities *that are down* for the people. A Bay Area abolitionist educator stated it best: "No history, no self. Know history, know self."

Let freedom read. May the *Fuerza* be with us!



Note: Top left: Tenochtitlan pop-up by Angelica Smith, CSU Dominguez Hills student, Fall 2018. Top right: El Plan de Santa Pop-Up, 2015. Bottom: Flyer for Xican@ Pop-Up Book 10-year anniversary lecture, King Library, San Jose State University, Fall 2023.

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