

## On Love, Covid, and Scholarship

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While so many of us, especially in rural areas, look forward to seeing old friends and colleagues at the national conference, this year NACCS 2021 brought us together as a virtual community. It was not the same. Many of us were able to take a break from online teaching, at least for a couple of days, yet there were no embraces, hallway pláticas causing us to be “late for the next session,” or dances with old friends and new. Yet come together we did. Reaching out amid loss and todavía in struggle, we shared scholarship and strategies and, amid the struggle—joy. Papers, poetry, and plenaries called us to action, even while we battled, each of us on our own campuses, in our own towns, with our own losses. Together we moved forward, renewed with the love of, and labor of, our colegas and communities.

Our NACCS 2021 Proceedings reflect a year of struggle. For many of us, isolation and grief pushed us to reach in and to reach out – claiming poetry and memory for survival and healing. It should be no surprise then, that part three of our Proceedings, “Creative Hope, Creating Healing,” is more robust than creative offerings in recent years. Love, poetry, and community brought us through the losses of the year. In part, because of this, I chose to include one of the poems that brought me through 2021 in our collection. Following the death of my mother, I taped a copy of “Chiconahui calli xihuitl: Año nueve casa” to my office door. Each day that I came to the office I was reminded that I am in the house of time. And so in this volume I use the poem as the epigraph to introduce section three. In it, Rafael Jesús González, calls us, all of humanity, to remember that we are sheltered in “the house of time,” sheltered in flower and song, he prays, “May it be home to our joy, comfort of our grief.”

As a whole, the volume speaks to our lives as people of community: the work so many Chicana/o/xs are engaged in to create a better world for this generation and the next, and the power of words to recall, remember, and inspire critical labor in

times of crisis. This work includes bringing traditional healing home to communities in the Oakland Bay Area, the creation of spaces of movement for sustaining our communities, the teaching, learning and collaboration of the teachers and students of the Homie UP Youth Empowerment Program, and the promotoras of project protect. This includes work in our universities, amid the losses of the pandemic. In our labor at schools, colleges, and universities, we too strove to be agents of healing and hope.

In my own classes several first-generation students had to help their parents and guardians at work, and so zoomed in from storage rooms and kitchens to keep up with school. They struggled with isolation and with loss, and I found myself calling on colleagues teaching in the K-12 system, in fact, a colega from our K-12 caucus, for pedagogy tips and input. I was, once again, grateful that working from silos was not part of my training and is not part of our method as NACCS educators, practitioners, and activists.

I too moved, into the back room of my mother's home as she recovered from a fall. Because of our economic privilege my partner was able to set up a workstation in that back room; even as I saw my student's homes, families, and pets, they saw my mother, traveling with her walker down the hallway. While we were apart physically, we grew to know a bit more about each other than we had known in the context of classroom education.

Like many of you, while I struggled to remain connected to my family and to my students, I was also aware of the role that Covid played in exacerbating the already gross inequalities that structure our world in the twenty-first century. While university students, such as those at WSU struggled to balance childcare, studies, and paid labor, the gap between grade school children of high income and low-income school districts became a widening chasm.<sup>1</sup> The role of zip code and economic status has, historically determined the quality of education a young person will receive in America's public schools.<sup>2</sup> In this context of inequality,

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<sup>1</sup> "The Impact of COVID-19 on the Disadvantage Gap in Primary Schools," *Education Journal*, no. 477 (February 2022): 29; Olivia Crow, "Education Inequality during Covid-19: How Remote Learning Is Widening the Achievement Gap and Spurring the Need for Judicial Intervention," *Boston College Law Review* 63 no. 2 (2022): 713-52.

<sup>2</sup> Crow, 717-718; Zeus Leonardo and W. Norton Grubb, *Education and Racism : A Primer on Issues and Dilemmas* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 104-106.

many city and district decisions throughout the pandemic failed to provide internet access for low-income and homeless youth, failed to address the needs of parents and guardians who could not work from home, and failed to develop an effective means of delivery for ESL and non-English learners.<sup>3</sup> The programming and bridges created by Universidad Popular, and the National Latino Research Center of California State University San Marcos, discussed in part two of this volume, became even more critical to the flourishing of our youth and our communities.

The devastation of the pandemic on the health of BIPOC communities and on the education of young people in our schools is not a coincidence. Just as public education is often referred to as “the great equalizer,” so too state and national politicians came to refer to Covid 19.<sup>4</sup> The harsh erasure of social inequalities accomplished by that short but powerful phrase allowed the structural racism and classism of our country and our world to breed and flourish. And so, before turning, to introduce the scholarship of 2021, I will digress, for just a couple pages, to place the virus, and our miracle of an online conference, in a larger historical context – one where the history of structural racism, in the U.S., gave rise to the unequal and devastating losses of 2021.

#### Love in a time of *Pathological Racism*<sup>5</sup>

In U.S. history destructive patterns repeat themselves; the dominant majority (or a dominant minority) blames the latest virus and/or economic crisis on people and nations outside the nation-state, while resources are distributed unequally among those within. Good people see and strive to address the pattern, yet it persists: a

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<sup>3</sup> Crow, 721-723.

<sup>4</sup> Crow, 717; See also Stephen A. Mein, “COVID-19 and Health Disparities: The Reality of ‘the Great Equalizer,’” *JGIM: Journal of General Internal Medicine* 35 no. 8 (2020): 2439–40. doi:10.1007/s11606-020-05880-5.

<sup>5</sup> Pathological racism is a term coined and mobilized by Ari Larissa Heinrich. See “The Future Repeats Itself: Covid-19 and its Historical Comorbidities,” In *Crisis*, edited by Jane Golley, Linda Jaivin, and Sharon Strange, (Canberra, Australia: ANU Press, 2021), 170. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1m9x316.20>.

crisis hits, social inequalities are exacerbated, the most vulnerable are scapegoated, the pandemic subsides. In this, our time of pathological racism, Covid exacerbated unequal access to healthcare, education, and other critical resources, while certain politicians and their followers scapegoated Chinese people, and Asians in general. Social inequality is not unique to times of pandemics, but instead is exacerbated by them, calling to mind the language of Ari Larissa Heinrich, whose use of the phrase “pathological racism” marks the intersection of racism and disease in the Western world, and how pathological racism made possible the anti-Asian violence of the nineteenth-century just as it made possible the racist violence of Covid 19.<sup>6</sup>

In the U.S. the scapegoating of Chinese immigrants and, in relation, Asian Americans has deep roots. From their arrival as workers in the fields and on the railroads of the nineteenth century, Euro-Americans blamed them for everything from wage suppression to the spread of cholera. This discrimination had deep roots in the global economy of the Opium Wars and in the global economy of Western Christianity. Long before the Chinese immigrated to the U.S., Euro-American merchants, missionaries, and diplomats traveled to China. Missionaries returned frustrated that the Chinese refused to convert to Christianity and told stories painting the Chinese as “heathen” and backward. Merchants, angry at China’s long closed ports, told similar tales.<sup>7</sup> As noted by Ari Heinrich,

Imperialist powers perceived themselves to have a civilizing mission. It helped to justify occupation and exploitation if the occupied and exploited were painted as inferior but capable of improvement through the paternalistic intervention of the occupier and exploiter.<sup>8</sup>

By the time Chinese immigrants arrived in the U.S, Euro-American culture was replete with Anti-Asian stereotypes. When the newly arrived Chinese succeeded

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<sup>6</sup> Heinrich, 170-174.

<sup>7</sup> Sucheng Chan, *Asian Californians* (San Francisco: MTL:Boyd and Fraser, 1991), 40; Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of California, 1994), 158-160.

<sup>8</sup> Heinrich, 174.

in mining and formed viable labor communities, white labor, reacted with violence.<sup>9</sup> In Folsom, California, in 1858 white miners formed an anti-Chinese organization and drove approximately 30 Chinese miners from their claims. That same year a mob of about 150 white men drove another 200 Chinese miners from their claims near Alder creek in Sacramento County.<sup>10</sup> Throughout the U.S. national West, violence and discrimination took shape through the legal system, through racist discourse produced by politicians and the news media, and through overt, physical violence. Not surprisingly, medical discourse shared in and contributed to this violence. Western medical practitioners blamed twentieth-century outbreaks of cholera on China, and, in relation, Chinese immigrants.<sup>11</sup>

When Donald Trump referred to Covid 19 as the “China virus,” his language pulled on and fueled a strain of pathological racism that, in the West, goes back for over a century. The pathological racism that he brought to the White House, spurred an increase in hate crimes even before the onset of Covid. Organizations such as the Southern Poverty Law Center, UnidosUS, and the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association noted an immediate increase in hate-crimes following the 2016 election.<sup>12</sup> The violence was widespread, targeting Chicaxxs and Latinxs, Asian Americans, Jews and Muslims, Indigenous people, and African Americans.<sup>13</sup> With the onset of the pandemic, Trump, and other anti-

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<sup>9</sup> Chan, 1-12; Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (New York: Penguin, 1990), 31-33.

<sup>10</sup> B.S. Brooks, *Appendix to the Opening Statement and Brief of B.S. Brooks on the Chinese Question* (San Francisco: Women’s Co-operative Printing Union, 1877), 9.

<sup>11</sup> Joan B. Trauner, “The Chinese as Medical Scapegoats in San Francisco, 1870-1905.” *California History* 57, no. 1 (1978): 70–87. <https://doi.org/10.2307/25157817>.

<sup>12</sup> Marc Davis, “Rise in Hate Crimes, Divisive Rhetoric Prompts Bar Groups to Act.” *ABA Journal* 103 no. 4 (2017): 1; Alejandro Beutel, “How Trump’s Nativist Tweets Overlap with Anti-Muslim and Anti-Latino Hate Crimes,” *Southern Poverty Law Center, Hatewatch*. <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2018/05/18/how-trump%E2%80%99s-nativist-tweets-overlap-anti-muslim-and-anti-latino-hate-crimes>. Accessed March 18, 2022.

<sup>13</sup> Karina Wong, “History Lesson and Class Project: Educator Karina Wong Talks about Her Asian and Latino Heritage and her Ideas for Inter-Racial Solidarity in All Form,” *UnidosUS*. <https://www.unidosus.org/progress-report/educator-karina-wong-talks-about->

Asian racists, were able to draw from a deep well of toxic discourse, fueling yet a new wave of violence throughout the nation.<sup>14</sup> As his attention split between building walls and the virus, Trump became bold in his vitriol toward Asia. In part, as a result, between March and December of 2020 Stop Asian American Pacific Islanders Hate reported 3,800 hate anti-Asian hate crimes in the U.S.; many of the targets were elders. In March a 21-year-old white male killed eight people, targeting three Asian-owned businesses in Atlanta, Georgia. The President of the U.S., even while informed of the role that his racist language played in fueling such violence, continued engage such language in his viral discourse.<sup>15</sup>

Our many and diverse communities responded to the increased violence with organizing and coalition; Stop AAPI Hate sent out a statement “Our approach recognizes that in order to effectively address anti-Asian racism we must work to end all forms of structural racism leveled at Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color.”<sup>16</sup> UnidosUS (formerly the National Council of La Raza) published articles on Asian-Latinos, including a lesson plan for teachers. The Antidefamation league began tracking both Anti-Asian and antisemitic conspiracy theories, as well as hate crimes against Asian communities.<sup>17</sup> In a 2020 article Jonathan Greenblatt of the ADL, drew structural connections between the rise in Anti-Asian hate crimes, the lynching of George Floyd by police officers, and the 2019 slaughter of 23 people in El Paso, Texas, killed by a white supremacist who

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[her-asian-and-latino-heritage-and-her-ideas-for-inter-racial-solidarity-in-all-forms/](#). Accessed March 19, 2022.

<sup>14</sup> Rebeca Toledo, “Anti-Asian Hate Did Not Begin with Trump,” *Beijing Review* 64, no. 14 (2021): 27; Greenblatt, 212.

<sup>15</sup> Toledo, 27; Jonathan A. Greenblatt, “Fighting Hate in the Era of Coronavirus,” *Horizons: Journal of International Relations and Sustainable Development*, no. 17 (2020): 213. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48590574>.

<sup>16</sup> Toledo, 27.

<sup>17</sup> Greenblatt, 212.

sought to “kill as many Mexicans as possible.”<sup>18</sup> He noted that while the violence against our communities is manifested differently, the root causes were/are found in violent, structural racism.

As noted by Katrina Wong, Latinx and Asian coalition, while seldom recorded, is a powerful tool for survival and for change. In 1974, for example, the Puerto Rican educational nonprofit ASPIRA

...joined forces with a group of Chinese parents in California in a legal battle for native language assessments. The case, known as *Lau v. Nichols*, landed in the Supreme Court where it was unanimously decided that not attempting to provide supplemental language instruction to English learners violated the Civil Rights Act of 1964.<sup>19</sup>

The time of Covid is a time of pathological racism. Like the activists of Stop AAPI Hate, UnidosUS, and the Antidefamation league, we know roots of this violence run deep. And we know lasting solutions lie in community strength and in coalition.

As we move into what the CDC is calling the post-pandemic phase, we do so with the knowledge that neither education, nor viruses are “great equalizers.” Instead, the virus exacerbated unequal access to education, unequal distribution of wealth, and unequal distribution of the resources necessary to survive the pandemic. But we also know that the way forward is through community and coalition.

Love in the time of La Corona:

When, in 2021, we came together under the theme of Love in the time of la Corona, it was not surprising that so much of our work focused on action. In this volume we include the plenary addresses of Sandra Pacheco and Ben Olguín. Pacheco’s work reminds us of the healing traditions of our own communities.

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<sup>18</sup> Greenblatt, 213-215. Karna Wong reminds us, that in addition to the violent crimes listed above, Clifton Blackwell threw acid on Mahud Villalaz as he was entering a Mexican restaurant in Wisconsin.

<sup>19</sup> Wong.

While she speaks to the work that she and other curanderas do in the Bay Area, and of traditions from her own family, she also highlights the work of so many Chicanas and Indigenous women who are bringing traditional healing and practices to our classrooms and communities; she asks us, “Can you envision our graduates carrying ancestral wisdom, advising doctors, nurses, and other healthcare providers on how to better serve our *gente*?” Ben Olguín’s work follows her call with a call for self-critique, highlighting not only examples of times and spaces where departments of Chicana/o/x studies have become complicit with empire, but also reminding us that we do know how to be both critical and expansive. Our field, as our archive, is discrepant, and thus holds the possibility of achieving “a paradigm shift that more accurately accounts for the myriad ways we navigate power.”

We are also fortunate to be able to include several papers by scholars and activists who presented at our virtual gathering—*gente* whose work, like the 2021 plenaries, brings us specific examples of challenging structural inequalities. This second section opens with a paper by Ardón, Favela, Hernández, Millan, Muro, Nuñez-Alvarez, Ramírez, Romero, Santiago, Serrano and Torres, where they draw attention to the critical work of la Universidad Popular and the Homie UP Youth Empowerment Programs in addressing structural inequality in education, and in the multiple ways their community negotiated the violence and inequitable challenges of the Covid pandemic. Including the voices of students in this powerful work, they offer concrete examples of how to use community cultural wealth to “build and nurture the bridge from higher education institutions to our communities... reclaim our space, be civically engaged, and dismantle the social, cultural, and economic barriers that have been place in our communities.”

In this second section it is the work of Emmad and Peña who bring our attention to the health inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic. They map connections between unequal access to health care and the marginalization of BIPOC communities, reminding us,

The dominant neoliberal healthcare regime has commoditized health care.... The enduring health care inequities are a result of structural racism and are associated with settler colonial founding institutions that have long blocked BIPOC access to quality health

care, safe workplace environments, and access to safe housing, clean water, and air.

While calling attention to the role of environmental racism in exacerbating the violence of the pandemic, they also speak to the concrete actions of assisting and listening to promotoras who assist agri-food system workers in fighting for and negotiating for human rights such as healthcare, organizing rights and humane working conditions; of fighting for legislation that protects essential workers, and then fighting to maintain its application on the ground. While the state engages in destructive engagements with biopower, they argue, workers engage biopower, to a different end, one that “converts [abuses of biopower] into acts of life-affirming solidarity and collective action.”

Finally, and, creatively, Alejandro Wolbert Pérez brings us into the world of Conjunto, where dancers claim and make space for “pleasure and community.” Like Sandra Pacheco, whose plenary and practices build on the knowledge of her grandmother, so Wolbert Pérez draws on his grandmother’s knowledges, to address “Xicanx identity, cultural memory, and decolonial movidas, or struggles, across time and space.” Expanding our archive, he draws on community space, voice, and movement to demonstrate how

Conjunto’s participants and performers defy modernity’s insistence upon an erasure of the past that breaks with history, and the individualist edicts of late capitalism and the neoliberal state. Conjunto musicians and conjunto dancers are living archives and repositories of knowledges; they embody our peoples’ histories and experiences.

It is Wolbert Pérez’s expansion of the archive that segues our Proceedings into Part Three, “Creative Hope, Creating Healing,” where the work of Arellano, Pendleton Jiménez, and Urquijo-Ruiz remind us of the power of poetry and prose, Gifts that, for many of us, helped to bring us through 2021 to the hope of another year. Like Wolbert-Pérez, as well as Pacheco, Karleen Pendleton Jiménez reminds us of the power of memory and abuelitas. Opening her piece with an excerpt from her work, *The Street Belongs to Us*, we are pulled into a discussion between a grandmother (based on her own grandmother), and a young, 12-year old Chicana tomboy. The discussion? History and memory. Pendleton-Jiménez unpacks the context of the novel, where the memories of her grandmother are

connected to the Indigenous memories of the first nations of Canada, and the struggles for Chicana and Indigenous curricula and knowledges. It is through her own journey to Chicana theory and praxis, that she was able to create fictive characters such as Nana, to voice resistance and provide critical histories for the next generation. Similarly, Rita E. Urquijo-Ruiz's "Apá," draws on memory. Yet, perhaps that is where the similarity ends. For while, *In the Street Belongs to Us*, the relationship between Nana and her young grandchild seems almost idyllic, in "Apá," the relationship between the young tomboy and her Apá is not. "Apá" carries us into the conflicted archive of childhood—a child's-eye view of love, violence, and loss.

The volume closes as it opens—with poetry. Cathy Arellano's poems, intersecting with the critical work of B.V. Olguín, remind us of the violence of empire at home, but also of joy – the warmth of young love on a street corner where missionary ladies preach and "I do" is spoken with poetic passion. Urquijo-Ruiz's "MÁS-cara" reminds us of Anzaldúa's words which, todavía remind us that we must "carve and chisel [our] own face[s]." <sup>20</sup> Together the poems bring us forward. NACCS 2021 provided us with opportunities to share knowledge and beauty, to struggle together, to imagine and create new futures. Poetry, for y canto, reminds us that our struggles are not new struggles and that we know how to do this.

Before closing, I extend a special thanks to Rafael Jesús González, for allowing us to use three of his poems in this volume: "La Luna Bendice" | "The Moon Blesses"; "Rezo a Tonantzin" and; "Chiconahui calli xihuitl: Año nueve casa" | "Chiconahui Calli Xihuitl: Year Nine House." I first came to know González's work through his translations of Nahuatl poetry – he was among the first scholars to translate Mexican poetry for our community, publishing his work in *El Grito*.<sup>21</sup> When, preparing to contact him I searched his name online, I discovered he was the first poet laureate of Berkeley, had won more awards for his work than I could list, and in 2010 was honored as one of the Museum of California's "24 remarkable Californians." Being the bold person that I am, I contacted him and asked permission to use his translation anyway, and thus began my love

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<sup>20</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands: La Frontera* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1987), 22.

<sup>21</sup> Rafael Jesús González, "Songs from the Nahuatl," *El Grito* 5, no.1 (Fall 1971): 13-16.

relationship with his poetry. As noted above, his work helped bring me through 2021 in beauty and power (you can subscribe to receive his poetry in your inbox <http://rjgonzalez.blogspot.com/>).

I am also eternally grateful to the 2021 editorial team who labored through a difficult year, carving out time to move this volume forward. They not only read and critiqued individual papers, but also proofed and edited the entire manuscript before it was uploaded. Our NACCS 2021 Proceedings would not have seen completion without the skill and labor of Isabel Millán, Jennifer Mata, and María González.

The struggle continues as we struggle to heal from our many losses. As global empires continue to wage wars against each other and against sovereign nations, the work of Drs. Pacheco, Olgún, Emmad, Peña, Wolbert Pérez, and the people of Homie UP, remind us to do work that matters. The poetry and prose of Urquijo-Ruiz, Arellano, Pendleton Jiménez, and González, remind us to dig deep. We know what to do. As we move forward in this year of war, where so many of our communities continue to lose gente to the pandemic, we remember that we stand together, and we walk together, in the house of time. We continue to do the work and we look forward to our next gathering.

Solidariamente,

L. Heidenreich, March 2022  
Washington State University  
On the Land of the Nimiipuu

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