Dancers Ava Holloway and Kennedy George are captured by Julia Rendleman in front of the Robert E. Lee monument in Richmond, Virginia as they pose for a photography series by Marcus Ingram titled "Ballerina Series."

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RutgersHumanist

A Magazine of Transnational Connections

Special Edition: *Living, Learning, and Teaching in Times of Disruption*

CONTRIBUTORS

This magazine is published by the Center for the Study of Genocide and Human Rights (CGHR).

Kristen Vargas (Editor) Kristen Vargas is a graduate of the Rutgers Graduate School of Education. She is a language educator, artist, and writer interested in the relationship between language and power and the perpetuation of inequity through language. In her most recent work, Kristen has explored issues in teacher education, inclusive language, and creating equitable learning environments.

Markia Highsmith (Writer) Markia Highsmith is a junior at Seton Hall University. She is double majoring in Elementary Special Education/ Social and Behavioral Sciences with a concentration in Speech Language Pathology. She has a strong passion for dance and is a part of the Seton Hall dance team. She took Dr. Daly's teaching social studies course and immediately became interested in the content and concept of culturally relevant teaching to students in the elementary years. Markia has recently participated in a discussion entitled "How to be Anti-Racist in Speech Language Pathology" as a panelist. She hopes readers enjoy her personal narrative on what its like to be an African American, first gen woman in America.

Zoe Susser (Writer) Zoe Susser is a junior at Seton Hall University. She is a double major in Secondary Education and Music with a minor in History. She is a classically trained violinist and has tremendous passion for the arts and classical music. She was incredibly close to her paternal grandparents, who were both Holocaust survivors from Krakow, Poland. She is passionate about preserving their memory through telling their harrowing stories. She is very incredibly grateful to be featured in this special edition of The Humanist. She hopes you enjoy reading about her family history as well as its connection to the present day.

Wamia Siddiqui (Writer) Wamia Siddiqui is a student at Rutgers University studying Biology and Public Health with a concentration in Health Disparities. Wamia is a long-time volunteer with Amnesty International, a grassroots human rights organization, which first sparked her interest in immigrant and refugee rights, as well as healthcare advocacy. As a student researcher, she has worked on projects surrounding access and barriers to care in LGBTQ+ populations, and the impact of reproductive policies on communities of color. Most recently, she joined the Center for the Study of Genocide and Human Rights through the Language Engagement Project. As an aspiring healthcare professional, Wamia hopes to be able to pursue a career combining her interdisciplinary passions for medicine, public service, and policy reform.

Claudia Valverde (Writer) Claudia is a 2020 Seton Hall graduate currently working at North Brunswick Township HS as a biology teacher. She's passionate about making science accessible to all students, especially those who have historically been excluded from this space. She strives to create a community in her classes that foster curiosity, critical thinking, and creating opportunities for students to see themselves as scientists.

Marya Mahmood (Writer, Photographer) I am Marya Mahmood, a recent graduate of Seton Hall University (2020) who majored in Secondary Education, Special Education, History, and minored in Gender Studies. I am a queer Muslim who grew up on the poverty line, and it has impacted every aspect of my life. I am currently working as a High School History and Gender studies teacher in Newark, NJ. I see teaching as my way of showing students their voices and power. I want them to know they are important and loved, and I want them to fight for what they believe in.

Francisca Hoegah (Writer) My name is Francisca Hoegah and I am 18 years of age . I was born in Ghana in the western part of African. East Side High School in Newark, New Jersey was the first high here in the United States. I have been studying here since my Freshman year. I am now part of the Big Picture program where we explore our passions and engage in personal learning. We even get to select an internship that we attend each Wednesday. I am interning at the NYCP Newark Career Pathway, where we learn how to build careers and become leaders. I am also part of the Early College Program where I am dually enrolled in Essex County College courses. I will graduate high school with an Associate's Degree and start as a junior in my next college after graduation.

Daniel Perez (Writer) I am Daniel Perez. I am 17, and I'm from Venezuela. I arrived in the U.S. two years ago. My family and I had to leave Venezuela because it was already very difficult to live there with the serious political and economic situation in the country. I'm a senior right now. I'm in the ECC program, and I want to study visual arts in college.

Cecelia Pateman (Writer) Cece is a senior at Seton Hall University majoring in Special and Elementary Education with a concentration in Speech-Language Pathology. Over the past year Cece has taken part in many initiatives to start the crucial and raw conversations that need to be happening in our communities such as speaking to Seton Hall's Title IX coordinator, facilitating a How to be Anti-Racist in Speech-Language Pathology Education panel, and attending Diversity and Inclusivity panels and discussions through the National Student Speech Language Hearing Association (NSSLHA).

James Lopez (Writer) My name is James Lopez and I proudly teach Language Arts at North Brunswick Township High School and Coach football at Sayreville War Memorial High School. In this piece, I wanted to show readers from all different walks of life that you don't have to be a the perfect student growing up in order to be a teacher who can make a difference. I'd like to give credit to the wonderful staff at the Department of Education and Human services at Seton Hall University, Claudia Valverde, Amber Ingram, Lia Zazzera, and Andrea Feminella for making me a better educator through our countless conversations. Lastly, thank you to my wonderful younger sister and my parents for supporting me through this journey and never giving up on me. Who would've thought...your boy is a published author!

Nela Navarro (Publisher)

Living in Times of Disruption

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Introduction to the Edition

This edition is a collaboration between the future leaders of our country at Seton Hall University's College of Education and Human Services, Center for the Study of Human Rights at Rutgers University, Rutgers English Language Institute-English Department, and The Newark School District's East Side High School.

This timely special edition of the Rutgers Humanist "Living, Learning, and Teaching in Times of Disruption-Spring 2021" is a labor of love, resilience, and great promise. This edition emerged from an initiative called "The Promises and Perils of Diversity in Education" (PPDI). The Promises and Perils of Diversity in Education Initiative is a group of professional educators and students representing a diverse range of expertise, experience, and interests, who work to engage in meaningful discussions, difficult dialogues, and program planning. The work of this group is informed by cutting edge research, is practitioner based, and is enriched by global understandings of the opportunities and challenges of this work.

The initiative brought together a unique and diverse group of students, scholars, educators, community advocates, and artists who, like so many of us around the world, felt the call to express, document, and share their experiences during times of disruption. PPDI thoughtfully and deliberately invited our youngest members to collaborate on and publish a special edition of the Center for the Study of Human Rights at Rutgers University's student publication, The Rutgers Humanist, an e-zine for and by students. This edition was intended to launch at the start of the fall 2020 semester but the inequities and realities of funding in education reduced our resources and the very existence of this edition was "disrupted" until now. This special edition employs two definitions of "disrupt" which include "to break apart" as well as to "forcibly separate". The pandemic has indeed broken apart and separated all that we hold dear but it has also uncovered, discovered, and disrupted ideas, practices, and ideologies that have long kept us from the work of cultivating inclusive, equitable, and diverse learning experiences and environments. Thank you to the next generation of trailblazing young global citizens who created this edition that we all have the honor of reading!

Nela Navarro
Director, EAD Program @ Rutgers English Language Institute (RELI)
Assistant Teaching Professor, Department of English-Writing Program
Associate Director, Director of Education-Center for the Study of Genocide and Human Rights

These are times of disruption. Medical, economic, political, social and personal routines and behaviors have been abruptly changed. Our homes, our classrooms, our stores, our streets, our houses of worship, and our places of employment have all been impacted. The pandemic, the heightened calls for social justice, and political instability have challenged us as in no other recent times. I want to thank the Center for the Study of Genocide and Human Rights at Rutgers University for providing an edition of The Humanist as a place for reflection on these times. College students from Seton Hall University and Rutgers University have used this space to share their experiences and thoughts. The need to act in difficult times is strong, and writing is one response that can impact both the writer and readers. The writers share how they have experienced disruption in their personal lives, in their schooling, and in their reactions to recent events. In these stories you will find a call for justice, a demand for equity, and a determination to overcome inequality. This edition also marks another collaborative project between the Center for the Study of Genocide and Human Rights, and the Rutgers English Language Institute with the Educational Studies Department at Seton Hall University. Together faculty and students in these programs have built the Perils and Promises of Diversity Initiative in Education. As this edition of the Humanist demonstrates, the collaboration has provided opportunities and resources for everyone involved from both universities.

James Daly
Professor Department of Educational Studies
Co-Founder Center for Global Education at Seton Hall University

We would like to give special thanks to our colleagues at the Newark Schools District and East Side High School: Brian Donovan and Pilar Veru and to Kristen Vargas for her design and editorial work.

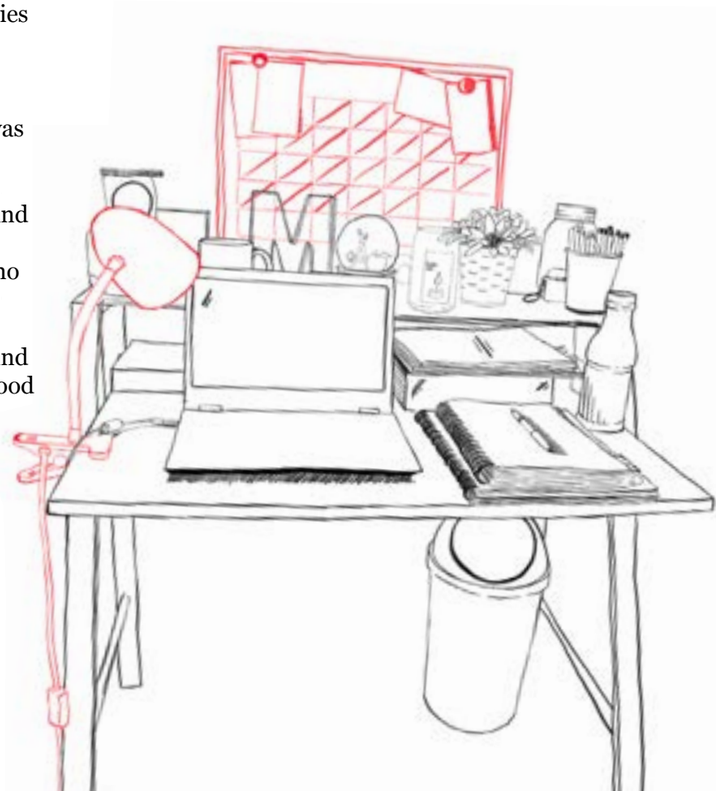
The Disruption of Stereotypes

by Markia Highsmith

So what does it mean to be black? In the world we live in being black automatically brings assumptions that one comes from a poor background, lives in a single parent home, is being raised in the "hood", and isn't well educated. These are just some of the many stereotypes attached to being black. It's sad to think that in the next few years blackness will continue have more pre-determined stereotypes attached to it. Trust me, these stereotypes are not easy to live with. They follow you like a shadow, you wear them like a shirt, and they are attached to you forever like a tattoo. I don't think we as black people walk around bowed head and frowned faced because we know these stereotypes exist. In fact, we do just the opposite; live our normal lives. Our skin color says enough. Our black skin reads out these stereotypes like an announcement on a school's intercom. Drawing attention, inviting everyone to input their thoughts about us. So, I ask, what about the black people who lived the stereotypical lifestyle but became successful? In other words, what about those black people who disrupted the stereotypes. I can be the one to tell you. We are bold, confident, and proud. We must be overjoyed for ourselves being as though we live in a word where we stand alone. Our lives don't matter, and our opportunities are smashed by the knees of fellow Americans.

I am a young black woman, who has lived the stereotypical black lifestyle. I lived in the hood, was raised by my mother only, my father was absent majority of my life, and my family was supported by several governmental programs. Being black and growing up in the hood was all that you needed. There were things that the hood taught you that no school ever could. You learned how to order your own food and pay at the local corner store at the age of 5. You learned how to pack, and separate and wash clothes at the laundromat in the neighborhood at 10 years old. Yeah, these things taught you independency at a young age, but the hood also prepared you for some traumatic events no child should ever have to expeirence. For instance, the hood taught me to not attend large gathers once the streetlights go on and the sunsets. It was almost always destined for some type of altercation to happen which I always knew ended with the usage of guns.

All my life I lived with my mother only. My father was absent for a large chunk of my life. Partly because he chose to and the other time he couldn't, being as though he was incarcerated. Of course, there were things in my life that I struggled with since I didn't have a father like figure. My mother was my inspiration and the driving force during my entire life. She continuously pushed me to do my best and be the best version of myself, especially in academics. My mother always said, "Nothing matters more than school. Although, it took me some time to realize the truth behind this statement." I followed this motto my entire life. I always knew there was something different about me though. Most of the kids my age, who I lived around and played outside with, hated school and everything associated with it. However, I did not. I absolutely enjoyed school, loved doing homework and disliked snow days. School was my place. Maybe I should say school was the place. This showed every marking period in my report card. I was always an A and B student. The place where I was able to show the true inner me and express how I really feel was school.



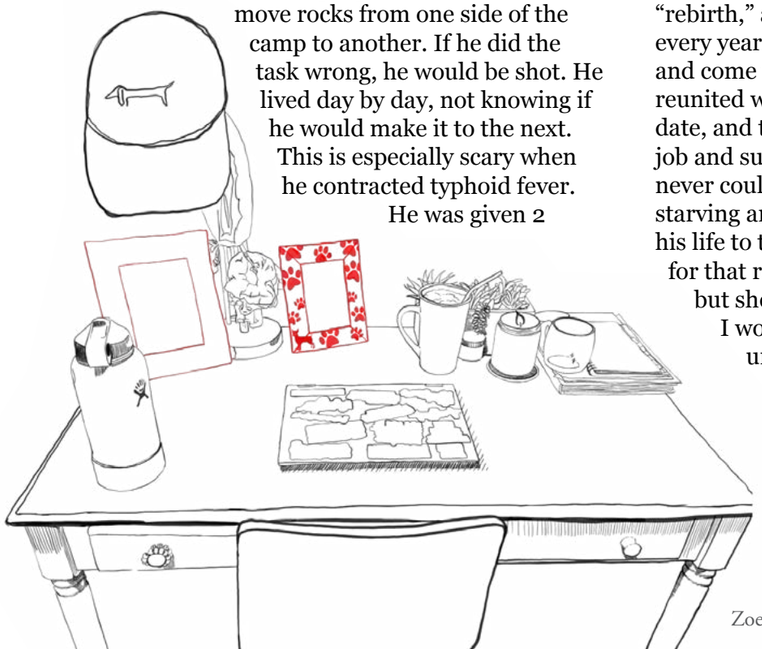
Zoe's 2020 workspace, illustrated by Kristen Vargas

The Purpose in Struggle

by Zoe Susser

My name is Zoe Susser, and I am a sophomore here at Seton Hall university, and my paternal grandparents are Holocaust survivors. My grandmother, Maryla, and my grandfather, Adam were born in 1922 and 1923 respectively, in Krakow, Poland. They were both born into loving Jewish families, and they lived joy-filled and comfortable lives as children. My grandfather even frequently played soccer with the future Pope John Paul II, Karol Wojtyla, when they were kids. When my grandparents were 16, their lives were turned upside down when they were forced to live in a ghetto. They had heard things about a group of people that didn't like Jews, but they did not know to get out of Poland soon enough. In an interview in 2014, my grandfather said, "I imagined that something terrible was going to happen, but I didn't know what." Both of his parents were shot before he was sent to his first of eleven concentration camps; leaving him alone and vulnerable. He must have been thinking how long is this going to last? What will happen after this? What will happen to me? Their valuables were taken away from them, but my grandfather kept his mother's wedding ring just in case he might need it later; which he did.

Luckily for him and my grandmother, they were at the "perfect" age for working in the camps, as the SS officers would immediately kill young children and older people. He was asked to move rocks from one side of the camp to another. If he did the task wrong, he would be shot. He lived day by day, not knowing if he would make it to the next. This is especially scary when he contracted typhoid fever. He was given 2 days to recover in the infirmary. It was only by sheer luck that his future brother-in-law, another prisoner, bribed the doctor to give him more time. He recovered by the grace of god, and his chances of survival grew. When he was especially hungry, he traded his mother's wedding ring for a bowl of soup. It was little things like that that got him closer and closer to surviving this horrific atrocity.



Zoe's 2020 workspace, illustrated by Kristen Vargas

Many years and concentration camps later, the Allies were closing in and the Nazis were getting restless. My grandfather was on a death march as more and more Jews were getting killed off to eliminate any evidence of the Nazis' behavior. One night, he decided he had nothing left to live for, so he hid in a hay bale overnight. The Nazi officers realized he was missing and looked for him the following morning, but they could not find him. Later that day, my grandfather heard the low rumble of American tanks in the distance. He was free.

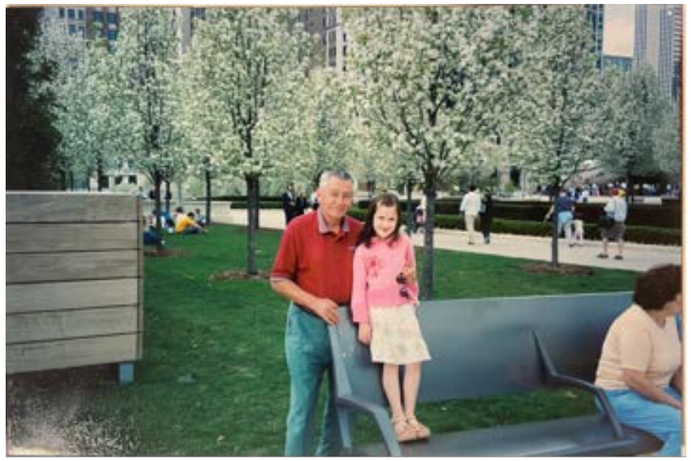
"How long is this going to last? What will happen after this? What will happen to me?"

He often referred to his liberation as his "rebirth," and he commemorated the date, May 1st, every year. He was able to recover in Switzerland and come to America a few years later. He was reunited with my grandmother on a not-so blind date, and they had two sons. He was able to get a job and support his family. This is something he never could have never imagined when he was starving and working in the camps. He dedicated his life to telling his story, as he thought he survived for that reason. My grandmother is also a survivor, but she found it much harder to tell her story. I would not be here if it were not for their unbelievable courage, bravery, and conviction. I have taken it upon myself to tell their story because Holocaust survivors are becoming few and far between. Their story should not die with them. It is vital to keep their stories alive, so we don't forget our history.

If we fast-forward 80 years, rumors were circulating about a new virus taking thousands of lives with the expectation that the United States would suffer an extreme number of casualties. Just like my grandfather, we were wondering how long is this going to last? What will happen after this? What will happen to me? We were bombarded with strikingly similar feelings to the ones my grandparents were feeling at the onset of the war. We were struck with feelings of despair, loneliness, and anxiety. We have been confronted by death. For some of us, we have experienced death closer than ever before. We don't know if the grass is greener on the other side, or if we will even make it to the other side at all. My grandfather did not know either, but he persevered. He came out on top and took control of his life; the life that was almost taken away from him.

Now, we have the opportunity to focus on the end goal and turn our lives around. Granted, we have more of a choice than my grandfather did under the menacing hand of the Nazis, but we have the power. Quarantine can be our chance to be reborn. We can learn more about ourselves and improve our mental and physical health, though the circumstances are testing us every day.

My grandfather realized the purpose in his struggle was to educate others on his story of survival. There can be purpose in our struggle with this crippling virus. Now, we know what it is like to live through unprecedented events; events that challenge our determination and strength. What do we want future generations to know about this time? Do we want them to see that we succumbed to our trials and tribulations? Or do we want them to see that we took the control of our lives and were reborn?



From left to right:

Figure 1. This picture shows my grandfather, Adam Susser, and I, aged 6, at a park in Chicago. Here, you can see that his thumb and index finger are missing on his right hand. He told many different stories for how he lost them, and it is a mystery to this day.

Figure 2. This picture shows my grandfather and I, aged 1, at the Brookfield Zoo in Chicago.

Figure 3. This picture shows my grandfather and grandmother, Adam and Maryla Susser, and I, aged 3 months.

Learning & Living in a Liminal Space

by Wamia Siddiqui

I was scheduled for my first vaccination for COVID-19 on the same day that armed insurrectionists breached the American capitol. I will always remember listening to the radio that afternoon on my drive to the hospital where I volunteered, my nervousness and last-minute apprehension towards the vaccine quickly being replaced by reverberating shock and fear.

Sitting down for the mandatory observation period directly after getting the first injection, I got a chance to reflect on the liminality of the situation I was in, not only of being halfway between susceptible and immune, but also between student and full-time employee in the "real world," as a senior about to start my final semester of my undergraduate career. More broadly, the United States at that point was also in an in-between space, in the midst of a much anticipated political transition, leaving behind a tumultuous and tragic era hopefully to be soon replaced by one that was radically different. Even in the efforts of curtailing the COVID-19 pandemic, we were simultaneously several steps closer to restoring normalcy, and experiencing the highest infection rates since March.

I realized that COVID-19 had not been a pause on my life, so much as an endless, undefined, murky gray area, a liminal space where the date where things would go "back to normal" was indefinitely postponed, again and again. This in-betweenness is the hallmark of my personal experience as a student during COVID-19, someone who will likely graduate completely remotely into a world unrecognizable to the one we'd left behind on that ominous Tuesday back in March. Prior to that moment that seemed to change everything, I remember the few months prior--after switching majors exactly halfway through college, the summer before my junior year, I remember the fleeting moments of purpose, drive, and invigoration I'd felt in that fall semester; the validating feeling of belonging in the courses I was taking, connecting with the professor, peers, and of course, the subject matter, as well as the exhilaration of being able to apply it to work outside of the classroom. I remember almost each week vividly, and each day felt packed and eventful.

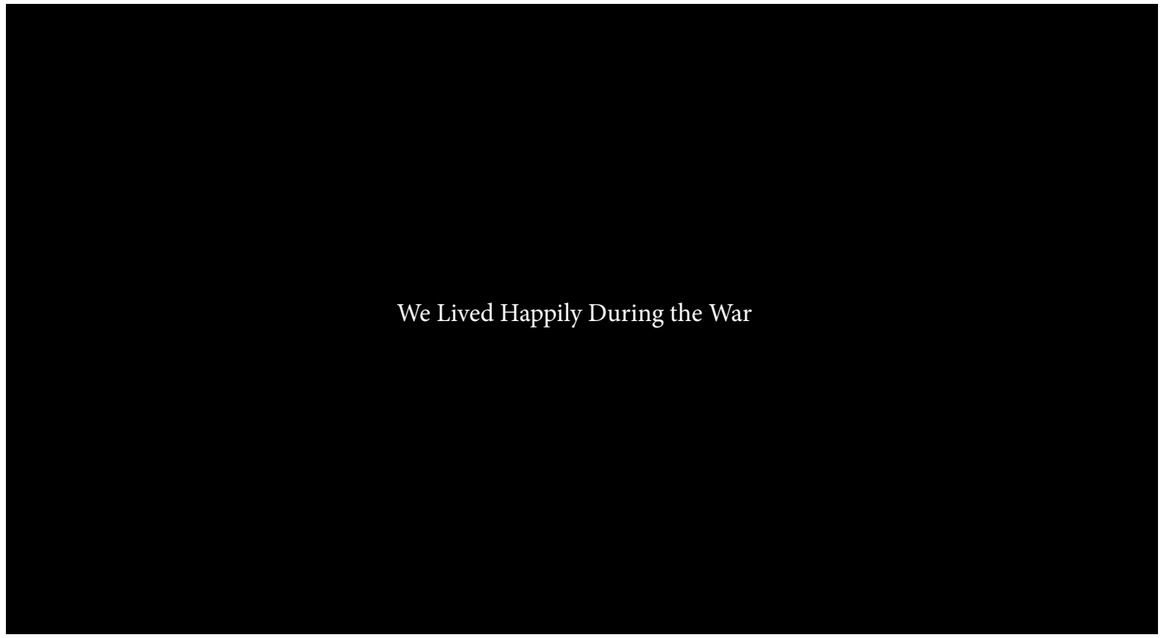
Photo of train station by Alexandr Bormotin

On the contrary, the last few semesters of my undergraduate career had passed by unimaginably quickly, slowing down for nothing and no one. While the monotony of staring at the same screen in the same space each day felt slow in the moment, I feel almost startled by how many days, weeks, and months have passed by. Undeterred by the almost apocalyptic events of the world, the world of higher education trudged forward, and there were many times I felt that the lectures I attended were inconsequential to the tumultuous world around us. The exams and assignments I'd used to worry over took the backstage to my concerns about the safety and health of my friends and family, the crumbling state of society, and my own, personal struggles to cope with issues, most of which were rooted far outside my locus of control.

"...I felt that the lectures I attended were inconsequential to the tumultuous world around us."

This past semester more than any other, I watched as my classmates disappeared, the familiar faces dissipating from class Zoom calls, and the only vaguely familiar names becoming increasingly sparse on course discussion boards. For some, they'd be gone only temporarily, reappearing weeks later, but for many, too many, it felt like they'd never existed. In this world of disruption, there is no doubt that the train of academia has kept chugging alone, but in doing so, many vulnerable students have been left behind at the station, and many more are falling off the tracks.

Although, arguably, COVID-19 has disrupted the quality of the content and courses student take, as not everyone has an aptitude for online learning the true repercussions of the pandemic on higher education exists in non-academic dimensions. College is a structured time for students to master the elements of the "hidden curriculum," the mere existence of which I, as the first person in my family to navigate the tribulations of obtaining a college degree in this country, did not even realize until much too late. It's the expansion of social capital, the thought-provoking debates and life-changing discussions, the informal economy of idea exchange and mentorship, that is



Clicking the image above will open a new page with a video of Ilya Kaminsky reading his poem, "We Lived Happily During the War."

another purpose of higher education, and one that is only partially being fulfilled.

Despite all of the built-in setbacks, every time something good has happened within the past year, though not necessarily a common occurrence, and for each piece of good news I received, I felt a tiny twinge of guilt at the back of my head about being even partly happy when the world as a whole was suffering. Reminiscent of Ilya Kaminsky's We Lived Happily During the War, a poem that resonated at various moments throughout the past year, each tiny spark of happiness is shaded by an understanding that the overall picture was still one of gloom.

For students on the verge of graduating into the "real world", there is undoubtedly a level of ambiguity and stress about "what happens next," but for students virtually trying to pass their classes in the middle of disruption and turmoil, many facing the harsh realities of unemployment, food insecurity, massive loss and loneliness, even acknowledging the impending changes is difficult. Not even completing a diploma application or signing up for (socially-distanced) senior portraits has lessened the implicit confusion that so much is about to change, irreversibly, while each day feels like a repeat of the last, stuck in an endless intermediate state.

I find it hard to grapple with the imminent loss of my identity as a student, as someone whose primary role, above all, is to learn. The version of myself that exists in the physical world, the one surrounded by papers sitting at the same desk in my childhood bedroom, is different from the facade presented to the Zoom world, dressed in blazers on the screen, but with sweatpants underneath-- and I am not fully convinced that either persona truly belongs in the "real world" beyond the walls of the classroom. Sitting at this one spot each day, I look at the ancient family portrait from hanging on the wall, appraising the long-term growth over the past two decades that a myopic perspective may have made seem liminal as well.

All in all, these disruptive and distracting circumstances have made much of my life, like many others', feel liminal and ambiguous. I am sure that in the grander scheme of things, this uncertainty will ultimately facilitate growth, not necessarily hinder it-- but for now, I am both seeking to embrace, and brace for the changes that are yet to come.

Wamia's 2020 workspace, illustrated by Kristen Vargas

Part One
Disruption as Identity & Inspiration

by Marya Mahmood

Coronavirus has created a world of disruption for everyone- for some, much more than others. Keeping in mind the structural inequalities that coronavirus has brought to light in its impact- this is one of the first times that the entire world feels impacted. Not just the "third-world" countries, or the people of color, but everyone. Even with that, there are many people in American white neighborhoods who do not have to worry about COVID-19, and wander mask-less in their downtowns. At the same time their "minority" counterparts working essential and low-paid services are taking public transportation in densely populated areas, historically red-lined inner cities, and are dying at higher rates of COVID-19.

Disruption. This is the theme of our special edition e-zine, because finally, the "first world" was shaken to its core when they had to close down malls, barber shops, stay home, and wear masks.

When I think of the word disruption, as a person of color in America, I think of my entire life. I also think of many of the people of color in countries far beyond America, who are under American influence and deadly drones everyday. I think of the Palestinian children who are never able to go to school or make friends, because their very environment is under attack every single day. I think of the children in Yemen who are starving and are not able to do things Americans take for granted every single day. I think of countries whose governments are in disarray because of American infiltration and intervention. I think of Black Americans who fear for their lives just walking down the street. Black Americans lose their lives not only through violent hate crimes, but at the hands of racist police officers meant to "protect" society. I think of Muslim Americans whose mosques, phones, and lives are being infiltrated by the government and their fear of hate crimes and attacks. I think of the border that the so-called-president wants to vehemently protect against innocent brown children and their families.

And now, to bring it back to my own life.

Disruption.

I am a Muslim, a first generation college student and American, who grew up on the poverty line and moved around frequently, a member of the LGBTQIA+ community, a survivor, and an activist.

When I was a child, I remember the first time I felt disruption vividly. Prior to it, I had felt it in every eviction and move, but this time was different. My dad was attacked at his security guard night job, and I vividly remembered seeing him in the hospital. I remember asking myself so many questions about why, why him, and why here? My parents came to America for freedom but were instead faced with violence that is usually anointed to the countries immigrants come from instead.

"I am a Muslim, a first generation college student and American, who grew up on the poverty line and moved around frequently, a member of the LGBTQIA+ community, a survivor, and an activist."

The second time I felt disruption was when we moved again to another more suburban rather than city area. I was downstairs and my mother and eldest brother were talking to my second eldest brother who has autism, “You’re a tall, dark, bearded brown man, you can’t just walk around like that! They see the beard and…” the conversation trailed off as I ran away from the lecture up the stairs as fast as my 11 year old legs could take me. For me, those words were enough. I understood what it meant to be Muslim in a country that was predominantly Christian.

Disruption to me was when I, a 9th grader in a hijab and long dress I was so proud of, walked in New York City with my brothers and was physically assaulted. Walking near the busy Penn Station, I felt a fist on my head as someone mumbled “fucking terrorist,” and disappeared into the crowd.

I felt disruption in the suburban neighborhood we lived in all the time. From never being able to afford groceries, to having our wifi, water, and phones shut off every few months. I felt it when I could not buy school supplies or clothes, and I felt it when I went to college more so. When I didn’t read the assignment because it was in a textbook I couldn’t afford, or when I missed a club event because there was a cost to attend. I felt it when I packed food in the dining hall to take home every week to my family.

Disruption came in all forms throughout my college experience. Whether it was because of my race, my religion, the way that I looked, or my socioeconomic level, the “great equalizer” turned out to be very inequitable at times.

At my university, my dorm window which showcased a Pakistani flag had food thrown at it three times, not coincidentally, as I lived on the fifth floor. My professors expected me to constantly educate the class and would ask “where are you from again?,” as a means to use my identity as an educating point for my white counterparts to learn. I remember when I had a racist student supervisor for a year at a school job, who never faced consequences for her actions and constant micro-aggressions and attacks.

There was constant pushback within one of my majors that has a very high majority of white students and professors within it, when all of my papers and conversations had to do with racial inequality and injustice. I became “that student” that professors either loved because I would do their job for them, or hated as I would create more disruption with my words and analysis in class.

I use this disruption as fuel. It drives me and motivates me to make a change. I would not be the same person if I was not exposed to injustice at an early age, and it has become my purpose in life to fight for a new system of equality and against racism. Education is my means for promoting justice. Being a victim of racism frequently throughout my secondary and higher education, I need to use my

privilege as a college graduate, and continue the fight so many before me started. Through education, we can teach young children to love and empathize. Through historical contextualization and a critical analysis, it’s possible to create students who think about and analyze the world with an open mind. It’s possible to create students who will go on and change the world, and that is what disruption has pushed me to do.

Photo of a protest in Newark, NJ taken by Jakayla Toney.

Learning in Times of Disruption

by Daniel Perez

This year has been chaos. Our world is experiencing many tragedies and changes that have affected our lives. During this year, people have died not only because of COVID-19 but also because of us. Many people died because they are different even though we know that being different is one of the qualities of human beings. But is there a problem with being different? The world's intolerance to this difference is the real problem and it is one of the reasons there is a rise in people fighting for rights and inclusion.

However, this chaos has also brought positive changes in our society. After four months of social distancing here in Newark, I could see how people started to take care of their health wearing masks, washing their hands more often, wearing gloves, and avoiding physical contact. These patterns of self care can result in some positive health changes in the future, if we can keep it up. I am trying to find the silver lining in this very difficult year, so I will reach at any chance I get.

Besides that, as social distancing was applied, our world experienced a phase of renewal. The contamination decreased, making the environment a better place for animals, other living beings, or even for us if we could stop contaminating the planet. But I think these changes would not last unless people learn how a minimum action can improve how the world works.

Also, the protests have brought good things. Although this pandemic has separated people from their families, friends, and social life, it did not stop people from fighting for justice. And one thing that is important to highlight about this is the fact that all kinds of people had joined forces to be a voice for those who have been victims of hate, racism, or any type of discrimination.

But this is not enough for the big masses. Although these recent social movements that began with "Black Lives Matter" have impacted many people around the world, there is still intolerance. But why? Is it that difficult to change people's minds? Sadly, the answer is yes. People are still being discriminated against not only because of their race but also because of their sexual orientation, religion, gender, or ethnicity.

Untitled by Daniel Perez

During these crazy times, although most people in this country and even around the world have been protesting for equal rights, people have struggled to get economic aid. And of course, it is difficult when you are not the priority. For example, many people were dropped from financial aid programs for being undocumented immigrants.

As an immigrant, it is hard to accept that so many people are treated differently just because of their social and economic status, even in Newark where most of the people I know are immigrants. Certainly, the intolerance has not disappeared even in times of crisis. But it did not stop the immigrant communities from helping each other as a family during these circumstances.

As time went by, the world adapted itself to this new age of changes. This situation should be an opportunity to make people realize how all lives matter. However, it looks like the opposite thing. This pandemic has affected all of us, even being healthy. And all this violence, hate, and controversies seen this year are proof of how people reject each other for being different.

Maybe this world is full of different people with different points of view, but that is not a reason for not including them fairly in society. We cannot agree with all the people, but we can respect them. Each person has gone through different circumstances and experiences that have built their unique way of being.

Daniel's 2020 workspace, illustrated by Kristen Vargas

What are Human Rights?

by Francisca Hoegah

Today I am going to elaborate on human rights, what are Human rights? Human rights are the basic rights and freedoms that belong to every person in the world from the time they are born until the time they die. Maintaining your rights is very important without our rights we are limited. Some examples of human rights are the right to vote, workers rights, rights of freedom of thought and also the right.

These rights are needed in our society and environment. We can gain our human rights in so many ways, for example at our workplace we have our human rights which is workers rights we have the right to work or also join a trade union and so on. This helps because if we know our human rights, people will not take advantage of us. The story of George Floyd is an example of someone whose rights were violated. It is a story of a 46 year old man who died on May 25 2020. He was killed in the city of Minneapolis, it was so sad. A man who was killed for no reason, so heartbreaking. This man deserves justice and his family does too.

We have our human rights to seek for Justice, the right to freedom to express our own opinions and if we don't speak up, who will speak up for us? Nobody! We make the change and change comes from us. We all need to have equality and respect for everyone around us to maintain peace and happiness in our society and we need leadership. Human rights have a big role to play in our lives and in everything we do ("fundamental role in our lives").The right to own what you want (ownship) is also part of our human rights. This is one main reason for keeping what you have.

Here is a story of a family member who owns a big piece of land and built a beautiful house on it. The landlord called people to break into the house because it was on the road of another family's beautiful home. They lost the house so they have to start all over again. Looking at this family member's story, I say to myself, they need justice because they broke into the house without letting them know. The saddest part is they just replaced the land without rebuilding the house back .What I am trying to say is we all have our human rights to fight for what is ours.

Things get more difficult if we don't know our human rights. They also have another right to freedom of expression. We have the right to think and also express ideas with others. Our human rights are the most powerful thing in our lives.

My name is Francisca Hoegah and I was born in Accra, Ghana. Living in Ghana was not easy but we still managed when things were hard at that time. Growing up as a young lady was a challenge for me. I remember when I was around 8 in Ghana, we would wake up very early in the morning, walk about 8 miles just to get water from a well before we got home. We used the water for a bath and also used some to cook, and eat breakfast before going to school. At that time things in Ghana were different. I remember in my childhood back in Ghana going to school in each class, every teacher used a chalkboard when teaching and there was no smart board. However, we still managed to learn. My school was built with cement with no windows or doors but we were still able to learn.

Francisca's 2020 workspace, illustrated by Kristen Vargas

Photo of glassware displayed in green hutch by Liza Pooor via Unsplash.

Growing up in Ghana I remember people like some of my teachers, and some of my friends told me something when I was 10 years in class which hurt me so bad was they say I was worthless. That day I really cried all day without eating. My mom saw that I was crying and I told her the story about what happened at school. My mom advised me about something great which helped me a lot. She said I am so talented and a gifted child so if anyone says something like that to me I should not accept it, that I'm good and great and that I should be proud of who I am. This advice has helped me in my entire life and my mom is my hero.

My life in Newark, New Jersey has been great so far but one thing I heard, which mande me feel so bad was in my freshman year in high school the second day, I went school in the morning in the cafeteria there was so many people sitting on their seat and also on their tables I was sitting on my chair and also my table as well in the cafeteria. Suddenly I just saw that someone was pulling a chair beside me and sat on the other side. I felt so bad because I was the only black African among them so they didn't want to sit beside me. This racism is still going on and I hope one day it will stop. This is so bad because some innocent people are being killed because of their skin color. Innocent black Americansand black Africans some of them are in jail for a crime they have not committed . This racism has to stop because if we don't speak up now it is going to be too late. We need to be strong and have the power to fight racism. It will help us if we make the right choices.

Starting the Conversation

by Cecelia Pateman

West Morris Mendham High School sourced from The Patriot, The Student News Site of West Morris Mendham

My name is Cecelia Pateman and I grew up in a small rural town in New Jersey called Chester. It is the type of town where everyone knows how many siblings you have, what street you live on, and what car you drive. I am grateful for where I grew up; for the safety, my town provided me and for the roof that was always over my head. Coming from a home of divorce, my mom struggled to pay rent for my triplet siblings and me. She and my dad both tried to keep my siblings and I in the West Morris District High School Region as they felt it provided me the best education in our area. I am grateful to have gone to school, to have teachers who cared about me, and four walls to make up my classrooms. When I left my bubble of Chester, New Jersey to attend Seton Hall University in South Orange, New Jersey I became skeptical of what was being taught explicitly and implicitly in the classroom and in the walls of my high school. While I could comment on the content being taught in the classroom, the issue is what was not being taught. The historical significance of Juneteenth, the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921, Black history, the racism that has existed in our country since the beginning of this country were all never discussed. In a town that is 87% white, it is of the utmost importance our curriculum and culture be outwardly anti-racist.

During my freshman year of college, I visited an elementary school with my "Introduction to Teaching" class. I learned in my textbooks the statistics of how African American males are overrepresented in the special education system. The principal of the school at the time, who was a woman of color, sat down with my class and my professor to tell the school's story as well as her own. She explained how African American boys are misclassified as having a disability because of the lack of tolerance from educators. Often educators see an African American boy acting out and call it something that it is not simply because they do not want them in their classroom. I believed the textbook, and I believed the principal, but it was not until I stepped foot in the resource room that I became aware of how the education system is failing these children.

During my sophomore year I vividly remember reconnecting with someone from my hometown who happened to attend Seton Hall as well. As we ate dinner in her dorm room and shared stories, I felt appalled how so many people in her life that were supposed to teach her, failed her instead. She told me that evening how she was afraid of walking downtown in South Orange because there are a lot of Black people here. She went on to explain how she cannot be blamed; her learned discomfort is a result of stereotypical media portrayal of Black people in America. Enraged with anger, I left shortly after to attend mass that evening. I remember praying that night at church for God to spread peace and love among his children. While I believe prayer to be powerful, it is our voices, education, and freedom we must use to combat racism. People of color in our country are depicted as dangerous and harmful, leading people to form racist ideologies. After all, racism is not something we are born with, but rather it is learned.

Fast forward to the year of 2020. I look at this year and imagine it like a movie as it seems as though the world around us is crashing and burning. There is a global pandemic circling the world, people are disagreeing about science, the statement Black Lives Matter is controversial, there are modern day lynching's, the list goes on. Even though the world seems to be ending, I believe it is beginning. This renewal is an opportunity for non-Black folk to become BLM Allies. Whether you are brand new to the conversation and the movement, or you have been fighting for years, we all have more learning and listening to do. The death of George Floyd has set the world on fire. People are marching in the streets, painting BLM on roads, altering football team names, and changing the world as we know it. This change is long overdue, but it is happening, and people are evolving.

Cecelia and fellow classmates from West Morris Central and Mendham alum.

Through a friend of a friend I was invited to a meeting with other West Morris alumni to speak about enforcing an anti-racist education in our district. We all hit it off, collaborated, wrote individual statements, and were ready to speak to the Board of Education on a Monday in July of 2020. Topics ranged from white fragility, anti-racist faculty training, diversity in faculty, microaggressions, not using Black voices as a vehicle for teaching racism, HIB policies, banning the confederate flag, programming BIPOC speakers, and the lack of "well-roundedness" in an International Baccalaureate program. Caitlyn Dorah, a West Morris Central Alum, was the last speaker in the lineup. She proposed three action items for the Board of Education. One, take an oath saying the BOE would make curriculum modification in all areas to be more inclusive and diverse; two, create a task force to fight anti-racism throughout the entire West Morris Regional High School District; and three, to make plans to address anti-racism available and transparent to the public. I am grateful to the people I spoke with to the Board of Education as I believe and hope it is the start of great change.

Cece's 2020 workspace illustrated by Kristen Vargas

Part Two
Disruption as Identity & Inspiration

by Marya Mahmood

I am writing this in hopes that my voice can be heard and my experiences can be shared and considered when educators make pedagogical and classroom decisions. My four years at University have been both interesting and educational. Yet when it comes to who was doing the education in many of my university classrooms the answer was frequently not the professor. Attending a predominantly white school I've learned that my identity is never going to be ignored and what I look like is constantly going to impact the discussions that I have with others in and out of the classroom.

Four years ago, I visited Seton Hall University with my friend and as we were touring the school we were separated by the careers that we would choose for ourselves. I chose education as the only place I was ever able to discuss the issues that I was passionate about was in the history classroom my senior year of high school. Deciding that I wanted to do what my AP European history teacher had done for me, in which she allowed me to use my voice for the better, I wanted to be a history teacher. Attending a session I met Dr. Katz, who is a leader in the Ed program, and a few woke words later I knew I wanted to go to Seton Hall because of how inclusive the professors, or the professor, was.

For the past three years I realize that I actually haven't learned much as a secondary education, special education, history, and gender studies major. I feel that in so many of my classes instead I was expected to educate my peers because I was so often the only person of color. And the thing is, if I don't say the things that my professors are expecting me to say as they are "neutral," then no one is going to talk about it. I either stay silent to save myself from reliving my racially traumatic experiences, or I talk about it so that my peers actually learn.

I've used a Google document for the past years in college to cope, and unfortunately I have five full pages of micro-aggressions, ignorance, and outright racist remarks that I've experienced in a university setting. I am going to just list out a few of them.

- Professor A. called me "Mohammad" all semester- as I am Muslim, in reference to our Prophet (peace be upon him.) That is not my name! I am not your token brown person!
- "Marya there's a lot of guns in Pakistan, can you tell us about that?"
- "People sometimes blindly follow things. Like the Muslims believe if they blow up everything they'll get virgins in heaven… Marya where are you from again?"
- Professor's X and Y both asked this same exact question 11 times in the span of one semester as a precedence to expecting me to educate the class on a global subject: "Marya, where are you from again?" As if it has changed since when you asked me last week?
- We were made to read a book that said: "Multicultural and feminist history are sorry intrusions to the field and ideological fads" My professors response when I called it out was "He's a conservative, but the book is valuable"
- Professor B. called me "M" and refused to learn my too-ethnic sounding name. It is two syllables… Mar-yah.
- I asked Professor T what to do if a student is racist in the classroom, and she said "Play along with it! Like if my students were to call me a white girl, I would be like, yeah! Check out my Starbucks!" So… Do I tell them to check out my bombs??
- A teacher in reference to my sexuality: "That's not real, you need to choose, why can't you choose, make a decision, you are trying to take advantage of everyone, you just want the best of both worlds, you young folk keep making all these choices for yourself but you not ready to deal with the consequences"

"My four years at University have been both interesting and educational. Yet when it comes to who was doing the education in many of my university classrooms the answer was frequently not the professor."

This list goes on and on. If I were to include the things/actions students have done that were both micro-aggressive and racist, it would never end. So I am going to stop here.

These comments are more than just comments. They made me skip classes. They made it hard to get out of bed in the morning. I skipped meals. Stopped leaving my room. And they made a determined first generation student lose all of their motivation at University. The problem lies in that while some professors were outright racist, a lot of them just had implicit bias and had just deferred to their students of color to talk about important issues because they didn't feel comfortable. It is emotionally draining and exhausting being tokenized and marginalized even further in the classroom.

Photo of Black Lives Matter protest taken by Gabe Pierce.

A Series of Racism & Micro-aggressions in Higher Ed

by Marya Mahmood

Photo 1 of the photo essay titled "A Series of Racism & Micro-Aggressions in Higher Ed," created by Marya Mahmood. It appears in this special edition to serve as a visual disruption to the carefully curated sections detailed in the Table of Contents. While the photo essay disrupts the boundaries of those sections, it emphasizes the theme of disruption and the intersections of living, learning, and teaching through it all.

An image of Marya smiling overlaid with a semi-transparent box with a quote that reads, "Wait, where are you from again?" The quote is attributed to 4 professors and repeated 11 times.

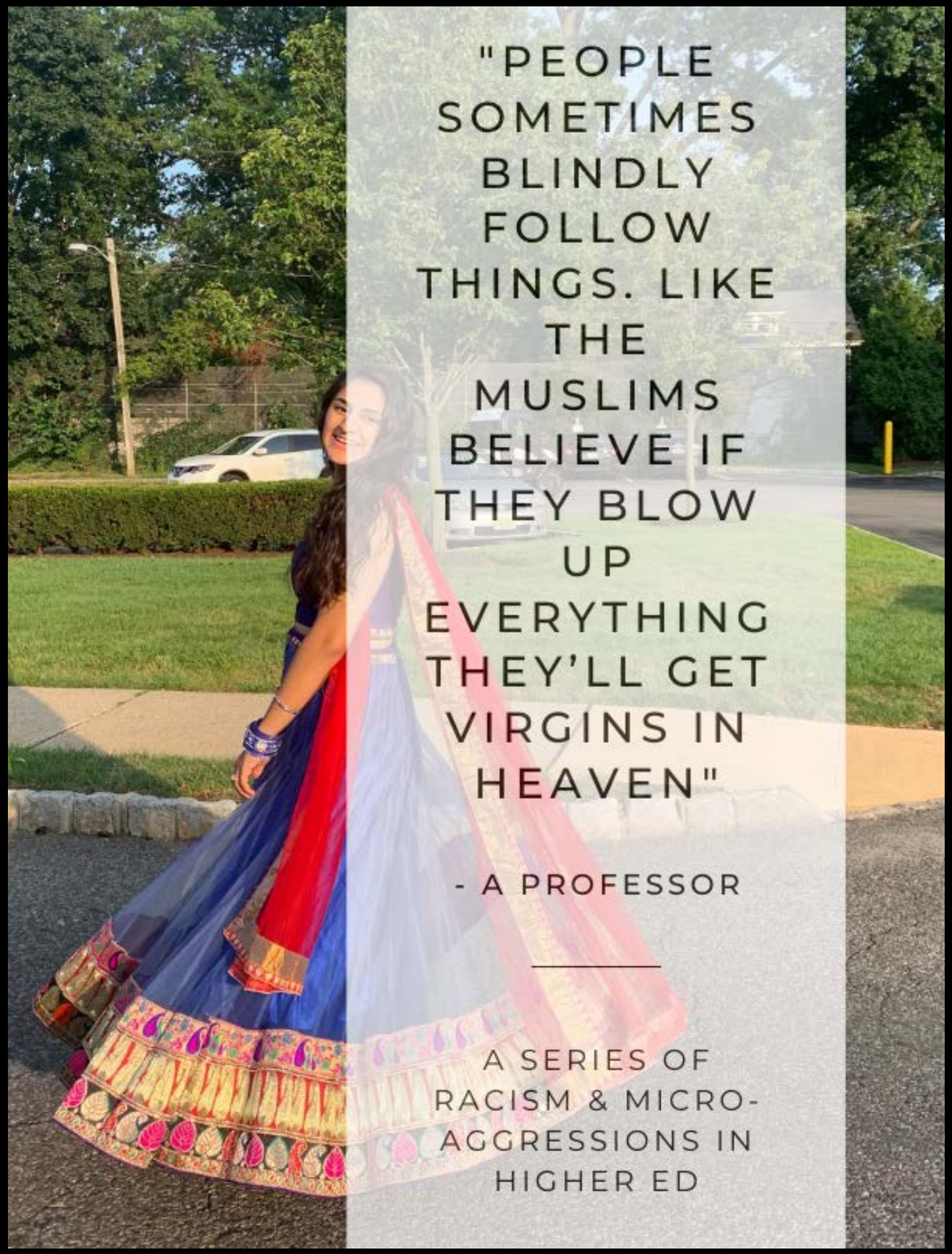


Photo 2. An image of Marya is overlaid with a semi-transparent box with a quote that reads, "People sometimes blindly follow things. Like the Muslims believe if they blow up everything they'll get virgins in Heaven." The quote is attributed to a professor.

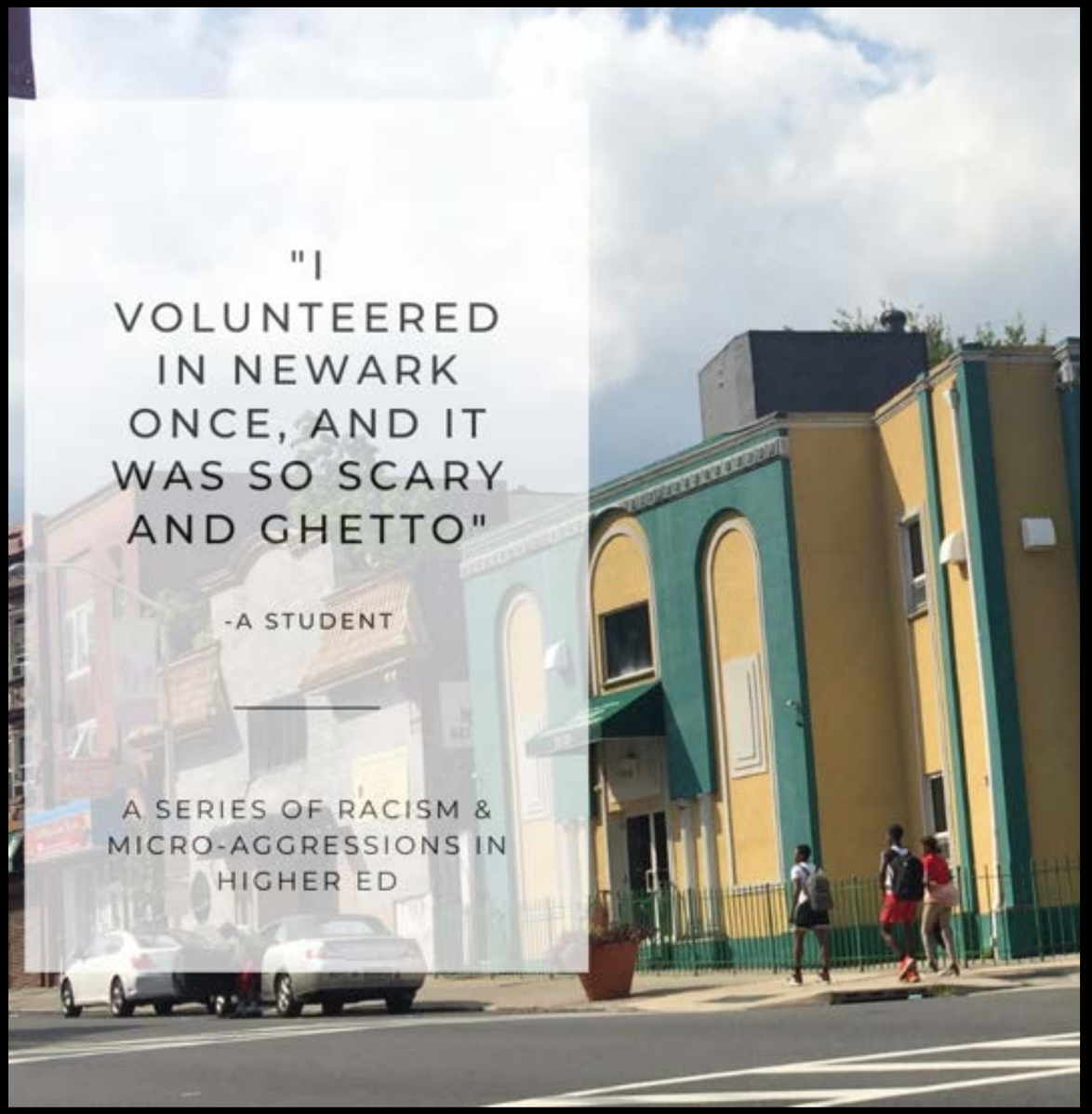


Photo 3. An image of a mosque in Newark is overlaid with a semi-transparent box with a quote that reads, "I volunteered in Newark once, and it was so scary and ghetto." The quote is attributed to a student.

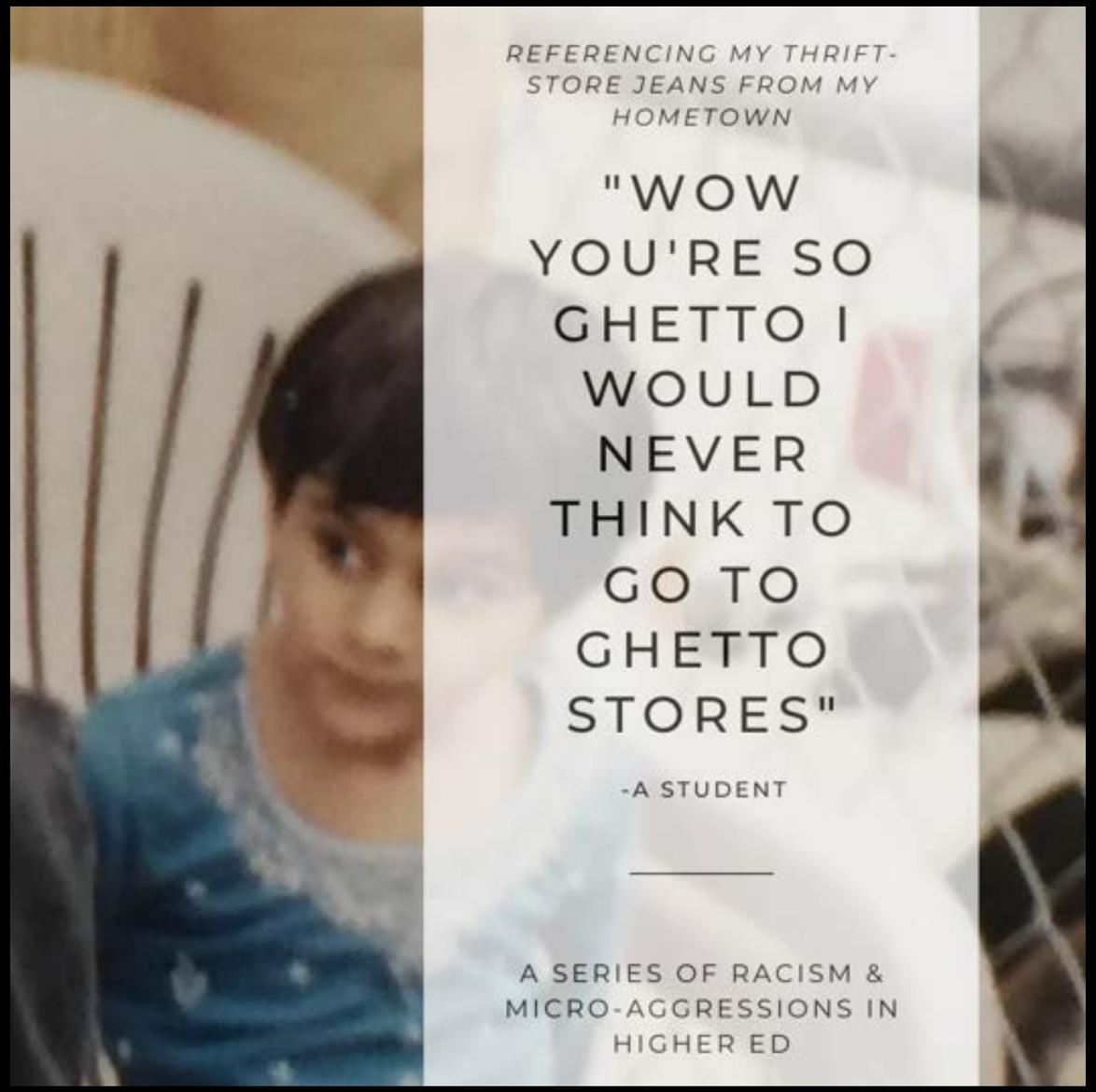


Photo 4. An image of a small child is overlaid with a semi-transparent box with italicized text that reads, “Referencing my thrift-store jeans from my hometown” followed by a quote that reads, “Wow you’re so ghetto I would never think to go to ghetto stores.” The quote is attributed to a student.

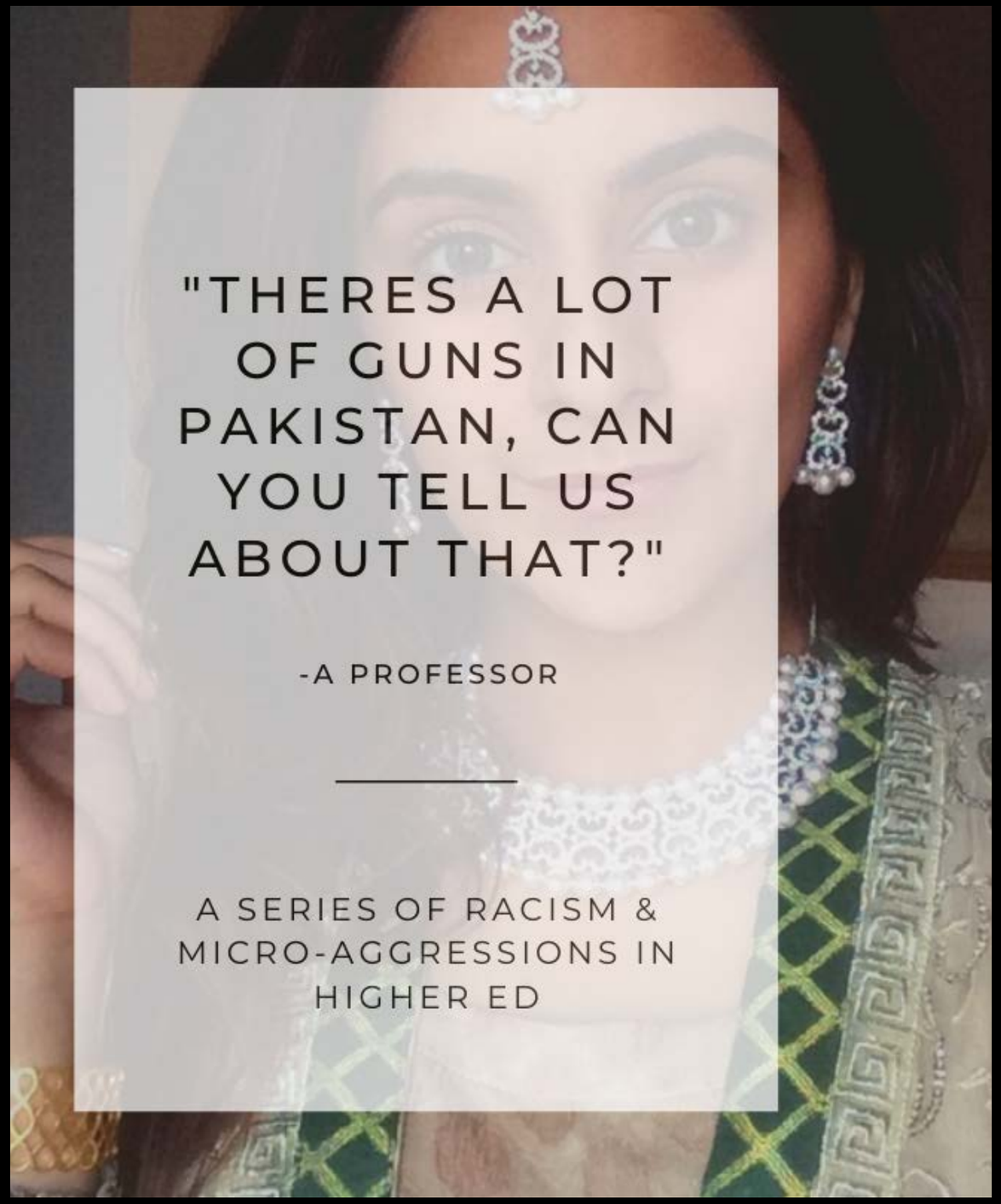


Photo 5. An image of Marya smiling is overlaid with a semi-transparent box with a quote that reads, “Theres a lot of guns in Pakistan, can you tell us about that?” The quote is attributed to a professor.

Photo 6. An out-of-focus photo is overlaid with a semi-transparent box with a quote that reads, “Pakistan is cancer.” The quote is attributed to a student.

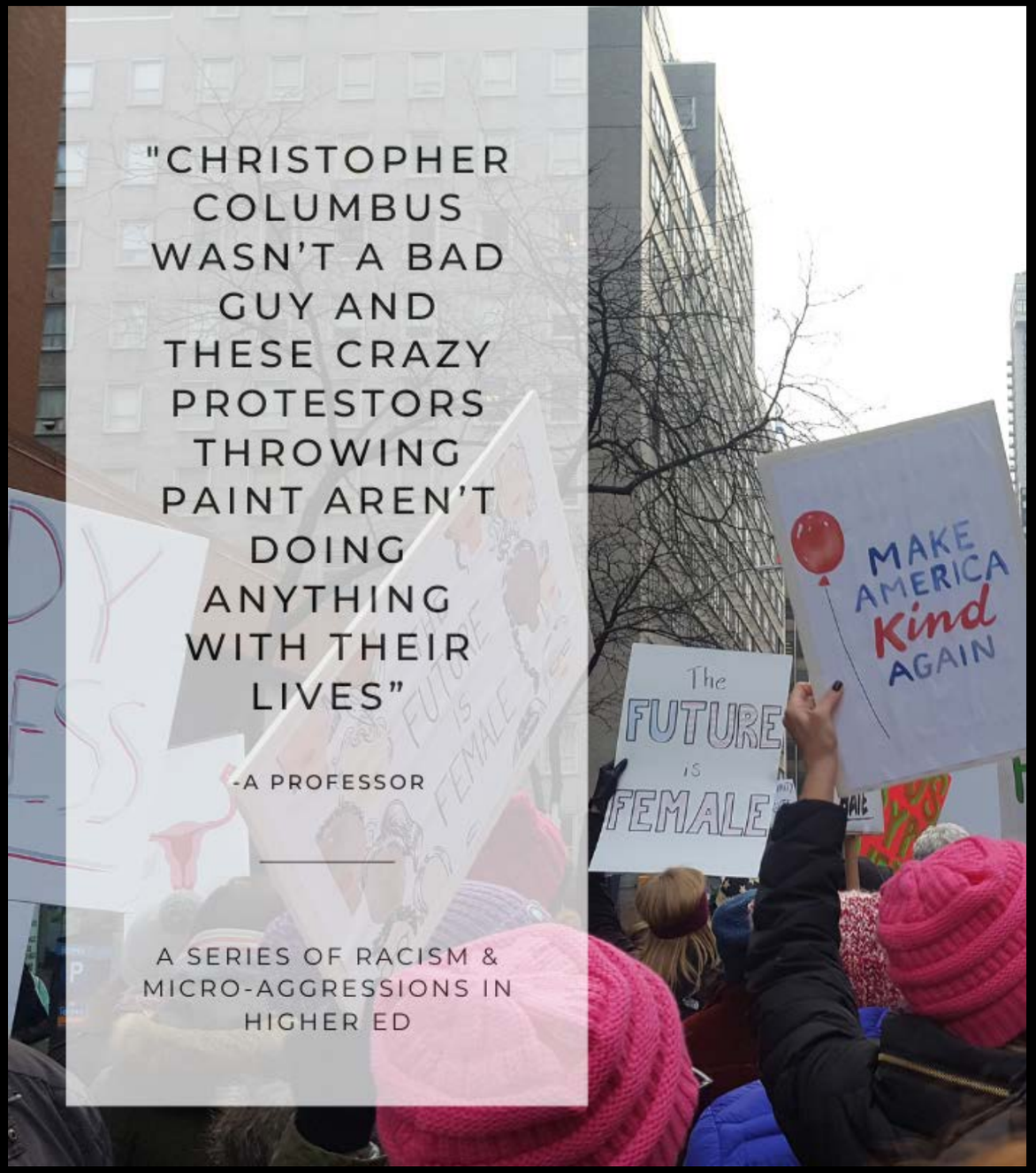


Photo 7. An image of a protest is overlaid with a semi-transparent box with a quote that reads, “Christopher Columbus wasn’t a bad guy and these crazy protestors throwing paint aren’t doing anything with their lives.” The quote is attributed to a professor.

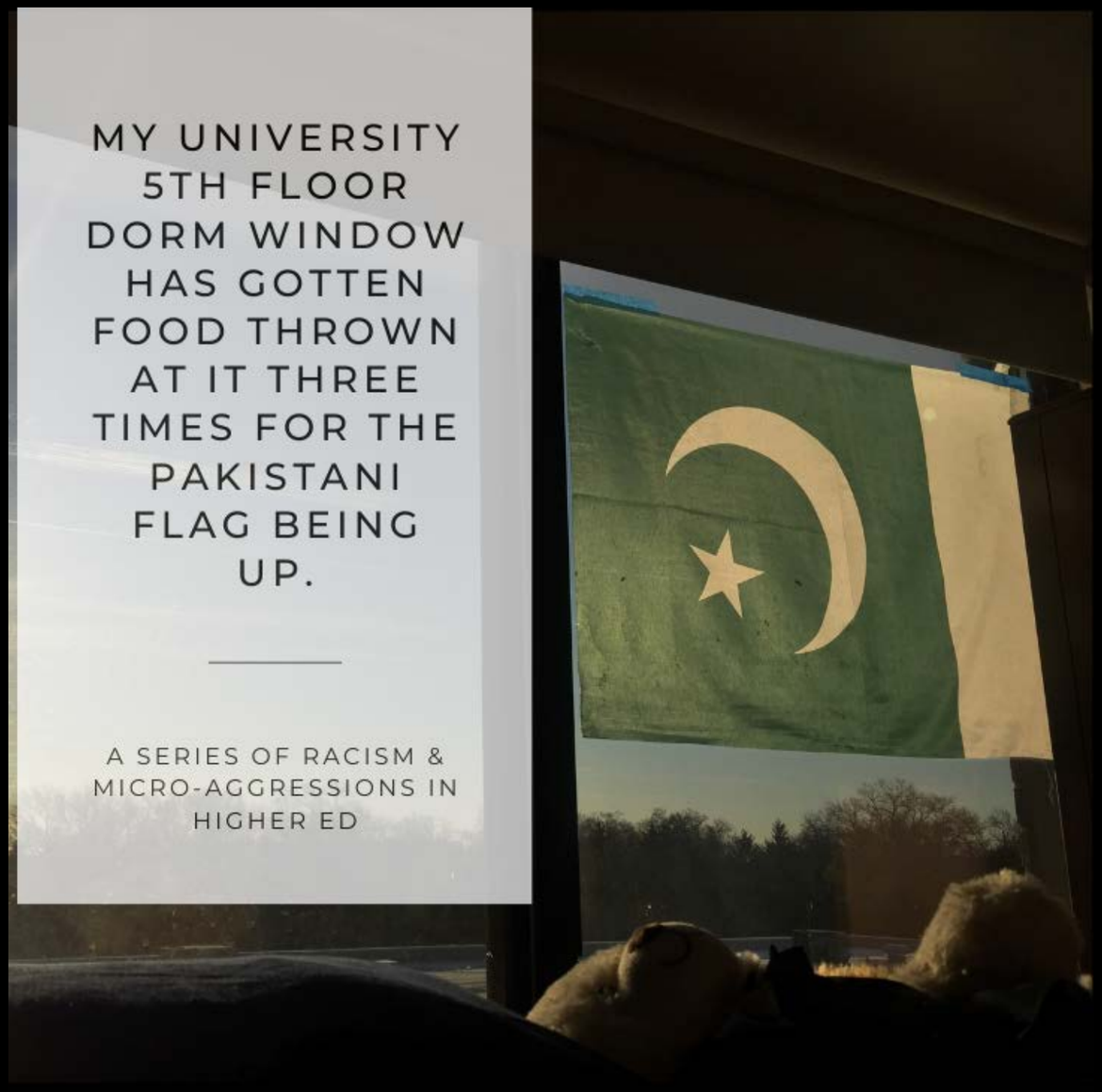


Photo 8. An image of a Palestine flag on a dorm window is overlaid with a semi-transparent box with the words, "My university 5th floor dorm window has gotten food thrown at it three times for the Pakistani flag being up."

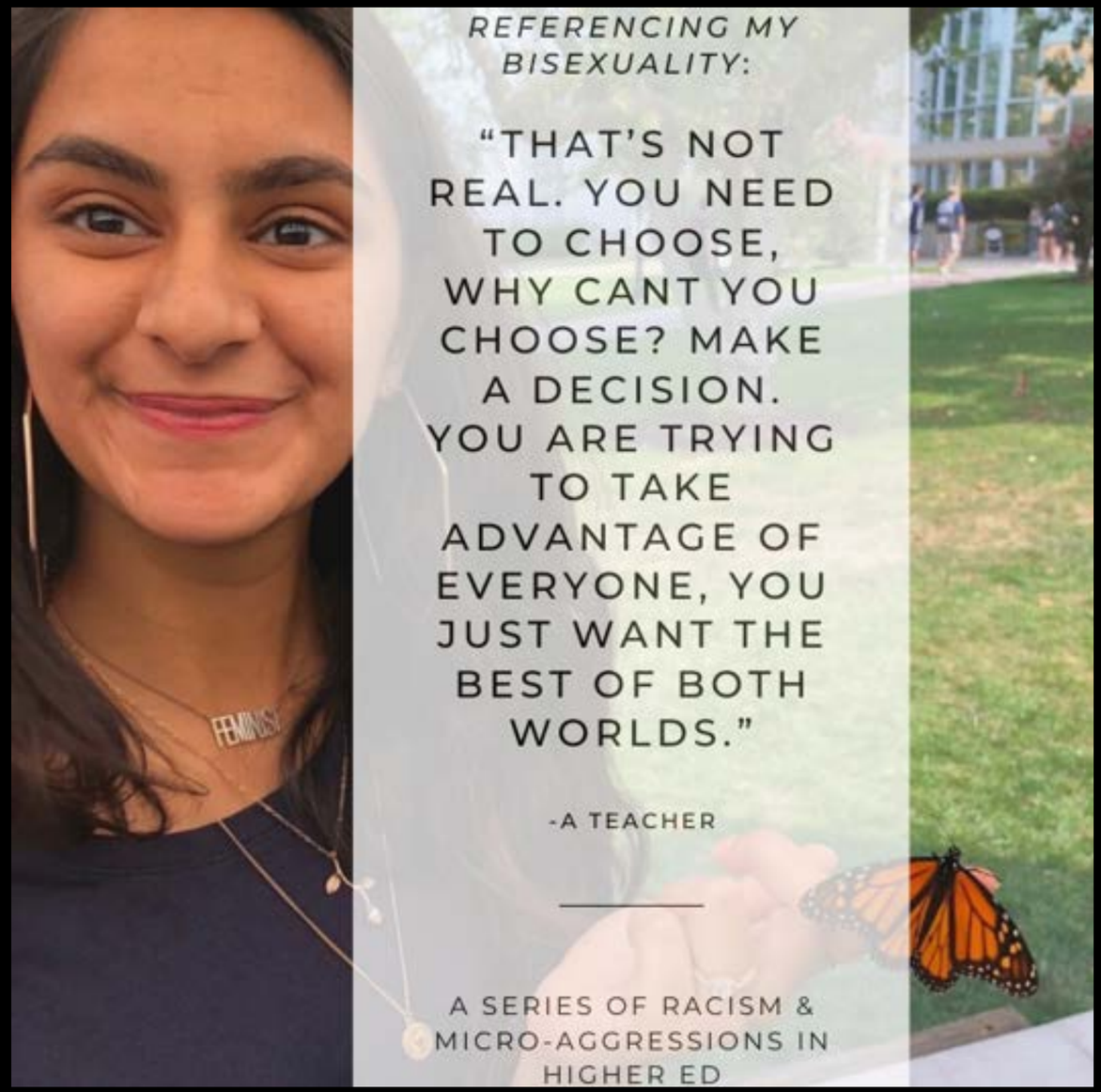


Photo 9. An image of Marya smiling overlaid with a semi-transparent box with italicized text that reads, "Referencing my bisexuality" followed by a quote that reads, "That's not real. You need to choose, why can't you choose? Make a decision. You are trying to take advantage of everyone, you just want the best of both worlds." The quote is attributed to a teacher.

Photo 10. An image of Marya smiling overlaid with a semi-transparent box with italicized text that reads, “During class discussion” followed by a quote that reads, “You already know we want your opinion on Palestine” The quote is attributed to a professor.

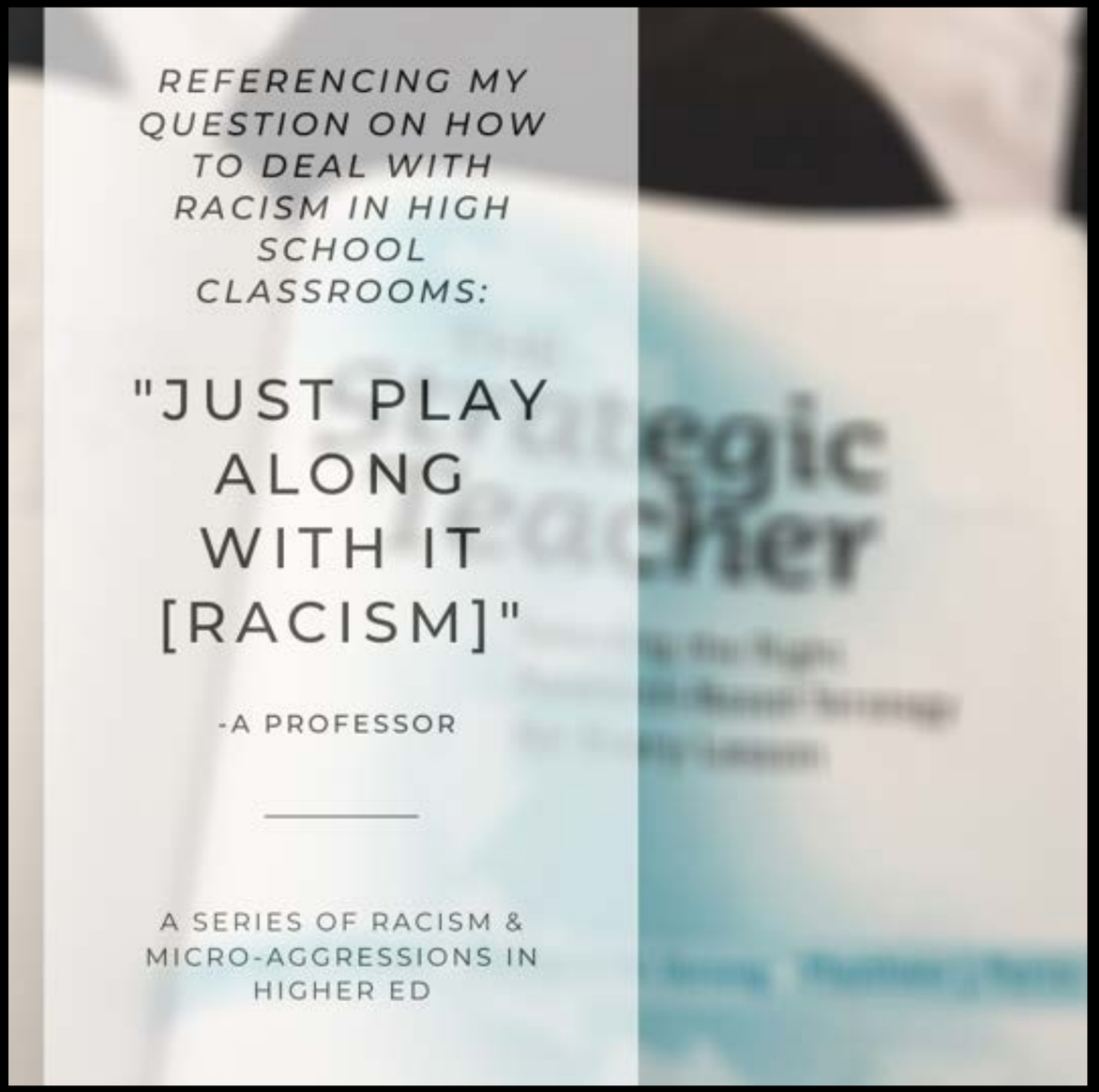


Photo 11. An image of an out-of-focus textbook overlaid with a semi-transparent box with italicized text that reads, “Referencing my question on how to deal with racism in high school classrooms,“followed by the quote “Just play along with it [racism]” The quote is attributed to a professor.

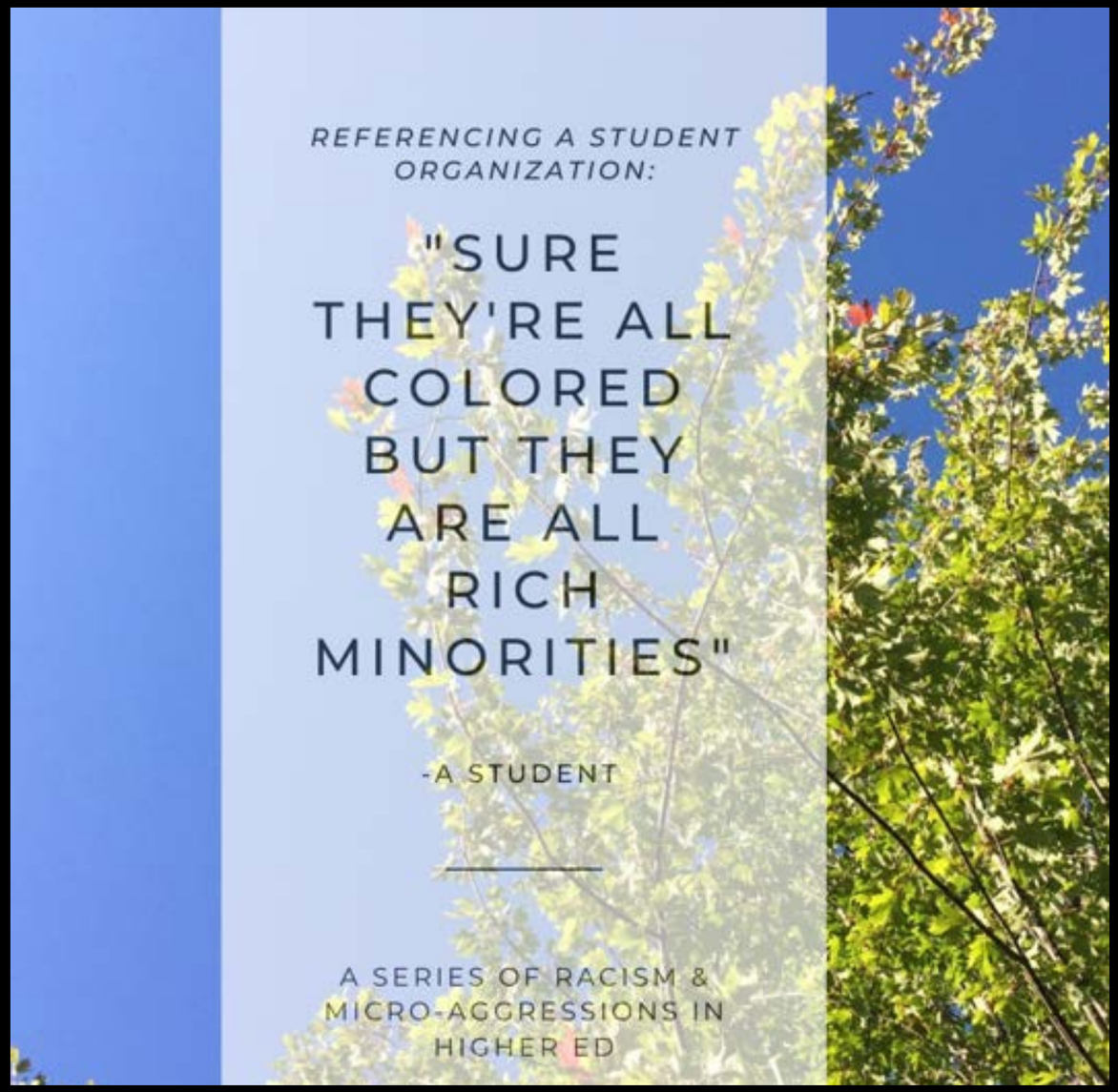


Photo 12. An image of greenery and blue skies overlaid with a semi-transparent box with italicized text that reads, “Referencing a student organization” followed by a quote that reads, “Sure they’re all colored but they are all rich minorities.” The quote is attributed to a student.

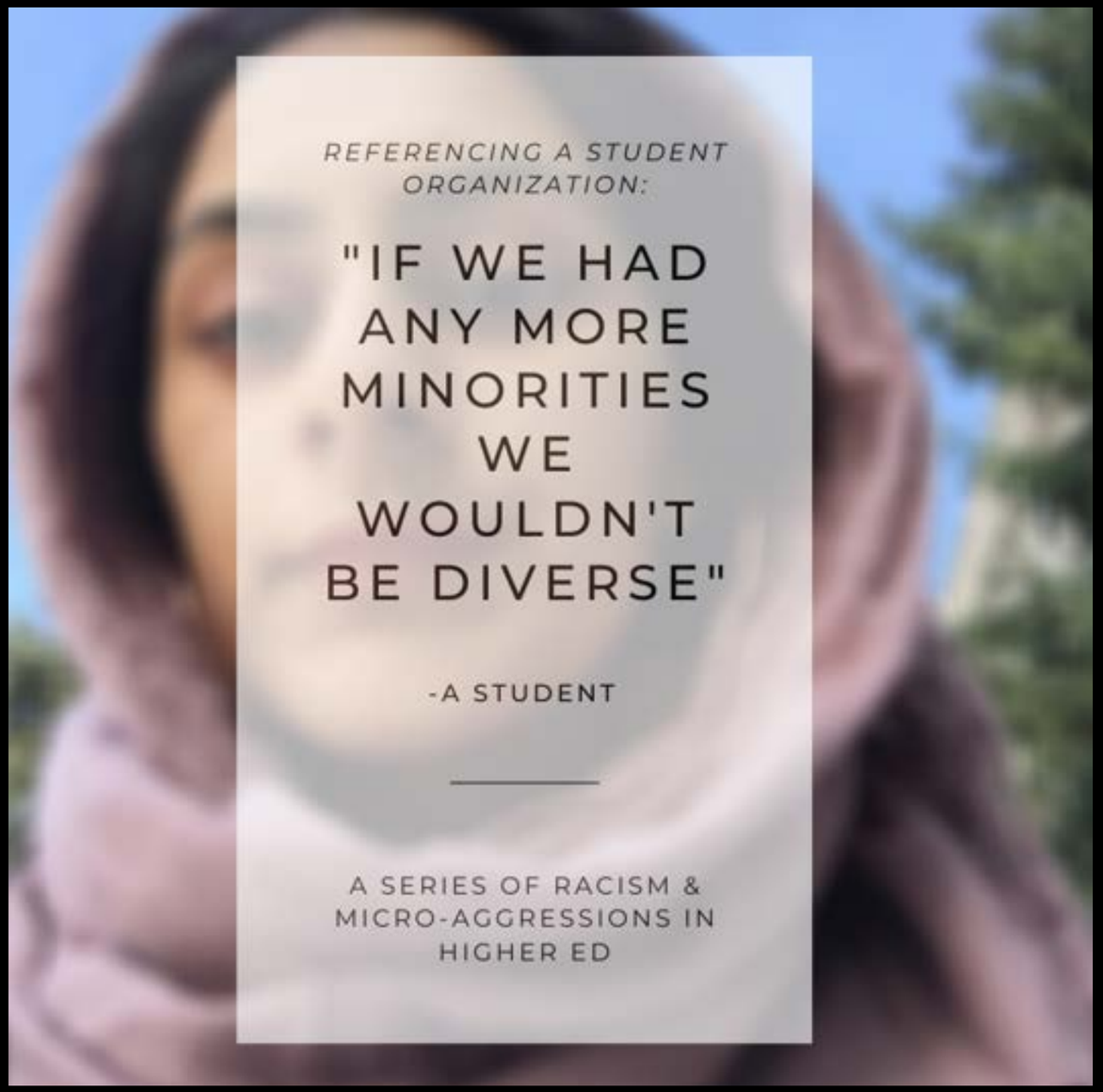


Photo 13. An our-of-focus image of Marya overlaid with a semi-transparent box with italicized text that reads, “Referencing a student organization” followed by a quote that reads, “If we had any more minorities we wouldn’t be diverse.” The quote is attributed to a student.

Photo 14. An image of Marya smiling overlaid with a semi-transparent box with a quote that reads, "You only like those movies because the people are colored." The quote is attributed to a student in a head position above me at a university job.

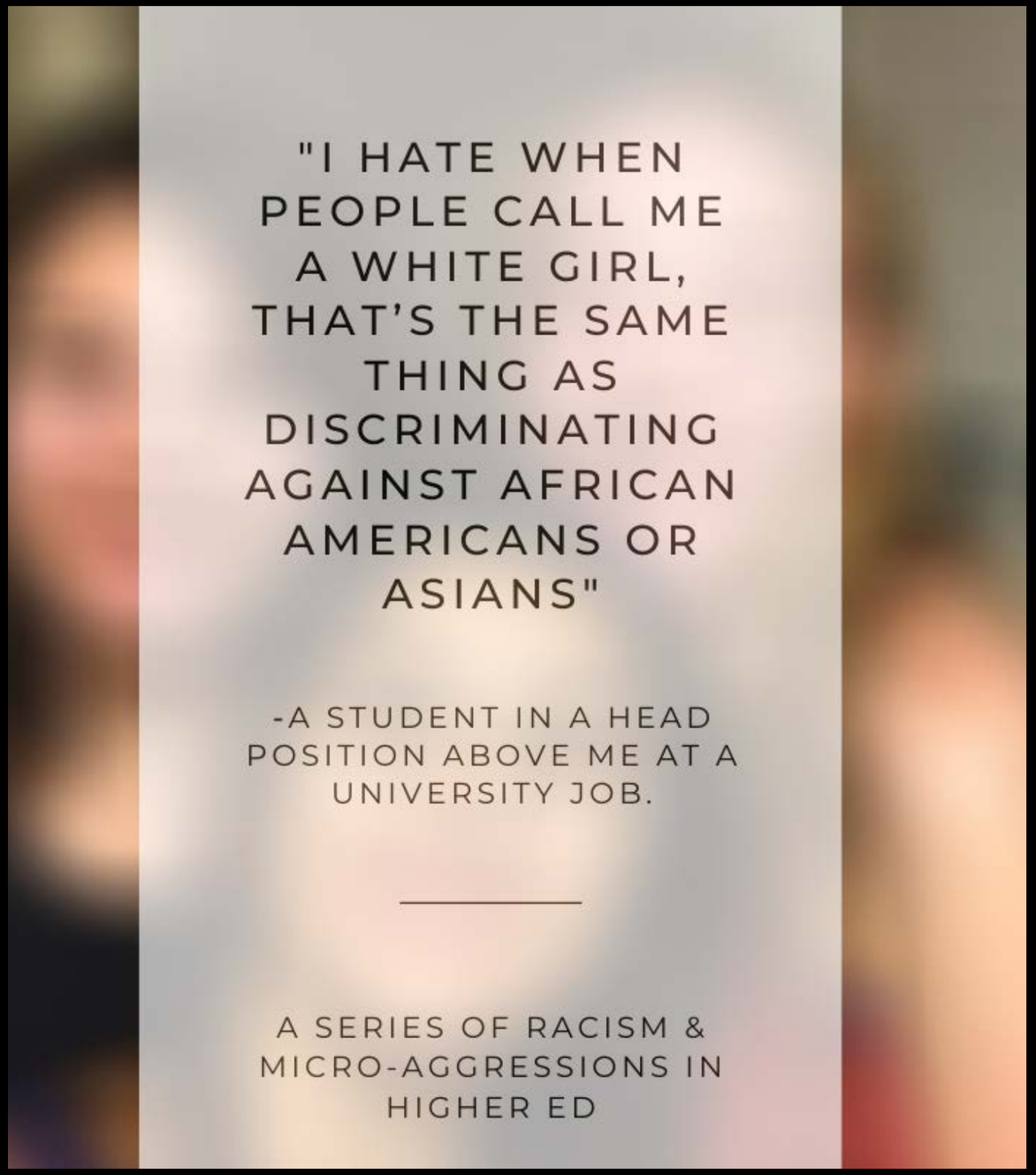


Photo 15. An out-of-focus photo of faces overlaid with a semi-transparent box with a quote that reads, "I hate when people call me a white girl, that's the same thing as discriminating against African Americans or Asians." The quote is attributed to a student in a head position above Marya at a university job.

Photo 16. An image of a dark room with a lit lamp overlaid with a semi-transparent box with a quote that reads, “Is ISIS Attacking? Omar...” The quote is attributed to a student and the name has been changed.

Photo 17. An out-of-focus image overlaid with a semi-transparent box with a quote that reads, “Our staff has a majority of white people, and we have never had a problem with race, we are all accepting, I walk in and I don’t see color.” The quote is attributed to a student in a head position above Marya at a university job.

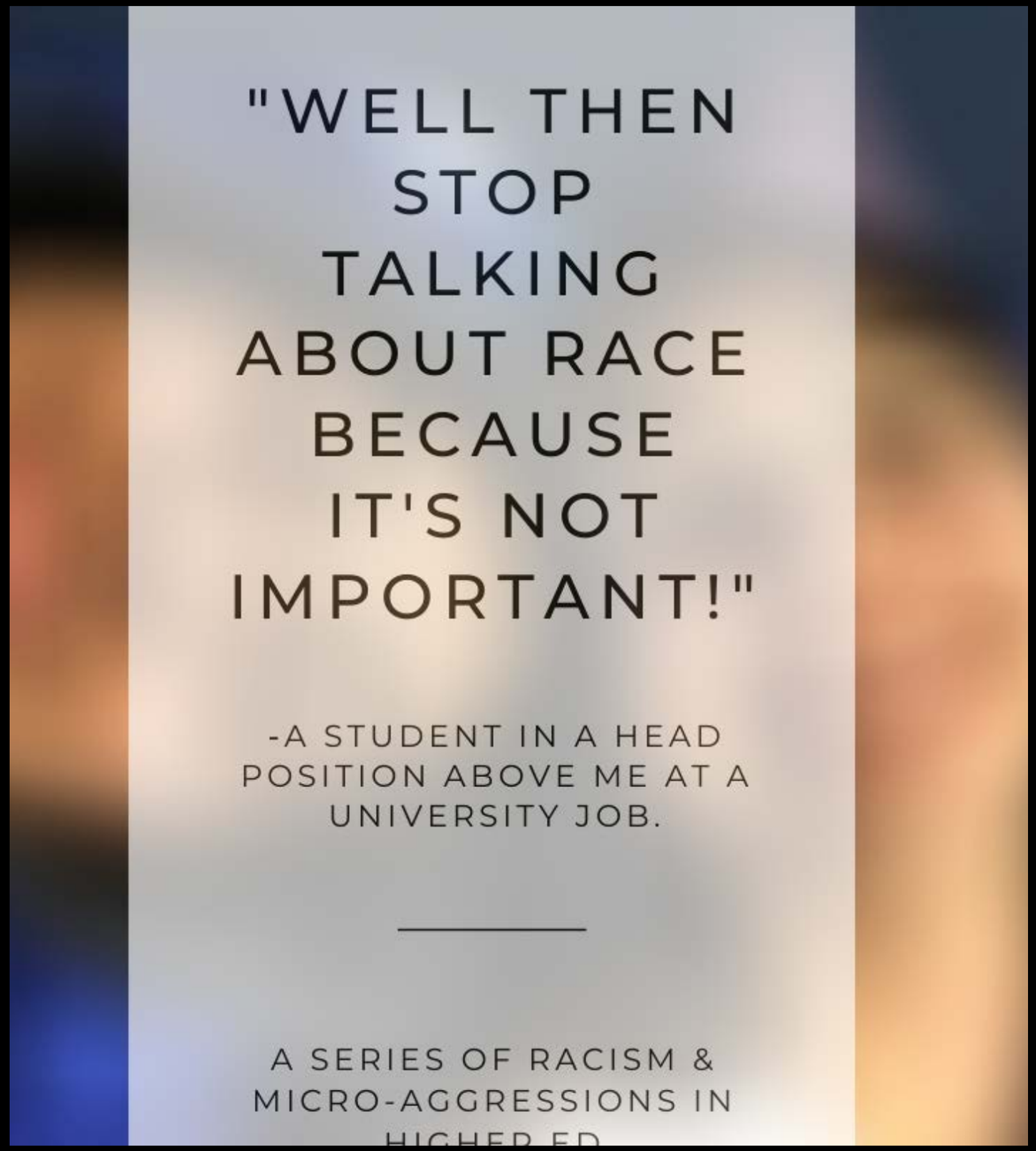


Photo 18. An out-of-focus image of faces overlaid with a semi-transparent box with a quote that reads, "Well then stop talking about race because it's not important!" The quote is attributed to a student in a head position above Marya at a university job.

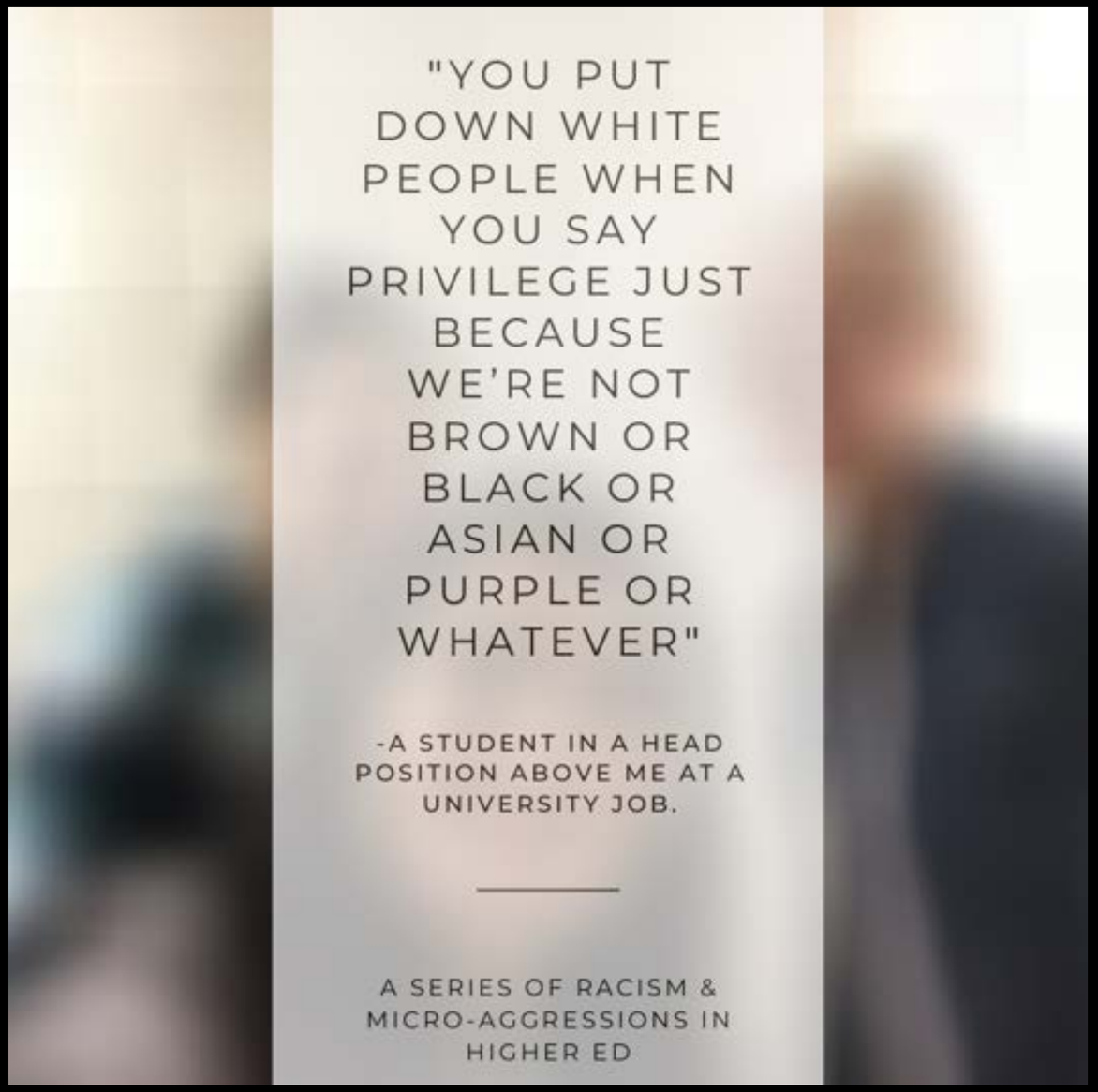


Photo 19. An out-of-focus image of people overlaid with a semi-transparent box with a quote that reads, "You put down white people when you say privilege just because we're not Brown or Black or Assian or purple or whatever." The quote is attributed to a student in a head position above Marya at a university job.

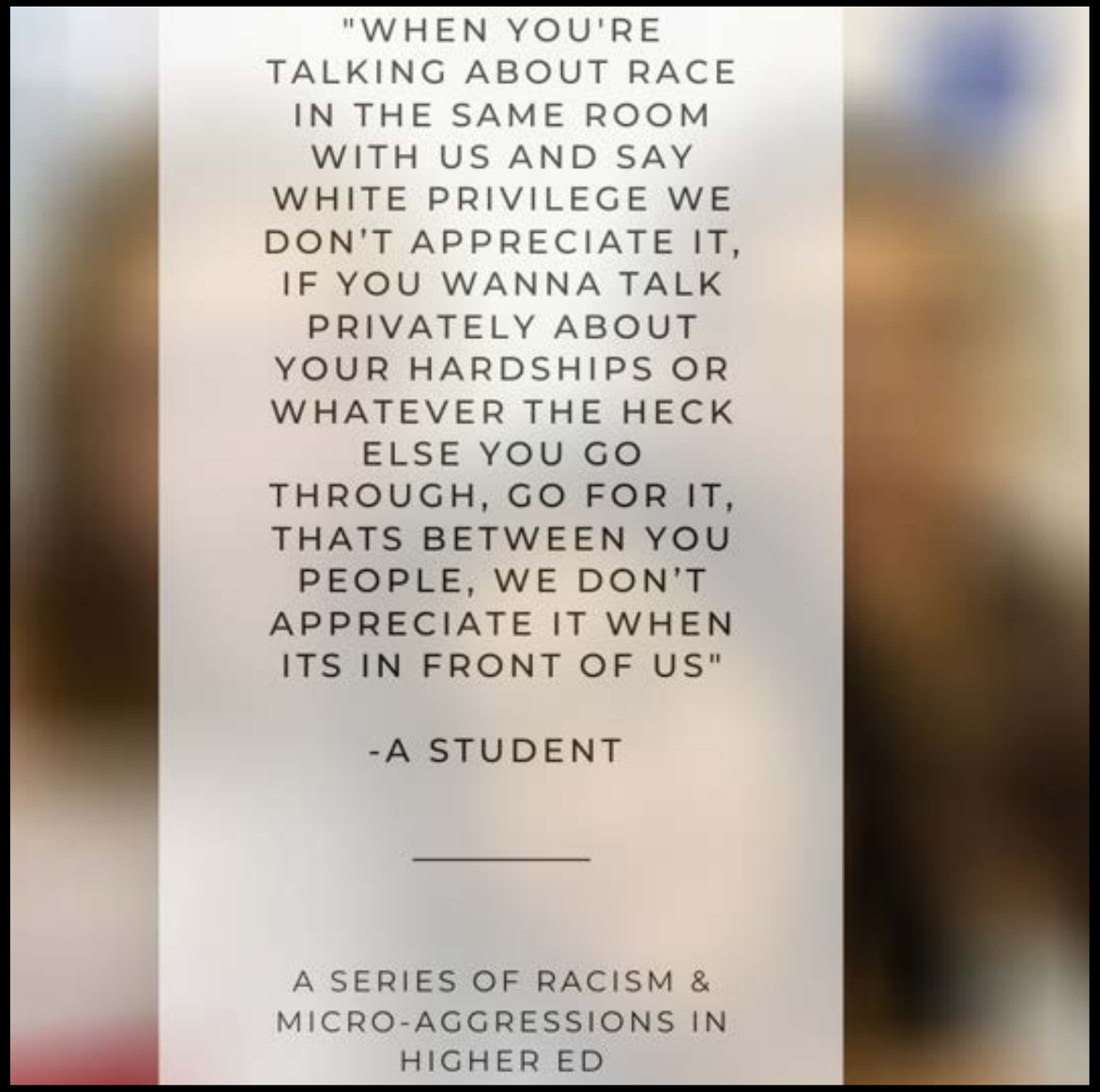


Photo 20. An out-of-focus image of people overlaid with a semi-transparent box with a quote that reads, "When you're talking about race in the same room with us and say white privilege we don't appreciate it, if you wanna talk privately about your hardships or whatever the heck else you go through, go for it, thats between you people, we don't appreciate it when its in front of us." The quote is attributed to a student.

Photo 21. An image of Marya smiling overlaid with a semi-transparent box with a quote that reads, "I'm just going to call you 'M' I can't figure out your name." The quote is attributed to a professor.

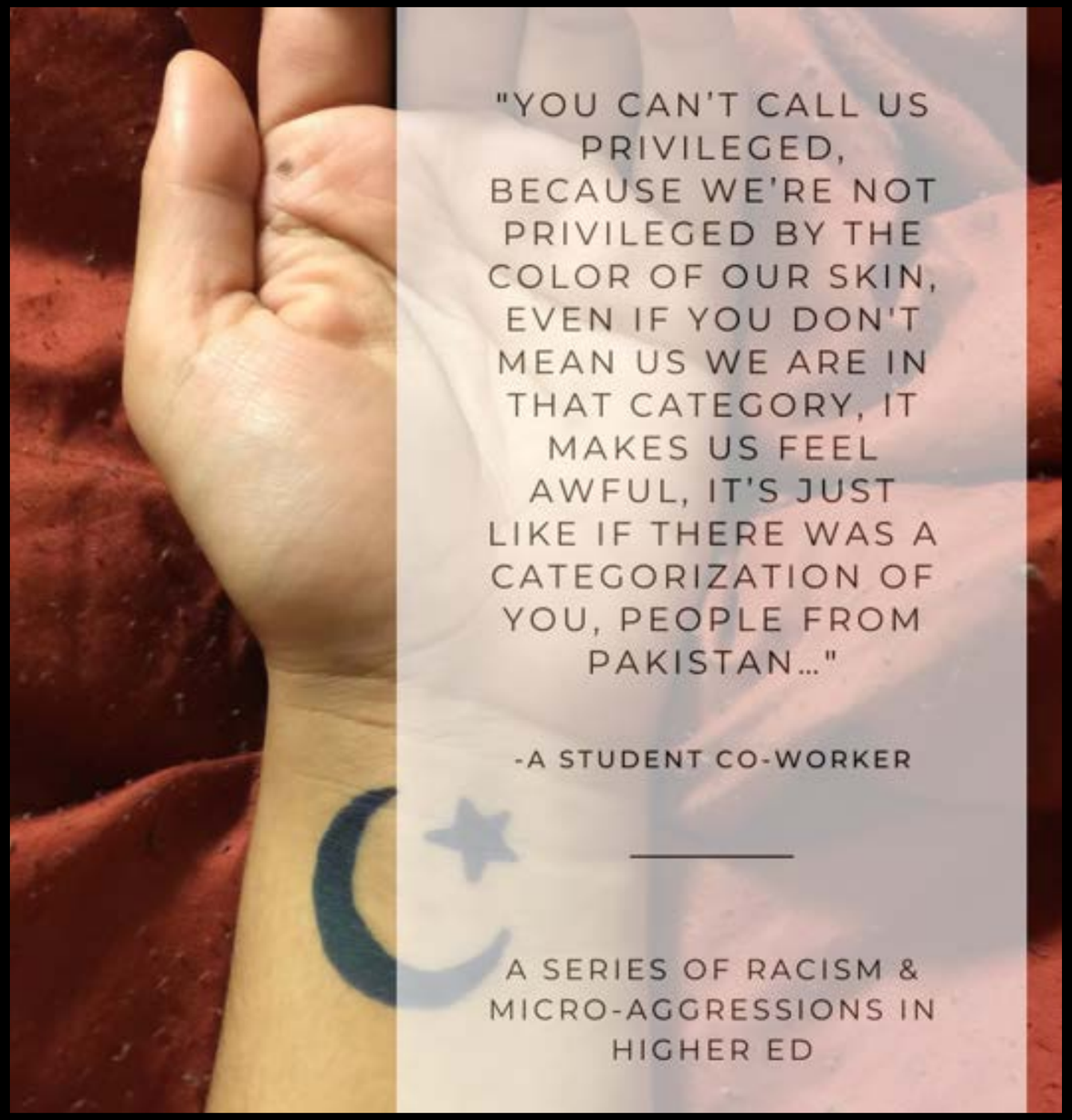


Photo 22. An image of a hand with the moon and star from the Pakistan flag overlaid with a semi-transparent box with a quote that reads, "You can't call us privileged, because we're not privileged by the color of our skin, even if you don't mean us we are in that category, it makes us feel awful, it's just like if there was a categorization of you, people from Pakistan..." The quote is attributed to a student co-worker of Marya's.

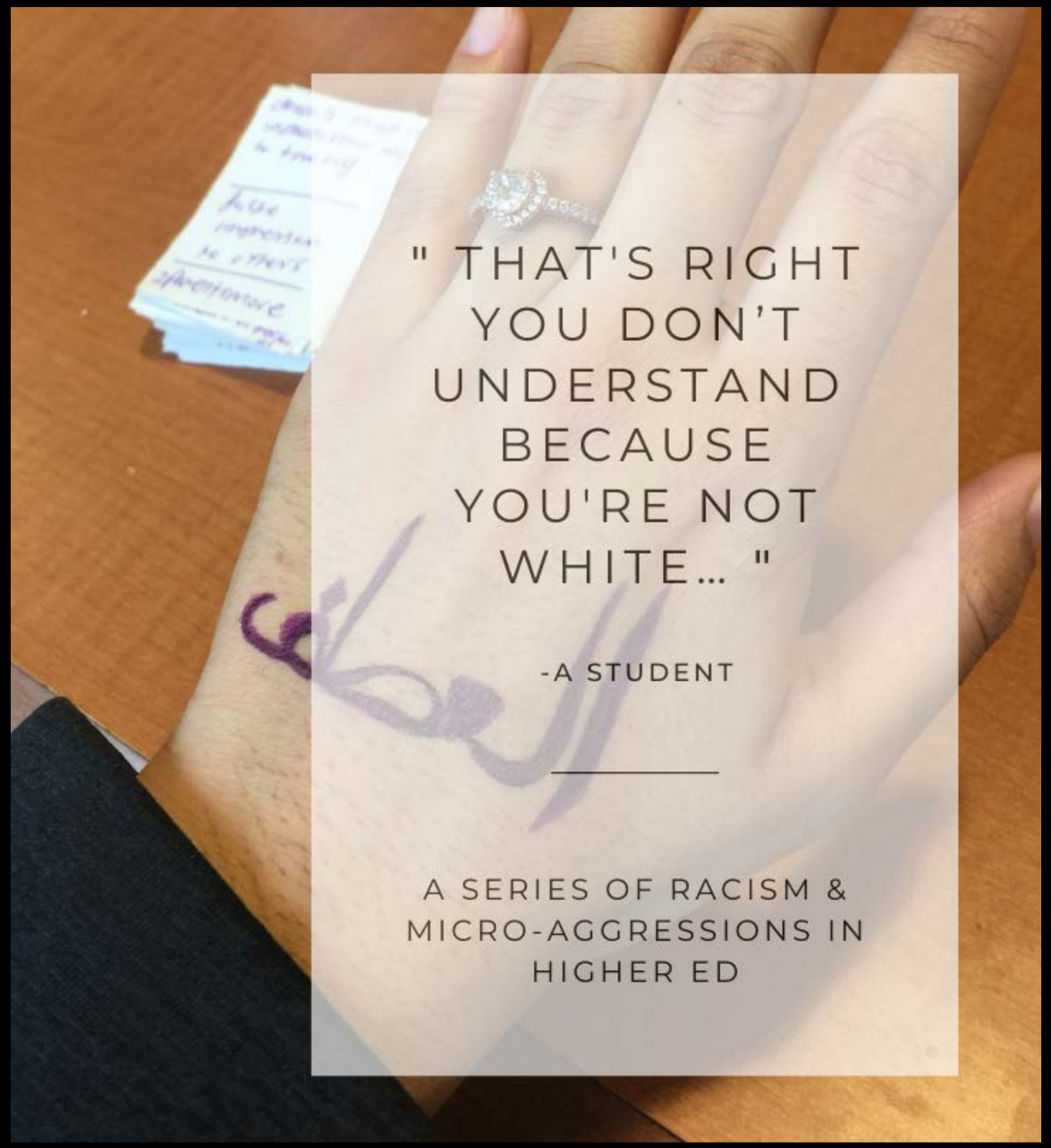


Photo 23. An image of a hand with "kindness" written on it in Arabic overlaid with a semi-transparent box with a quote that reads, "That's right you don't understand because you're not white..." The quote is attributed to a student.

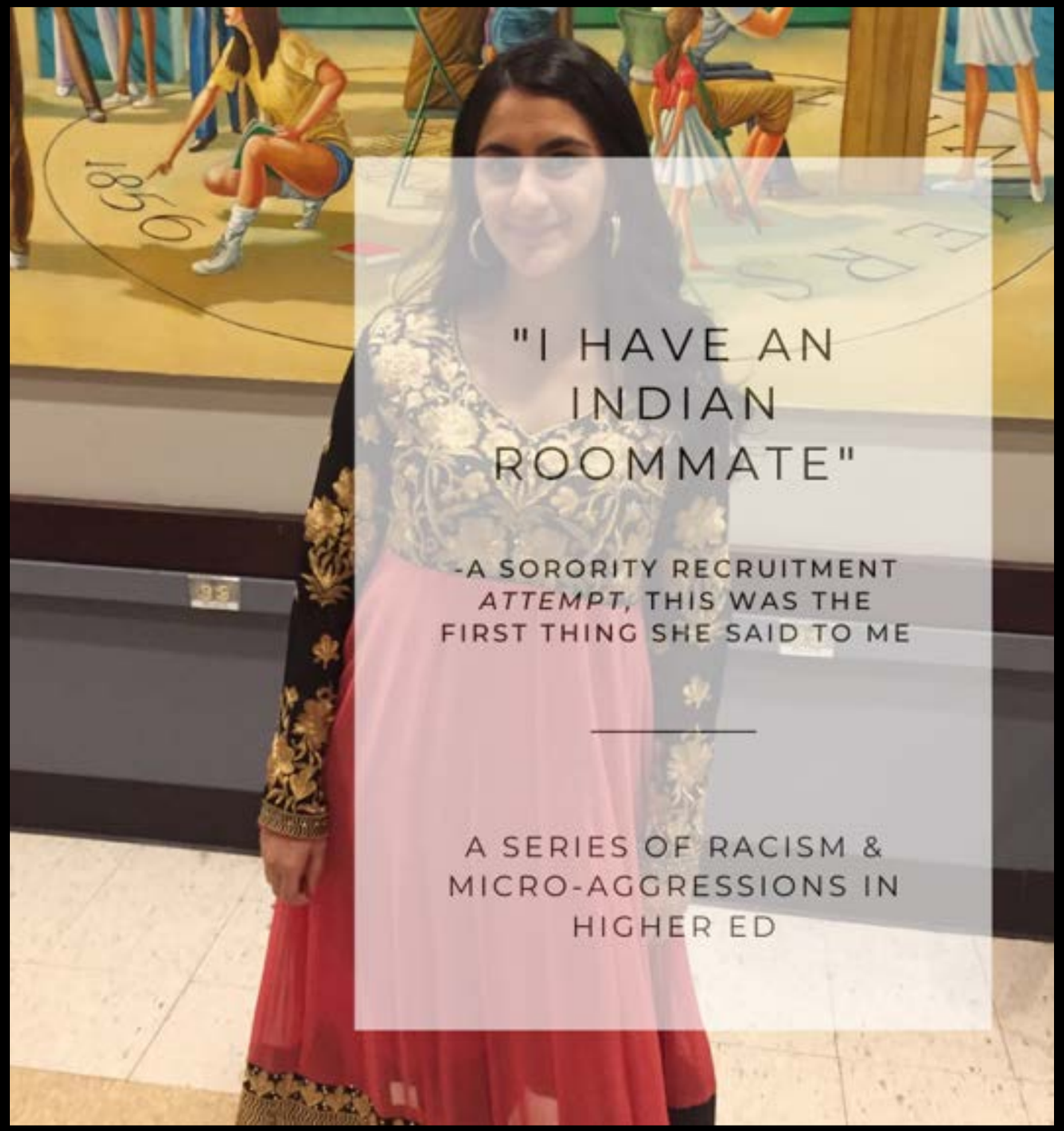


Photo 24. An image of Marya overlaid with a semi-transparent box with a quote that reads, "I have an Indian roommate." The context provided reads, "A sorority recruitment *attempt*, this was the first thing she said to me."

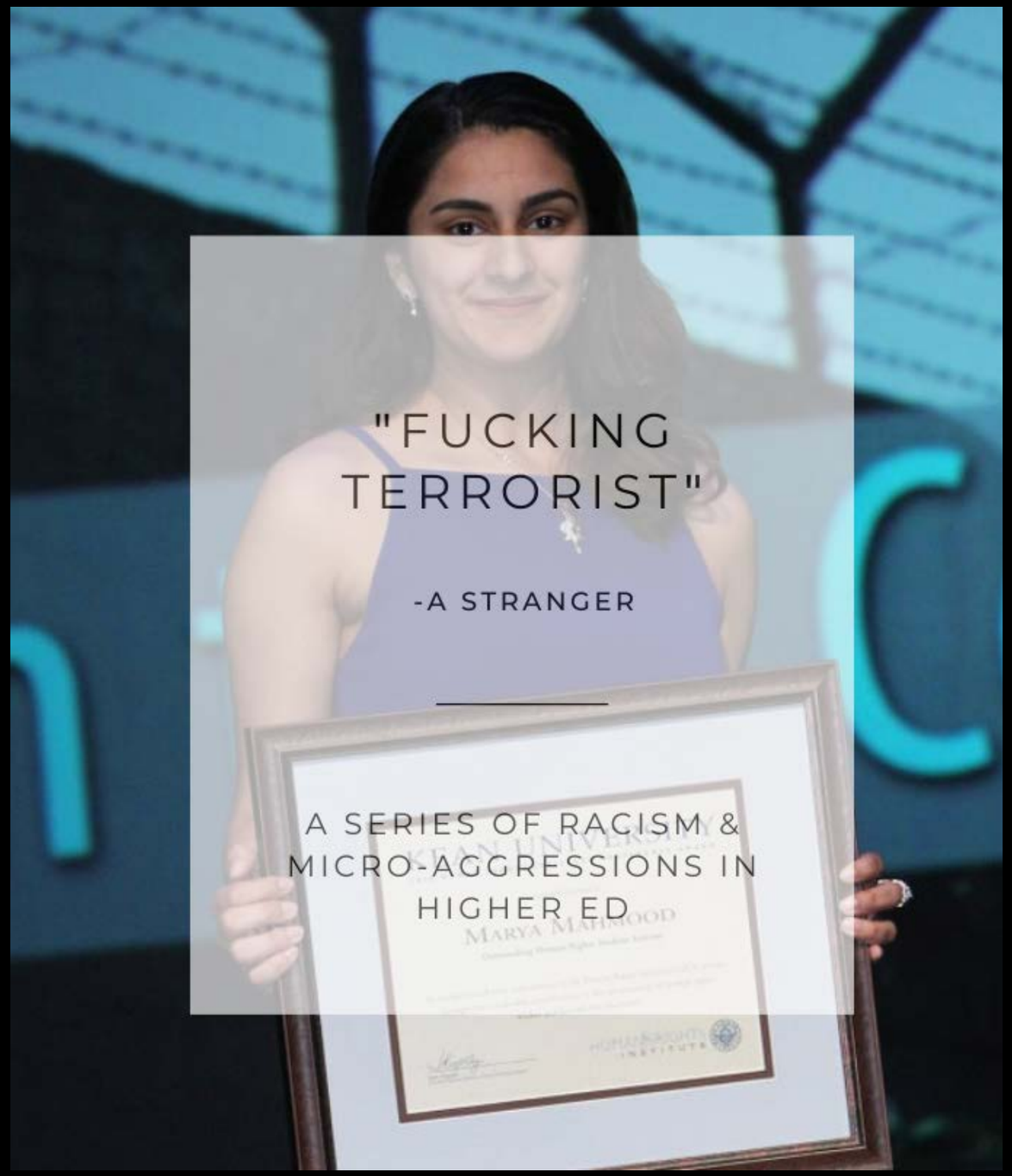


Photo 25. An image of Marya holding a degree overlaid with a semi-transparent box with a quote that reads, "Fucking terrorist" and is attributed to a stranger.

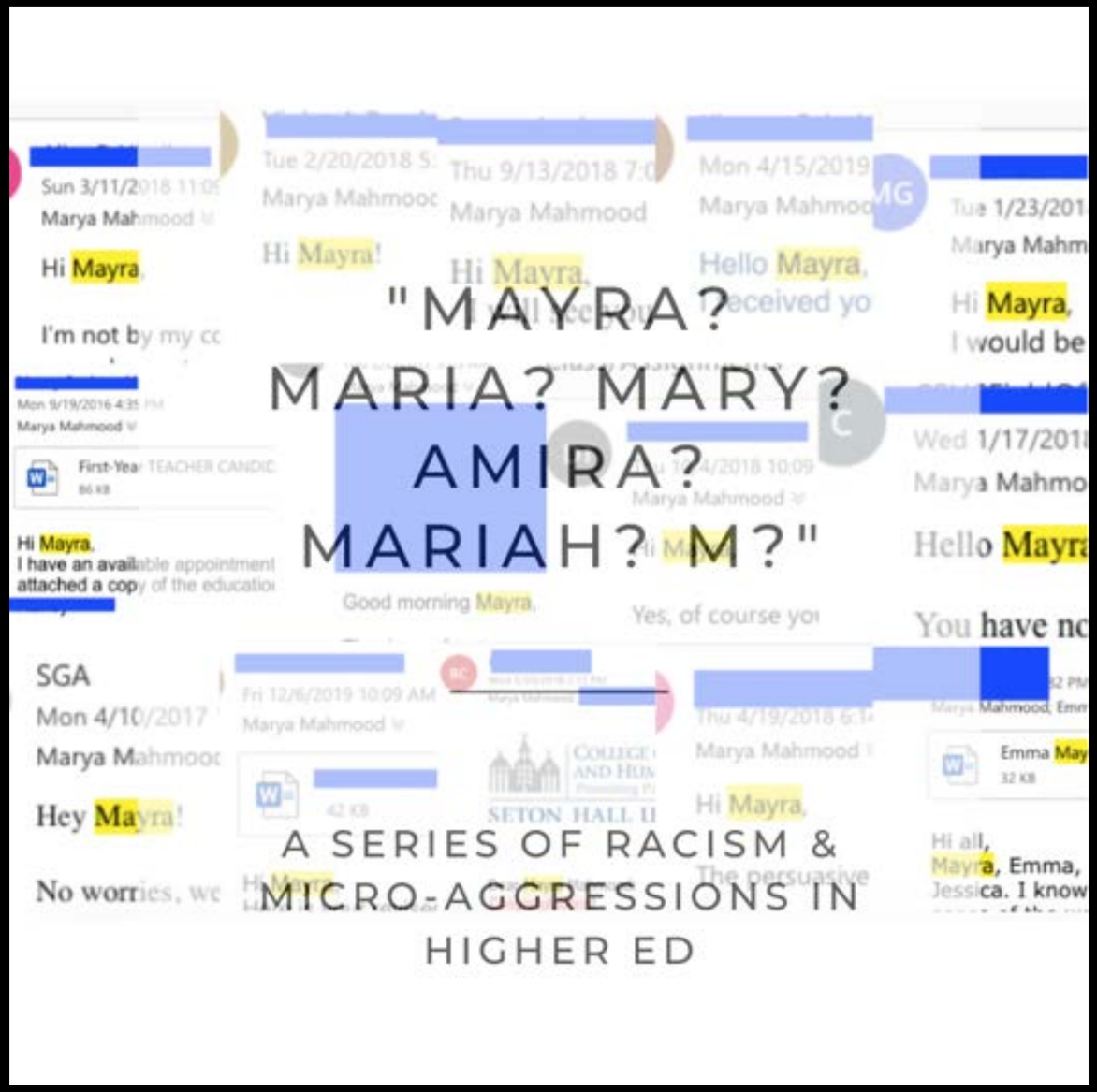


Photo 26. A collage of screenshots of different emails addressed to Marya with the name mispelled. It is overlaid with a semi-transparent box with a quote that reads, “Mayra? Maria? Mary? Amira? Mariah? M?”

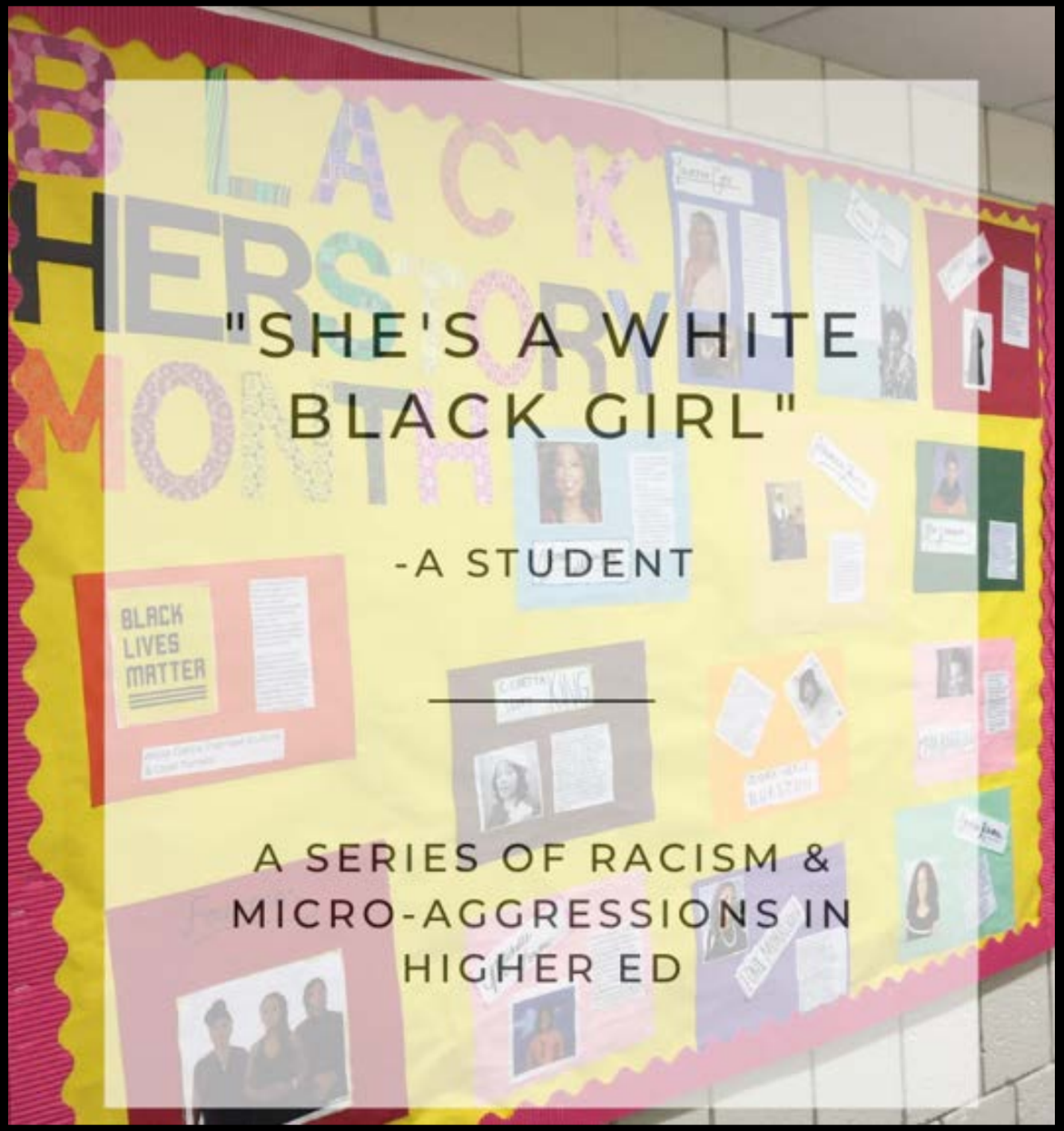


Photo 27. An image of a bulletin board for “Black Herstory Month” overlaid with a semi-transparent box with a quote that reads, “She’s a white Black girl” and is attributed to a student.

Examining the Call to Action

by Kristen Vargas

Throughout the summer, my inbox was flooded with emails about "standing together against hate" in these "unprecedented times." To say that these are unprecedented times is, at best, to bask in the privilege of ignorance, and at worst, to wield the power of erasure. These are not unprecedented times. The murder of George Floyd was not unprecedented, and neither were the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, or Nina Pop.

The murder of George Floyd led to the release of countless memos, email campaigns, and letters demanding change and justice in the face of police brutality and racism. Even so, the language used in these Call to Action letters continues to contribute to the erasure of Black and Brown communities. The persistent deflection of accountability and reductive language that readers find in many of these letters negate the letters' intended messages of justice and equity.

"...the language used in these Call to Action letters continues to contribute to the erasure of Black and Brown communities."

Several teacher preparation programs have published letters that follow these harmful trends. These letters, particularly those from "social justice" teacher preparation programs, are litmus tests for what versions of "social justice" these programs uphold.

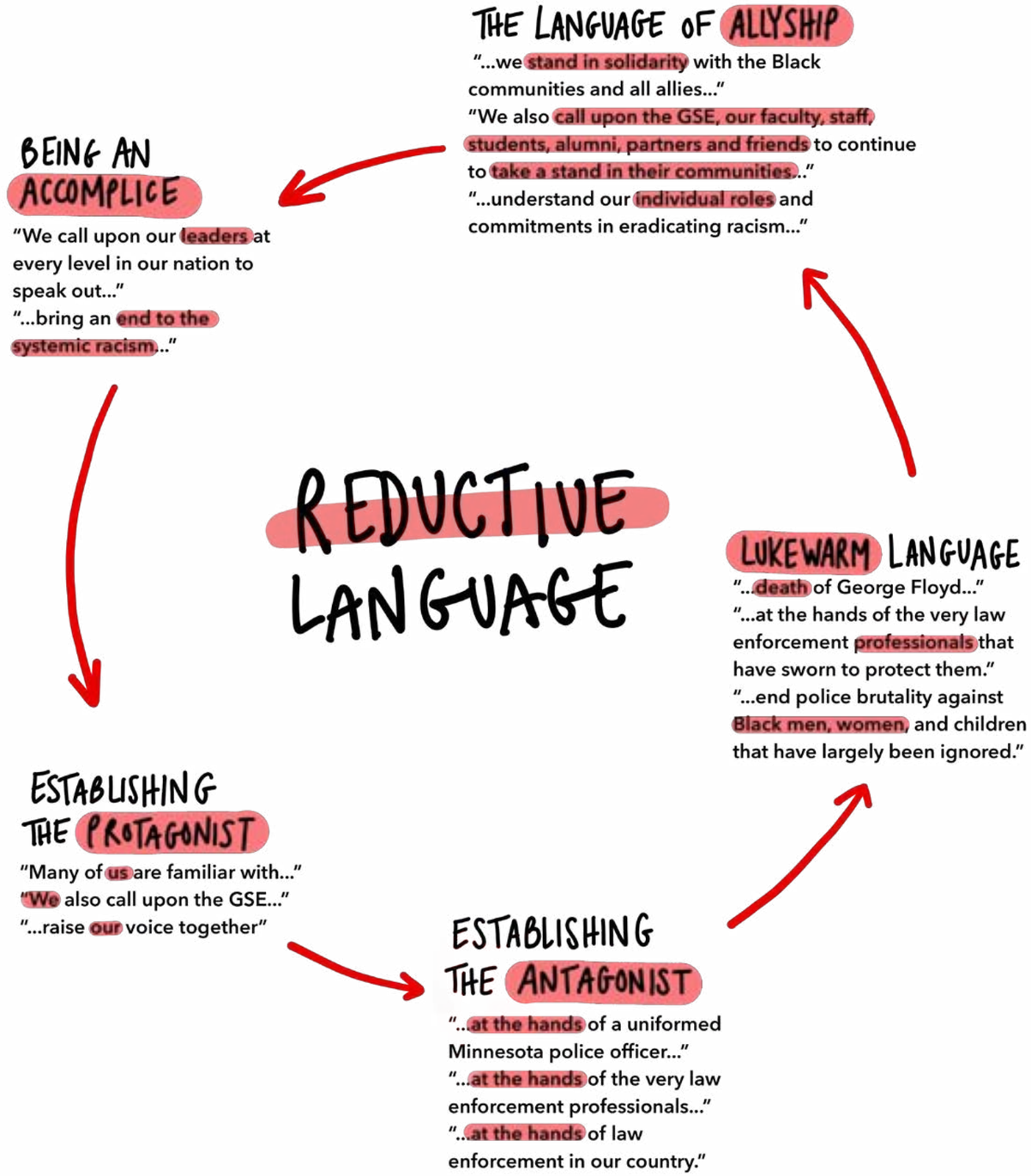
The Graduate School of Education (GSE) at Rutgers University launched its Urban Social Justice Teacher Preparation Program in 2017. According to its website, the program's mission is to "develop a generation of teachers with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to teach and advocate for all students and learn from the communities they serve." One week after George Floyd was killed, the GSE published a letter titled "Historical and Systemic Racism: Rutgers GSE Call to Action."

Language and silence are often weaponized to oppress or erase communities of color. Developing a critical consciousness of this tactic is central to achieving equity and social justice. The language that is used to create social justice teacher preparation programs is not usually the same language that excludes the communities they are committed to serving. It is, however, often the same language that disempowers them. When teacher preparation programs focus on developing teachers who "teach [and] advocate," they omit the vital reciprocity between educators and the communities they serve. Students are often not recognized and celebrated as agents of their own liberation in oppressive systems of education.

While attending the GSE's Urban Social Justice Teacher Preparation Program, I experienced firsthand how it followed through with and fell short of its mission. We cannot begin to hold institutions accountable or enact change in favor of justice until we notice and name the areas in which growth remains possible and essential.

My analysis seeks to explore two main questions:

1. What examples of social justice efforts does this Call to Action letter represent?
2. How does the language in this Call to Action reflect the mission of the GSE?



Reductive Language

When I use the term reductive language, I refer to any language that minimizes or softens the gravity of what it is describing. The mechanisms that contribute to the trend of reductive language can be understood as follows.

The use of "we," "us," and "our" aligns the reader and the GSE, and together they create the protagonist in the letter. Directly opposite "us" is the antagonist, "law enforcement," which is implied with the repetition of the phrase "at the hands of" that precedes it. Without naming white supremacy and systems of policing, the antagonist that is created by the phrase "at the hands of" lacks the complex context of the violence the letter seeks to condemn. The antagonist should include "law enforcement" as well as the systems by which members of law enforcement are empowered to enact violence.

The next two mechanisms are the language related to two roles in activism: ally and accomplice. An ally stands in solidarity with an oppressed person or group while an accomplice works to disrupt the oppressive systems. The GSE's allyship starts and ends with standing "in solidarity with the Black communities and all allies."

Even though the GSE calls for "an end to systemic racism," this is not an example of being an accomplice (though this language does relate to that role). In order to be an accomplice, the GSE would have to work to dismantle oppressive systems. Understanding that striving towards this goal is ultimately detrimental to the prosperity of the GSE, it calls for its audience to work towards being an accomplice instead of taking up the task itself.

The final mechanism is directly concerned with word choice; excerpts from the Call to Action letter are some of the most concerning. Describing the "death of George Floyd" is a choice that conflicts with the later use of "video murder" and "unlawful killing" to describe the same event. The word "death" appears first and is a jarring minimization of what the GSE later refers to as a "grave injustice."

The use of "professionals" in the sentence,

> "Many of us are familiar with the deaths of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Trayvon Martin, Sandra Bland, and countless others in Black communities over many decades at the hands of the very law enforcement professionals that have sworn to protect them"

is violent. In what world are they professionals?

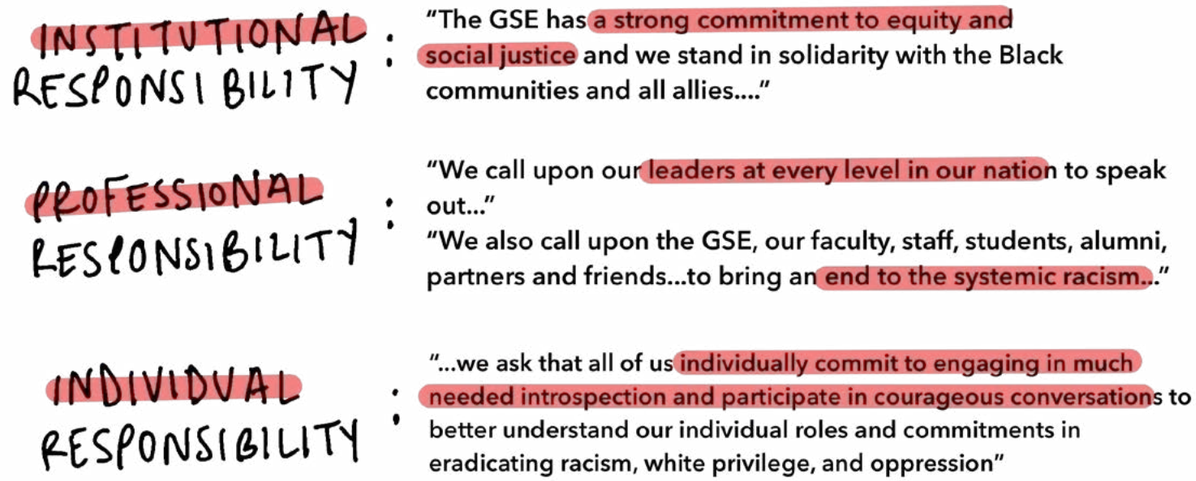
The Call to Action also tends to use "communities" and "people" when discussing Black and Brown folks with the exception of one sentence:

> "The protests and demonstrations that we are currently witnessing across the United States are a reflection of many years of marching and pleading for those in power to end police brutality against Black men, women, and children that have largely been ignored."

Here, choosing to highlight the "Black men, women" that have been subjected to police brutality affirms a gender binary that excludes members of LGBTQIA+ communities of whom Black and Indigenous transwomen are disproportionately vulnerable to violence in systems of policing and the prison industrial complex.

Kristen's 2020 workspace, illustrated by herself

Deflection of Accountability



The Call to Action letter is made of thirteen sentences: ten active sentences and three passive sentences. Using passive sentences allows the GSE to hide the subject deeper in the sentence and shift the reader's attention to the act instead of the person responsible for committing it. When an institute of higher education focuses more attention on the act than its subject, it stops prioritizing accountability.

In active sentences, the subject appears first, followed by the act. In passive sentences, the subject and object switch places so the object appears before the act instead. The event is no longer recognized as someone doing something to someone else.

This is important because not only is the subject able to distance itself from the act, but it can be erased completely, without affecting the reader's ability to understand the sentence. "In March, Breonna Taylor was killed when Louisville, KY police shot her..." is just as comprehensible to readers as "In March, Breonna Taylor was killed."

In the Call to Action letter, accountability is only explored through legality and the current carceral system. The prison industrial complex is built on qualified immunity and mass incarceration. The field of education is no stranger to its effects: the school-to-prison pipeline is one of the racial disparities discussed in some critical education curricula (the GSE's Urban Social Justice Teacher Preparation Program included).

Language choices like "unlawful killing," "we also call for the prosecution of all involved," and "call for severe consequences for the officers who perpetrated these crimes, and to set a precedent" ignore the reality that legality is not always prioritized in discussions that involve the prison industrial complex (because of systemic components like qualified immunity).

These language choices perpetuate and reassert the current carceral system as the only path to accountability and in doing so, align the GSE with the carceral system despite the harm it causes to the communities the GSE is committed to serving.

Conclusion

The GSE itself establishes that it "has a strong commitment to equity and social justice" and stands "in solidarity with the Black communities and all allies," but does not actually say what it will do to support those communities. Instead, its most robust call to action is actually dedicated to individual readers' responsibilities to "commit to engaging in much needed introspection and participate in courageous conversations."

This Call to Action relies on allyship to represent the GSE's main contribution to social justice efforts. The emphasis on individual and professional responsibility highlights what is missing from the institution's responsibility for social justice as a teacher preparation program. The kind of advocacy that the GSE expects from its teachers is modeled in the language in this Call to Action letter. It is a safe advocacy, in which little risk outside of standing "in solidarity with" marginalized communities is taken.

Without calling for the end of policing, the school-to-prison pipeline continues to exist. Without calling for the end of white supremacy, white saviorism and fragility continue to take up space and power in schools, and without calling for the end of oppression, any mission of social justice in education is destined to align with the oppressor, instead of liberating the learner.

"...without calling for the end of oppression, any mission of social justice in education is destined to align with the oppressor, instead of liberating the learner."

Disrupting the Status Quo

by Claudia Valverde

Figure 1. My sister, myself, and a friend at our local BLM protest.

On March 21, Governor Murphy issued the first stay at home order for New Jersey. For many citizens of NJ, like myself, this came as no surprise as everywhere we looked, we saw other countries and states taking similar initiatives. Yet, nothing prepared me for the reality of living in a pandemic. Before the summer had even started, I would have already experienced several health scares in my family and gained a stronger appreciation for the profession I was entering. At the end of March I was still in the process of finishing my undergraduate education courses, and had landed a long term substitute position at the high school where I had done my student teaching. I found myself in the interesting position of being both a student and an educator during this chaotic and uncertain time, and while it was not easy, I came out of it feeling like I had better understanding of what it really means to be a teacher. There are not many positives to a pandemic but the one bright light I saw in all of this is that COVID-19 forced schools to take a harder look at the inequitable foundations they were built on, which includes a narrow understanding of what it means to be a teacher.

Being a brand new teacher, I was accustomed to being the one with all the questions, from how to work the industrial printer to the proper procedure for emailing a parent. However, this pandemic disrupted the status quo of "experience". So often, in most professions, we look to those with the most years of experience for guidance and consider them the best at what they do. People's experiences should not be undervalued but occasionally experience comes with complacency and there is simply no room for complacency in education. Teachers who had gone years without feeling a need to integrate technology, even at the basic level of utilizing school district free tools like Google Classroom and1-to-1 technology (meaning every student had a school given laptop), were at a loss for how to handle a completely electronic learning platform.

The status quo idea that "years of experience" means excellence or even expertise had been thoroughly disrupted by the COVID pandemic. What I lacked in experience I made up for in my understanding of educational technology, not only because it was a part of my college curriculum but also because technology has always been a part of my life. And so, my interactions with colleagues changed from my asking questions to being asked questions... along with being told I'm lucky to be a part of a tech savvy generation. But I would argue that anyone can learn, I mean that is the fundamental belief all teachers should have. The reality is, the teachers who said they could never navigate Google Classroom or record videos, ended up doing it by the end of school because they had to, there were no excuses anymore. Moreover, there is something to be said about "practicing what you preach". How can we ask students to be lifelong learners if we are unwilling to learn and adapt with the times ourselves?

Prior to e-learning, many schools sent out technology surveys to see who had computer and internet access in the district, and had to find ways to distribute technology to families without it, if feasible. I refer to schooling after March as e-learning because that was my experience with it but the reality is some districts do not have 1-to-1 technology and so they used physical packets, to administer instruction to students. These weekly packets included readings and practice problems for the students to complete, and while it was not ideal for many teachers, it was better than giving the students nothing at all. Even in districts where there was already an initial baseline of 1-to1 tech, the schools' main concern was that a household had computer access which in a house of two or three students, might mean just making sure there is one laptop that all the students can share. Living in a household with two younger siblings who are also in school, I cannot fathom how we would have operated if we had to share electronics and I recognize my family's privilege in not having to prioritize one child's learning over the others.

Figure 2. Woodbridge, NJ Black Lives Matter protest, June 2020.

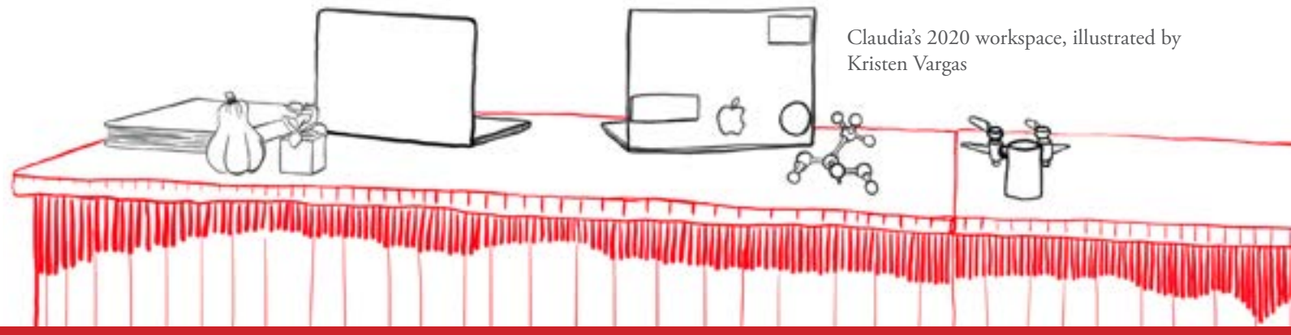
There is this status quo around technology where it is just assumed that in this day and age, everyone has internet access and a working device. The reality is many households, approximately 15%, around the country do not have internet access (U.S Bureau, 2019). Maybe that doesn't seem like a high percentage in a country as large as the U.S but if even one student is being denied opportunities of an education because of this, then we are dealing with unequitable practices.

Being at the "forefront" of the e-learning experience, I had a lot of people ask me why schools did not close sooner and there are so many attributing factors to that. For one, schools that are funded by the state- specifically looking at public schools- had to wait for guidance from the governor. A lot of schools anticipated the potential closing and were planning prior to Governor Murphy's announcement, but even that was not enough time for many districts. At the heart of it, schools are inequitable and our society is inequitable, wherein both offer unequal opportunities for the majority group at the disadvantage of most marginalized groups. This is to say, trying to ensure all students receive academic instruction while a pandemic is in progress with so many people already at a disadvantage was a daunting task for everyone involved. Students were concerned with being online for hours (among many other concerns), parents had concerns over the quality of their child's education, and schools were trying to figure out how to deliver quality education with so many moving parts. School districts had to find ways to ensure that students on free or reduced lunch still received their meals. The effort school districts put into arranging food pick-up sites was great to see, but it made me wish schools always would put that much effort into making sure some of our most vulnerable students are well-fed. There are countless stories of schools who refuse to serve students a hot lunch because they have a negative balance on their account, even though it is of no fault of the student. Students are punished because of their circumstances. So if in the middle of a pandemic we can recognize that students need to receive their meals and that the circumstances of employment might also make it difficult for parents to pay school accounts, why can't or don't we realize the same is true even beyond a pandemic?

Something that was emphasized to teachers during the start of e-learning was that we had to check in on our students. Too often students are asked to leave their troubles and concerns at the classroom door and focus on their classes. Students are constantly put in the position of having to ignore family stress, adolescent growing pains, their other classes, and the onslaught of current events occurring all around them. And if students, especially our Black and Brown students, are not able to compartmentalize all these very real concerns and end up having a "bad" day, they are punished through suspensions, loss of privileges, and even police involvement. More to the point, these forms of punishment occur at a disproportionately higher rate to Black and Brown students than to their White counterparts. My fear is that we will still see these disproportionate rates of punishment even in virtual school, which begs the question: Is school more about discipline and rule following rather than about genuine learning.?

There is some hope, however. For the first time in a long time, I saw administrators across the board seem to push their teachers to genuinely check in with their students. It took a global pandemic for schools to acknowledge that we often treat students as if they are children who don't understand anything and at the same time treat them as adults who need to be held accountable for every action. We often forget that students are developing young people who need someone to check in on them as they navigate their way through the world. Students benefit from check-ins, which range from asking about their day to mindful moments, because it lets students know you care about them and it helps them process information in a safe environment.

Clicking the image above will open a new page with a video of a high schooler graduating and giving a shoutout to Mrs. Gleason (his teacher).



Claudia's 2020 workspace, illustrated by Kristen Vargas

Even as a college student, I so appreciated my professors asking how my week had been and taking the time to discuss current events as a class, even if it was not related to the content. Administrators and teachers attempted to be more understanding when their students could not meet the deadline for an assignment and were proactive in finding ways to communicate with parents/guardians if they were concerned for the student.

Another area where I think status quos were shaken up is in the realm of student voice. In the educator world, everyone talks about student-centered classrooms, which in a nutshell means students' interests and ideas are reflected in the classroom and curriculum. However, creating student-centered classrooms can be challenging for some, especially for teachers who struggle to let go of the reins. The e-learning experience prompted many teachers to ask students for genuine feedback on the class. The reality of the feedback was not what many teachers wanted to hear but no one could deny that students were speaking out and advocating for themselves. Many students in the district I was working in felt overworked and stressed by all they were expected to accomplish in a day. Teachers who took this sort of feedback into consideration might have cut down on work and selected the essentials of the curriculum. Making decisions on what material is actually essential for students to succeed the next school year and what holds relevance is something we as educators should always be considering. Some school districts are still using curriculum that do not align with new standards and are still using outdated textbooks that contain problematic and irrelevant material.

On May 25, George Floyd was murdered by the police. Almost three months after states like NJ had closed due to the pandemic, and our students (all of society, really), had to process yet another disruption. The truth is we cannot talk about the impact of COVID-19 on our students and not also discuss systemic racism. This pandemic has disproportionately impacted Black and Brown communities throughout the U.S, which stems from the lack of access to healthcare to the demographics of essential workers to even the demographics of urban cities (cite). During those first few weeks of the global Black Lives Matter protests it was incredibly hard for me to focus on my work because there was so much hurt going on in the world. Throughout my time subbing, I received more emails than I thought possible from students who had sick family members or even lost family because of COVID-19. How could I ask these students to continue on as usual as if they weren't grieving? And as the protests started, how could I ask the same students to ignore what was happening in their own communities? And so I asked my students how they were dealing with everything, using Google Forms and class discussion to get their input. The feedback I got from my student through these activities showed me the beauty of the youth.

My students were angry, so angry that there was so much injustice in the world, many acknowledged that these injustices predated George Floyd's death and they all wished more people would just do better. Like them, I wish that those in power would step up when it counts the most, and that includes wanting my fellow teachers to have these difficult conversations with their students. As teachers we have the ability to create lessons that connect current events with the content, leading to meaningful discussions. For example, I taught about the evolution of skin during the start of the BLM protests, and as a class we discussed bias in science and issues related to colorism and implicit bias. But it also goes beyond the teachers, it involves school administrations too hesitant to speak on BLM, it includes performative messages that lead to no actionable change, and it involves school systems that have not changed in 130 years when the world was a very different place.

The truth that we shy from is that the school system in the U.S was not built for marginalized groups of students. Schools were not built to support and care for students with disabilities, ELL students, students in the LGBTQ community, or any student that does not fit the "status quo". If we want ALL students to succeed then the status quo is not good enough. As Dr. Bettina Love said, "To want freedom is to welcome struggle". Dr. Love's work is centered around anti-racist/abolitionist teaching and her talks of freedom dreaming have opened me up to the notion that I can dream beyond the current state of education and in fact we have to think beyond current systems in order to do right by our students. If we want to operate in schools that value all children and where all our students are free to be their authentic selves and reach their potential, then we cannot settle for the same old system. The pandemic, for all the harm it has caused, has also disrupted the way schools operate and that gives us an opportunity to re-imagine what it could be. We have to continue on in our disruption, fully aware that it is uncomfortable and it will be a struggle, but it is needed.

Poppin' Pedagogy

by James Lopez

If you've ever been in a teacher education course, than you know a professor's favorite question to ask is, "Who is a teacher from your past that inspired you to become a teacher?" I've been asked that question so many times I can't remember which professors asked me or what classes I which classes it was asked in. The one thing I do remember is that every time I was asked "Who is a teacher from your past that inspired you to become a teacher?" I never had an answer for my professors. None of my K-12 educators were positively responsible for instilling my passion for education, as a matter of fact, my passion to become an educator came from all of my negative experiences in the public-school system. I vividly remember spending a majority of my middle and high school career sitting in class bored out of my mind, getting in trouble for talking, and cheating on tests just to get by with an average grade.

As I navigated throughout high school maintaining a 3.0-3.2 grade point average, I watched many of my friends excel in honors and AP courses while they placed in the top 100 of our class rankings. Almost all of my friends soared throughout high school, graduating with honors and earning acceptances to some of the most prestigious colleges in the country. While I watched my friends accomplish so much academically, I often found myself stuck in the middle of the pack, wondering what was wrong with me and why I wasn't able to succeed academically like everyone else? It wasn't until I decided to pursue a career in education when I realized there was nothing "wrong" with me as a student, rather, the pedagogies and practices of my K-12 teachers only aligned with the strengths and skill sets of certain students. To put it plainly, their pedagogies were not poppin' enough to reach all the different types of learners in their class. For anyone who is unfamiliar with the term, "poppin'" is an adjective, and is slang used to describe something that is stylish, appealing, or enjoyable to take part in. So, when I refer to the lack of poppin' pedagogical practices in teaching, it means that there is simply not enough up to date, appealing teaching practices that students and teachers mutually enjoy participating in.

Before I move on let me be very clear, teachers have one of the most selfless and underappreciated jobs in our country. Not only are we underpaid, but there are hundreds of other responsibilities that come outside of the classroom professionally and personally (especially if you're a teacher with a family, special shout out to you). HOWEVER... although teachers have professional and personal responsibilities to juggle throughout the school year, this does not excuse us from continuing to get better at our craft! Teaching is an art form that constantly needs to be crafted and improved upon each year. If an artist wouldn't submit the same painting exact painting into an art show every year, teachers shouldn't go into the classroom every year without new and relevant practices. Now I know that there are probably teachers reading this who are already rolling their eyes and I just please ask you to stay with me until the end of this piece and you may take something away that will change a student's life.

"To put it plainly, their pedagogies were not poppin' enough..."

The effects of COVID-19 has drastically changed the field of education and how we will operate for the next few years. Some of the obvious changes will be socially distance classrooms, hybrid class schedules, and a heightened emphasis on hygiene throughout the building. These changes will definitely take some getting used to but are simple enough for teachers to practice on a daily basis. A less obvious change that COVID-19 has also made to education is that it has exposed the teachers who have gotten comfortable in their niche and do not grow past their required professional development days. These are the types of teachers that failed to reach the type of student I was in K-12 and kept me from maximizing my potential. When COVID-19 broke out in March, it became very clear which teachers have continuously been working on their teaching methods and which teachers are simply present for their professional development days.

Mr. Lopez's 4 Tips Towards Poppin' Pedagogy

1. Build Your Classroom on Mutual Respect, Rather than Demanding Respect

If you're a current teacher or a pre-service teacher, you've most likely heard the famous phrase, "Don't smile until November" as a way to get your students to fear/respect you to begin the new school year. As a former student and as a current teacher, I think that rule is the most asinine recommendation I've ever heard. Many teachers enter the classroom immediately demanding respect from their students solely on the basis that they are the adult in the room, and they deserve respect for that alone. If the "Don't smile until November" rule actually worked, then why do teachers still have issues with classroom management even after they've been dry and humorless from September through November? Spoiler alert: it's because demanding respect instead of earning it does not work!

Whether you're on year one of teaching, or year twenty-one, it is never too late to try a new approach to start the school year. Instead of demanding respect from your students, shift towards building mutual respect with your students. I found that I always respected teachers more when they treated and spoke to me the same way they would towards their colleagues. While many teachers don't know every single colleague they work with, there is still a mutual respect among each other throughout the building. We shouldn't treat our students any differently than we treat the colleagues in our building, they are young adults who deserve to be respected. On the first day of school, I make it clear to my students that I build my classroom based on mutual respect for one another. I treat them exactly how I would want them to treat me and everyone will be held accountable for their own actions.

2. Take the First Week of School to Get to Know Your Students

Tip number two sets the foundation for tip number one to be successful. Building mutual respect and classroom rapport are important in creating a cohesive classroom culture where all students are excited to come to class. I always recommend taking the first week of school to get to know your students and for your students to get to know each other.

When I say get to know your students, I do not mean go around the class doing cringey first day ice breakers where everyone feels uncomfortable saying their name, birthday, and a fun fact about themselves. It's uncomfortable for everyone and they could be skipped right over. Rather than a boring first day of pain staking ice breakers and syllabus review, give your students a questionnaire.

Along with asking my students fill out a questionnaire, I fill one out myself and display some pictures and images on a slideshow to tell my students a little bit about myself. Doing this allows students to see their educator differently than what they traditionally experience. Seeing their teacher as a real person will make them more inclined to open up and If there's still time left over, I'll ask students to go around and share one answer from the questionnaire that they feel comfortable telling the class. This gives the students choice to share what they are comfortable with and it allows the class to take their first steps in getting to know each other.

James' 2020 workspace, illustrated by Kristen Vargas

Another activity I do on the second day of school is a free write. I ask students to take a picture from their camera roll (ideally a picture with family, friends, or something with scenery) and write two paragraphs about it. The first paragraph is descriptive, so I ask them to describe all of the visual details in the picture as if my eyes were closed and I was trying to imagine their picture in my head. The second paragraph is narrative, meaning I want them to tell me the backstory of the picture. Why did they pick it? Where was it taken? Who are the people in it? Why are they important?

The next two days of class I'll begin with each student briefly presenting about their image and then start to ease into some light content (summer reading, content vocabulary etc.). However, before each day of presentations, I remind students that we are doing this to continue to build trust and respect among each other. Doing this continues to give students the opportunity to express themselves in a space that traditionally rewards content memorization and leaves little room for self-expression.

I'll usually end my week with creating a set of 10 classroom rules that the students an I come together and collaborate on. I'll provide the students with 5 rules that I think are the most important for us to follow, then I'll let them come up with 5 additional rules on their own together. Before I let the students go off an make their rules, I provide them with guided support. I make sure it's clear that the rules they think of will help our class grow as a whole, and they're not rules like "No homework every Wednesday" or "We can wear beanies and hats indoors." Rather, I encourage my students to think of rules that will help us respect and learn from each other at all times and make everyone enjoy being around each other. I first start by making students think of 5 rules on their own, then we come together as a class and they pick 1 of their rules they deem most important, they share it, then we come together as a class and vote on which rules will round out the rest of our top 10. Doing small activities like that sets the tone for the rest of the marking period and it's important for teachers to build off that momentum in their lessons that follow.

Questions I ask:

- **What is your name?**
- **Do you have a nick name? What are your preferred pronouns?**
- **What is the most difficult part about virtual and in-person learning for you?**
- **What are your 3 favorite movie or TV shows?**
- **Who are your 3 favorite music artists?**
- **What are some things you find least enjoyable about (insert content subject) class?**
- **What are some things that I can do to make our lessons enjoyable for you? (ex. group work, including pictures & videos, bringing in real world examples, etc)**
- **Are you involved in any clubs, sports, or have a job after school?**
- **What are two qualitities that make you a good learner? What are two qualities you think you can improve on this year?**
- **Is there anything else you'd like me to know about you before we get the year started?**

· Is the lesson serving all types of learners in my classroom?

· Is there a way I can intergrade technology into this lesson?

· Is the lesson still relevant to our world currently? Are there any current events or real-life examples I can bring into the lesson?

· Is there a way I can make this lesson more student centered and allow them to collaborate rather than working individually?

· Is there a way I can incorporate my students' interests or my own into this lesson?

· Is there a way that my students can relate, share their thoughts, or experiences in this lesson?

· Are we acknowledging which groups of people are represented in the content and which groups may be missing?

3. Treat Your Teaching like an Art Form

It's no secret that teachers are underpaid, overworked, and expected to maintain a high level of professionalism. After several years of teaching it's easy to get into a routine of teaching the same lessons, using the same materials, and doing what you can to keep your head above water. Teachers who have families, coach a sport, advise a club, and do countless other activities add even more onto their plate aside from the 99 other responsibilities in classroom. Although teachers are tasked with juggling a multitude of different responsibilities, this does not excuse us from continuing to get better at our craft. When COVID-19 took our schools by storm, a number of teachers didn't know how to upload a document onto Google Classroom, or even how to host a virtual meeting. Due to the number of different responsibilities teachers take on outside of the classroom, many teachers simply continued teaching the lessons and the activities they did well without making improvements on them.

Every artist starts out drawing stick figures and eventually advances into painting a beautiful work of art that they are consider their lives work. Teaching is no different than being an artist. We are masters of our content and we have the ability to make it come to life every time we step in front of the classroom. If Michelangelo stopped improving his art after he mastered painted on canvases, we would never have the Sistine Chapel. Similarly, if teachers continue to teach the same lessons the same way every year after they've mastered it, we're missing out on the beauty and complexities that exist in our profession. If you have a number of lessons that you feel like you've perfected, ask yourself some of the questions highlighted to the left.

Implementing new strategies are steps any teacher can take in order to take a routine lesson and transform it into an artform. We owe it to our students to make our content come to life, but we owe it to ourselves to be excited to come to work every day and to do it with a purpose. Remember what it was like to be infatuated with your content. At some point we were all young people who were excited to read stories, learn history, go to lab, or solve equations.

4. Don't Be Afraid to Share Your Life with Your Students

We're currently in a time where social media has become where people go to seek first, second, third, and fourth impressions of people. Take it from a new and young teacher, not a week has gone by where I haven't gotten a follow request from a past or current student. And you can also heed my advice as a former high school student when Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook began to enter popularity, students are absolutely taking the time out of their day to look up their teachers on social media. For obvious professional reasons, no teacher would allow a student of theirs to follow them on social media while they are still a minor. But I don't think that teachers should view their students wanting to follow them as an invasion of privacy or a lack of maturity. I actually think it shows that students want to know more about their teachers, other than that we are really knowledgeable in a certain subject area. Students spend almost 5 days a week with us, obviously they want to know about their teacher's life interests! And I don't see any good reason as to why it shouldn't be allowed for our students to see us as more than a teacher.

"I actually think it shows that students want to know more about their teachers, other than that we are really knowledgeable in a certain subject area."

Before I go on, I think every teacher understands the line of professionalism we must walk when we engage with our students, but we have so many different experiences and interests that our students would love to hear about. I don't think teachers should share anything they are not comfortable sharing with their students, but we have plenty of opportunities to allow our students to see us as more than just a teacher. Share your interests, triumphs, defeats, hobbies, and stories with your students. They're interested in finding out more about their teacher even if they may not express it. Opening yourself up to your students is a great way to build relationships with them, but it also helps classroom management as well.

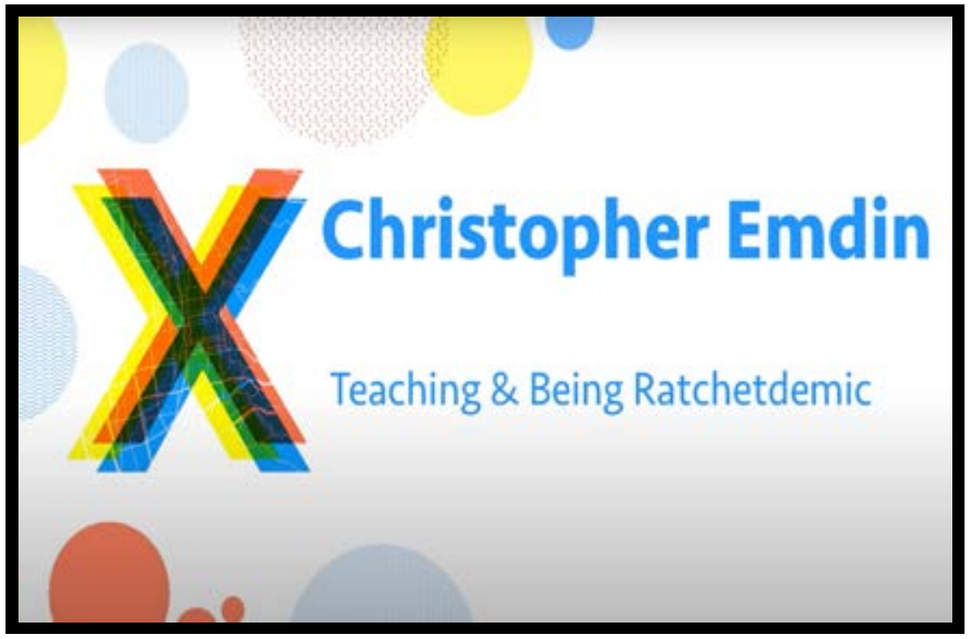
When educators hear the word "classroom management" many immediately assume it means "How well can you keep your students quiet, seated, and working?" I push back on the narrative that a teacher can only have good classroom management if they are a totalitarian leader who is feared by their students. I think that being personable, open, and honest with your students will make them want to respect and work hard for you. Many teachers think that it is impossible to be open and friendly with their students and still be able to hold them accountable for their actions. There is no reason to be a disciplinarian before any problematic behavior even occurs. It is 100% possible for teacher to build relationships with their students and address problematic classroom behaviors at the same time. I believe it's all about finding balance, don't rule out something that you have never done before. If it doesn't work out the first time, go back at it again! Take your time and ease into this style of teaching if you haven't done so before.

Teachers have great potential to inspire an entire generation of learners. We're in the business of shaping minds and developing the adults of tomorrow. Don't let the world sour you, dig deep and reclaim the passion that brought you into the classroom. You never know who you might inspire.

Poppin' Pedagogy
Pros

To give credit where credit is due, the pedagogies and practices of Dr. Edmund Adjapong, Dr. Chris Emdin, and Gloria Ladson-Billings have had the biggest influence on my approach and practices in the classroom.

- James Lopez



Clicking the image above will open a new page with a video of Dr. Christopher Emdin presenting "Teaching & Being Ratchetdemic"

Clicking the image above will open a new page with a video of Dr. Christopher Emdin presenting, "Teach teachers how to create magic."

Part Three
Disruption as Identity & Inspiration

by Marya Mahmood

For educators, being neutral is the same as being on the side of the oppressor.

I cannot continue to academize my own life just because I am already marginalized. Educators need to do their own work. They need to research, ask questions, send emails, read books, and be genuine and openly honest about their pre-existing assumptions and about the things they don't know about. Conversation and discussions on race and diversity need to happen naturally in a classroom. That will only happen if a teacher creates an incredibly safe and positive environment in the classroom where all students feel that they can express their opinions, but also know that the teacher will take a stand if they explain a marginalized experience that happened to them or if they state something biased about other people. There's a difference between indoctrinating your students and staying silent and allowing ignorance and prejudice to continue. As educators, we must draw lines and understand that our voice is important and powerful in the minds of students who will grow to further impact other people in their lives. This isn't a "liberal" or "snowflake" agenda. It's about basic human rights and disallowing prejudice and racism to continue. It's about starting uncomfortable conversations and being dedicated to growth.

I wrote the above months ago, before I started teaching in my own classroom. Now, I teach 9th graders World History. I teach Women and Gender Studies to 11th and 12th graders. I have learned in just a few weeks, what teaching during disruption means.

It means that the students are human beings first. They come first. Their mental healths, their physical health, nothing else matters. At the end of the day, we choose to be teachers for students, not for content. Especially now more than ever, teachers are realizing the importance of checking in on their students. This should not be new.

Teachers, too, are important. Take care of yourselves. You cannot take care of your students if you are not taken care of first. Mental health is key.

Use this time to DISRUPT. The past few months of collective community trauma, especially for Black Americans, has been absolutely horrific. Your job is not to ignore the outside world, but to bring it into the classroom. Have conversations about the pandemic and self care. Have conversations about George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Trayvon Martin, and so many more.

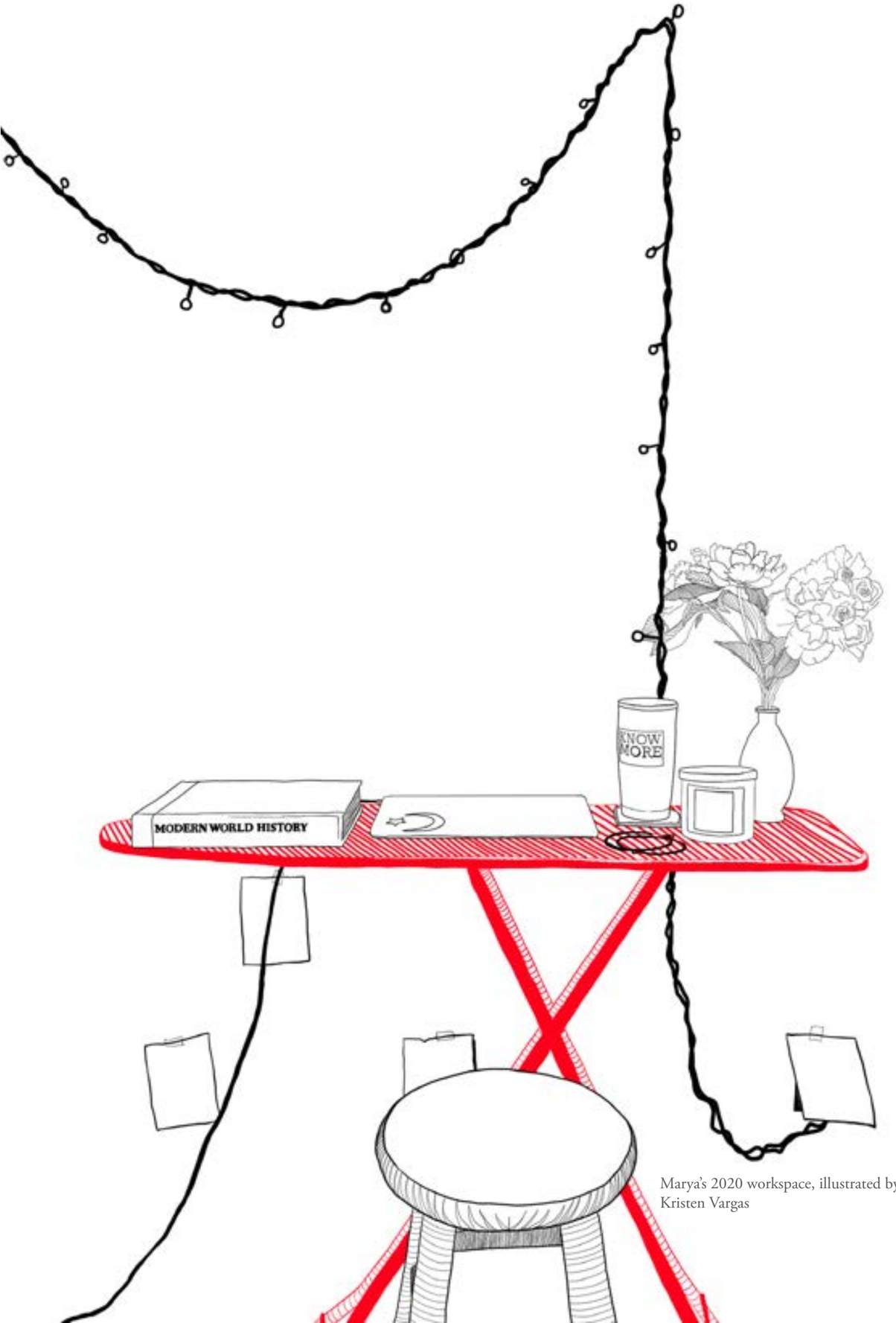
Have conversations about how everyone's lives are changing and uncertain. We have to embrace disruption. Use this time to critically think about how you have taught and how you will teach. Were you being culturally responsive? Were you catering to the needs of ALL students?

Teaching is disruptive, and teaching is impactful. Your voice as a teacher inspires the hundreds of students you have. You have so much power. Just because you may not be seeing your students in person, does not mean that your impact is gone. Teach your students to use their voices and make change. Teach them everything you were never taught.

We NEED to talk about race, religion, socio-economics, and sexuality in the classroom. Intersectionality and oppression do not fall off a students shoulders when they enter a learning space. Instead their and our intersectionality always lies within us. Teachers need to acknowledge the diversity in this world, and the structural injustices and racism that occurs. Silence is violence.

Teaching about injustice is not biased, it is teaching about a fundamental invasion of human rights and decency. We live in a world where the lives of every person of color is politicized, and subject to debate by the government. You can teach your students to have empathy, and to believe in human equality.

This is your job- and it is your turn to disrupt the world that has so much disrupted us.



Marya's 2020 workspace, illustrated by Kristen Vargas

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The Center for the Study of Genocide and Human Rights (CGHR)

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