

2024 WGSC Spring Conference

No Study Without Struggle: Confronting Settler Colonialism in Higher Education

Leigh Patel

**Please join Dr. Patel for
the keynote on Friday,
April 12, at 3 PM**



*Office of the Gender &
Women's Studies Librarian*

Created as an educational resource
for the 2024 WGSC Conference:
April 11-13, 2024, Pyle Center,
University of Wisconsin-Madison
campus

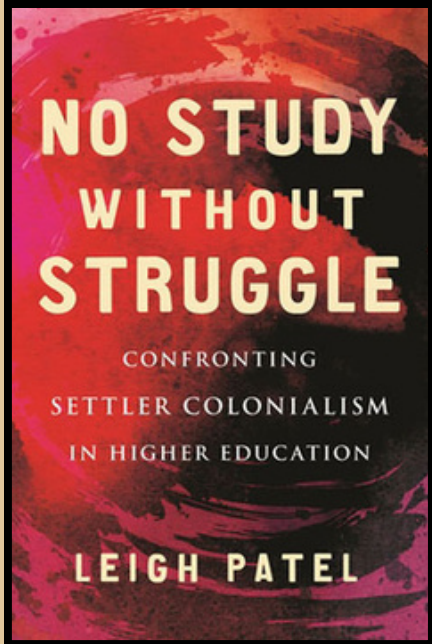
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Introduction

What is the relationship between predominantly white institutions (PWI's), public protest, and the freedom to learn? PWI's have in the past half-century sold themselves on their missions to guarantee the freedom to learn without internal and external violence and at the same time engaged in the erasure of Indigenous people and land treaties and racial and capitalistic violence. Dr. Leigh Patel's book *No Study Without Struggle: Confronting Settler Colonialism in Higher Education* examines the ways in which the histories of the most marginalized have been revised to fit colonial, Eurocentric, racist, and capitalistic narratives of diversity, inclusion, and progress. These histories are interconnected with a lack of desire from these institutions to create a culture of collective success and instead creates a marked individualism that inform their soaring tuition rates, admission processes, and the dynamics and practices that animate college spaces, promotion practices, and post-graduation access to jobs, student debt, and graduate education. Additionally, Patel counters narratives that studying only happens within these institutions, as social movements founded and led by students and young people at societal margins, and located outside of PWI's, have been built on collective study and struggle. Patel charges readers to release preconceived notions about what learning and study is and the role that higher education plays in allowing students to do so.



The goals of this reading guide align with the goals of this Conference: to make resources, learning and ongoing access and conversations about knowledge production a core component of the conference experience. Conference spaces have the same potential that higher education does of recreating oppressive and exclusive dynamics which decenter access and engagement with learning; giving this access to those outside of the conference space is a way that the Conference seeks to disrupt these dynamics. The Conference shares the belief that when those within PWI's and higher education fail to recognize their institutions' role in perpetuating oppression, there is a dismissal of learning as occurring both outside of these institutions and as an inherently human and humanizing project.

This guide was created by Martino Mangano and Amelia Teske, student workers of the Office of the Gender and Women's Studies Librarian (GWSL). Martino (he/him) is a senior majoring in Linguistics and Gender and Women's Studies with a certificate in LGBTQ+ Studies. Amelia (she/her) is a senior majoring in Philosophy (honors) and Gender and Women's Studies (honors). They will both be graduating in May 2024.

Dr. Leigh Patel

Leigh Patel is a writer, educator, and cultural worker. Her work is based in the knowledge that as long as oppression has existed so have freedom struggles. She is a community-based researcher as well as an eldercare provider. Dr. Patel is a Professor of Education at the University of Pittsburgh's School of Education, where she also served as the inaugural associate dean for equity and justice. She is also an elected member of the National Academy of Education and co-directs the mentoring program, Cultivating New Voices.



Prior to being employed as a professor, she was a middle school language arts teacher, a journalist, and a state-level policymaker. She is also a proud national board member of Education for Liberation, a nonprofit organization that focuses on supporting low-income people, particularly youth of color, to understand and challenge the injustices their communities face.

Professor Patel has written for academic outlets as well as being interviewed for or writing for wider outlets including: *Truthout*, *Beacon Broadside*, *The Conversation*, *The Feminist Wire*, and *The Atlantic*. Her latest book, *No Study Without Struggle: Confronting Settler Colonialism in Higher Education*, from Beacon Press, contends with the distinct yet deeply connected forms of oppression while also shedding light on the crucial history of political education for social transformation. Her walk-on song is “Can I Kick It” by A Tribe Called Quest.

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Chapter One

Summary

In this first chapter of the book, Dr. Patel provides the historical and social context for why study and struggle are necessarily and inextricably linked. Dr. Patel situates the following analysis of the book in the framework of settler colonialism as a way to explain the harm and barriers to education that are perpetuated against marginalized populations, pointing out that naming racism in higher education is absolutely necessary but insufficient on its own. The chapter introduces concepts of epistemology, public pedagogy, access, and more to offer the theoretical framework for study and struggle.

“This is a book [...] fundamentally about the struggle to be able to study and the important place study has had in social movements that have fought for access to learning in higher education and education for social transformation.” (4)

Key Terms

Struggle: “People’s rigorous engagement with each other and differing ideas of freedom” (3).

Epistemology: the theory of knowledge, especially with regard to its methods, validity, and scope; the investigation of what distinguishes justified belief from opinion.

Public pedagogy: considers the application and development of educational theory beyond formal schooling.

Settler colonialism: a system of oppression based on genocide and colonialism, that aims to displace an Indigenous population of a nation and replace it with a new settler population.

DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion): organizational frameworks, primarily in higher education institutions, which seek to promote "the fair treatment and full participation of all people", particularly groups "who have historically been underrepresented or subject to discrimination" on the basis of identity or disability.

Discussion Questions

“Diversity” asks how many of which categories are present on any given campus. “Equity,” while important, is rarely defined and therefore left glaringly insufficient. [...] Inclusion is irreconcilable with the foundational hierarchy and surveillance that higher education rests on.” (30-31)

What are some of Dr. Patel’s arguments for why DEI programs fall short? What would it mean, through Dr. Patel’s framework, to truly incorporate ideals and standards of diversity, equity, and inclusion into education?

What would it mean, through Dr. Patel’s framework, to truly incorporate ideals and standards of diversity, equity, and inclusion into education?

What are some examples that show how settler colonialism has always been at the core of land grant institutions?

What are the connections between histories of stolen land and surrounding neighborhoods on your campus?

Can you think of recent examples that reveal the relationship between struggle and study on your campus and surrounding community? Have students led campaigns or protests that overlap with community action?

Chapter Two

Summary

Dr. Patel provides the historical and social context for how American education was founded on settler colonialism and its functions in propagating anti-Black racism, erasing Indigeneity, and seizing Indigenous land for its racial capitalist value as property. Dr. Patel describes the effects of Eurocentric tellings of American history on BIPOC students as they learn in K-12 schools and higher education. The chapter introduces concepts of gift economies, “knowledge for” projects, stereotype threat, and more to offer the theoretical framework for settler colonialism.

“While the impact of racism on higher education is indisputable, and, in many ways, yet to be fully comprehended, much less discussed is settler colonialism, even though it has been a part of higher education from the first universities.” (41)

Key Terms

Gift economy: A system of exchange where valuables are not sold, but rather given without an explicit agreement for immediate or future rewards.

Indigeneity- The quality of being Indigenous or being related to Indigenous culture, practices, lifeways, etc.

Spirit murder: The denial of inclusion, protection, safety, nurturance, and acceptance because of fixed structures of racism; from Bettina Love’s book *We Want to Do More Than Survive*.

“Knowledge for” projects: The justifications used by settlers to control people and land using a moral judgement.

Stereotype threat: The risk of confirming negative stereotypes about an individual’s racial, ethnic, gender, or cultural group which can create negative self-perception, increase stress, and reduce academic focus and performance.

Indebted(ness): The quality or experience of owing a social or economic service to someone or something.

Key Terms (cont.)

Diversity workers- People who work in academic and/or non-academic settings to diversify an organization's people, policies, and/or research.

Munificence: The quality or action of being greatly generous.

Plantation politics: Behaviors enacted by White people and institutions that subjugate and dismiss the humanity and worth of Black people.

Morrill Acts: Laws passed by the U.S. Congress in 1862 and 1890 to develop land seized through settler colonialism for land grant universities.

Service learning: A teaching method that engages students in solving problems within their schools and communities as part of their academic studies.

Discussion Questions

“Settler colonialism is a structure that arranges people relative to land, recast as property, and relative to each other, in the quest for empire. Settlers must always be settling land and turning it into property, Indigenous peoples must always be disappearing, Black peoples’ humanity must always be in question, and forced migrants must always be denied their legitimacy as humans.” (41-42)

What are some ways that settler colonialism informs K-12 education, higher education, and academia as a whole?

“I have heard the question ‘How do I gain access to communities?’ from dozens of academics. As the child of migrants, I have often thought and sometimes asked, ‘Why should you have access?’” (65)

How do the individual goals of publishing and producing knowledge exploit BIPOC communities? What are some examples of collaborative relationships Patel offers that disrupt this cycle?

Chapter Three

Summary

In this chapter, Dr. Patel provides a brief history of the ways in which whiteness as property has been built into the foundations of educational institutions, and how this has proliferated through the systems of profit and debt. From continuing to sell the college experience for profit amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, to accepting bribes from wealthy parents trying to get their students into certain schools, higher education institutions have proven time and again that their main goal is to make a profit from the labor of minoritized students and faculty alike rather than to foster their growth and education.

“Higher education may learn that its responsibility, its indebtedness, is to those who have always striven for learning and knowledge, rather than property and wealth.” (101)

Key Terms

Property: A thing or things belonging to someone.

Wealth: An accumulation of valuable economic resources that can be measured in terms of either real goods or money value.

Debt: Something, usually money, owed by one party to another.

Racialization: The process of categorizing, marginalizing, or regarding according to race.

Racial capitalism: The intersection of racism and class stratification that reproduces race and class stratification across generations.

Carcerality: Referring to institutions of confinement like jails and prisons, as well as the wide range of policies, practices, and institutions that scrutinize individuals and communities both before and after their contact with the criminal justice system.

Discussion Questions

“Poverty and debt do not simply exist naturally. They are created and perpetuated on purpose. Wealth and property accumulation are tied to debt and enclosure. One cannot exist without the other. Because the institutions of higher education share the same settler colonial DNA, it is predicatable (but not ethical) that higher education would also reflect and enact these ties between debt and wealth.” (80)

What are some specific ways you see “whiteness as property” functioning on your campus?

**How should we approach the question of what universities built upon slave labor “owe” to the descendants of those slaves? (pg. 83)
More broadly, what do American education institutions at large “owe” to the cultures and land they have maliciously profited from? (pg. 98)**

What does Dr. Patel mean by “bearing witness” (pg. 85)? In a higher education culture where BIPOC female professors are disproportionately made to bear witness to their students’ struggles, how can students and professors alike navigate the ways in which they communicate, and support each other in, their struggles with their institution?

How do HBCU’s push back against the practices of white wealth, property, and the asymmetrical inheritance of debt? (pg. 100)

Chapter Four

Summary

Dr. Patel provides the historical and social context for how literacy and learning have occurred outside of educational institutions and settler colonial narratives. Dr. Patel describes how American governmental efforts barred literacy from people of color, how communities of color have taken to educating and studying outside of these institutional settings and created their own knowledge systems, and how these study groups support protests and social movements as young people theorize ways of affecting change in their schools and communities. This chapter introduces concepts of fugitivity, gospel literacy, Fugitive Slave Acts, and more to supplement the theoretical framework for settler colonialism.

“For every march that happens, some political education and planning has taken place beforehand, and it has often included study and learning as part of those planning processes.” (121)

Key Terms

Furtive: Secretive, sly, stealthy.

Fugitive: Related to secrecy and escape, especially in the context of enslaved African people fleeing from bondage.

Gospel literacy: Education occurring in Black churches via music and spirituality.

Iron fence disease: Discouragement or depression from internment as seen in Japanese internment camps described in Gail Y. Okawa’s book *Remembering Our Grandfathers’ Exile*.

Afterlife of slavery: The skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment that continue to occur in Black communities after the end of chattel slavery; coined by Black studies theorist Saidiya Hartman.

Key Terms (cont.)

Fugitive Slave Acts: Federal laws enacted in 1793 and 1850 which required that those who found escaped enslaved people return them to their enslavers.

UndocuQueer movement: Public campaign made by undocumented and queer Americans to spread awareness of the struggles of being queer and undocumented and fight for protections for undocumented and queer people.

Discussion Questions

“[MPD150’s] work, which is not attributed to one single person, is freely available online, and has steadily served as a forum for public pedagogies about the struggle for life in the clutches of white supremacy. It is a fugitive praxis.” (117)

What are some examples of public pedagogies that you have interacted with? What are some sources of communal learning/knowledge that are not controlled by institutions?

“Black studies, ethnic studies, and women’s and gender studies departments were largely formed out of the campus protests in the mid-to-late 1960s. However, as Roderick Ferguson notes, these same programs, because of their visibility and dependency on the larger, corporate-like university structure, have ironically become co-opted into places of, at best, symbolic representation of diversity, and at worst, places where faculty and students receive the least amount of funding and support.” (119)

Does this description of critical studies programs fit with your experience as a student? Why or why not? How can students intervene or have a voice in disrupting this pattern?

Chapter Five

Summary

Dr. Patel contextualizes and analyzes the difficulties in teaching to liberate in higher education. Highlighting both personal and historical experiences with pushback from PWI's against critical pedagogy and student protests, Dr. Patel reveals that the increasingly corporate structures of academic institutions label efforts to educate students on settler colonial power and history as "the problem." Dr. Patel emphasizes that at the same time, these institutions need social justice scholars who write about power for public relations purposes and to uphold the appearance of being welcoming to diverse theories of scholarship, while also avoiding taking real action to meet the needs of students whose struggles and protests have the potential to improve conditions for marginalized students on campus. This chapter introduces concepts of interest convergence, containment, and "the other."

“The hallowed halls are not safe spaces for BIPOC populations; they were never intended to be such. But that does not mean that ... we ever stop demanding better from these institutions, demanding them to be answerable to their histories and ongoing practices of exploitation for the profit of a few.” (152)

Key Terms

Strata: Groups of people with shared socioeconomic statuses, i.e. education, income, and social influence.

"The other": In sociology, a person who is categorized as different by a majority group, i.e. non-white, non-man, non-straight, non-cisgender, etc.

Fomenting: Creating sentiments or courses of action.

"Cul-de-sacs": Metaphorical rotation of marginalized students to diversity worker offices to air micro and macroaggressions by faculty.

Key Terms (cont.)

Interest convergence: The act of giving into the demands of marginalized people only when it does not change the power dynamics within institutions.

Containment: The act of limiting social change so that institutions do not lose power.

Discussion Questions

*“ ... Critical race theorist and law professor Derrick Bell ... posed that **Brown v. Board of Education**, which was meant to encourage racial desegregation of schools, was a gesture. A conciliatory act that would sacrifice a bit of power to maintain white supremacy as the cultural and economic stronghold of the country.” (135)*

Since *Brown v. Board of Education*, what other conciliatory acts have taken place in the university, sacrificing a bit of power in order to maintain the status quo of white supremacy? Do you agree with his claim? Why or why not?

“The centering of diversity is, in and of itself, a move on the part of whiteness, as it names the absence of “the other” as the problem, not whiteness.” (138)

How can the university shift from centering ‘diversity’ and thus protecting whiteness from being recognized as the problem, towards practices of recognizing the centrality of whiteness in the university as a problem? Do you think that universities are capable of this change? What sorts of strategies can we, as activists, implement to aid in this decentering of whiteness?

Chapter Six

Summary

Dr. Patel provides the historical and social context for how the combined acts of struggle and study create societal change. Dr. Patel describes how settler colonialism maintains its power by the common fear of disrupting communal and national identity in retelling the violent history of one's community and nation. Dr. Patel urges that if study's validity is only recognized in educational institutions, where it acts to appease settler colonial interests, then it will only further settler colonialism. Dr. Patel demands that institutions of higher education turn away from a desire to protect their reputation and promote individualism and instead create a collectivist academic culture. This chapter introduces concepts of otherwise moments, palimpsests, and beneficent fictions.

“Decolonization and liberation, when we pursue them, will push us to the edges of how we have imagined not only justice but freedom.” (168)

Key Terms

Palimpsest: Something that has been changed but contains elements of its previous state.

Otherwise moments: Instances of pushing back against settler colonial power through refusal and/or joy; from Ashon Crawley's article “Otherwise, Ferguson.”

Language of appeasement: Policies in higher education that seek to increase diversity and inclusion rather than transform campus instruction, culture, climate for marginalized students; from Dafina-Lazarus (D-L) Stewart's article “Language of Appeasement.”

Key Terms (cont.)

“Precise ongoing colonial moves”: Tactics used by institutions of higher education to appropriate transformative ideas from student activism and instead engage in language of appeasement; from Roderick Ferguson’s book *The Reorder of Things: The University and Its Pedagogies of Minority Difference*.

Beneficent fictions: Literary stories that have positive purposes and uses; from Chinua Achebe’s essay “The Truth of Fiction.”

Discussion Questions

“To name these realities and the ongoing erasure of stolen labor and stolen land should cause ruptures in the feelings of school pride, municipal identity, and patriotism that many feel ... if we wait for a “good” time to tell the truth, we will never do it. It is always the right time.” (160)

Where can one see pride and reputation influencing what is deemed political? How are campaigns for change dismissed by this claim?

“While it very much matters that more deans of schools of education are Black in 2020 than ever before, this itself does not shift the material structures of racism that pulse through university processes of admissions, tenure, and grading... having a Black dean does not mean that white male faculty will stop receiving the highest course evaluations. However, refusing to uphold these forms of evaluations would be a transformative action.” (161-162)

What other transformative actions does Patel identify in this chapter? How does abolition and/or refusal play out in these actions?

Further Reading & Resources

Bibliographies

The Office of the Gender and Women's Studies Librarian has created bibliographies for each conference thread. These include articles and books for further engagement and classroom discussions.

a. Centering Women of Color Feminisms

b. Digital Spaces, Online Activism

c. Fugitive Spaces: Feminist, Queer, and Trans Studies

d. Resistance Across the Globe

e. Student Center(ed)

f. Feminism, Community, and the State

g. Feminist Pedagogy and Praxis

Books

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Baker-Bell, A. (2020). *Linguistic justice: Black language, literacy, identity, and pedagogy*. Routledge.

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