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Ethnic Studies in the USA

By Rafael Dominguez

The article “‘If There is no Struggle, There is no Progress’: Transformative Youth Activism and the School of Ethnic studies” by Cabrera, et. al (2013) shows how ethnic studies in the USA continues to be oppressed in school systems. Arizona and Texas are states in which students and teachers organized to put ethnic studies in school curriculums. These organized civil disobedience groups opened a nationwide conversation regarding ethnic studies curriculum in middle schools, high schools, and universities. Arizona and Texas have been states that call ethnic studies courses to be “anti-american” and even “radical.” These states tried pushing legislation that would ban ethnic studies curricula and other states considered doing the same. However, California recently passed legislation that would require an ethnic studies course for a graduate requirement in post-secondary schools. By organizing community members to disobey civically, ethnic studies courses have been gaining more acceptance as part of the effort to transform curriculum in schools.

Grassroots direct action like transformative resistance is considered to be an effective method to promote equity. Transformative resistance occurs when people are motivated by social justice and have a critique of oppression and they change the oppressive system by transforming it into a new system. The opposite of transformative resistance is reactionary resistance in which people react to oppression without regard to social justice. UNIDOS was the organization that fought legislation in Arizona to continue their ethnic studies curriculum in high school. When protests began and teachers and students walked out of class, the media began saying students were simply walking out to ditch school. However instead of going to school, students and teachers instead attended the ethnic studies school that they organized together. Students and professors from around Arizona came together to learn about ethnic studies and they also discussed why they were protesting for ethnic studies curriculum. The forming of the school of ethnic studies showed how the students and teachers wanted real change in their curriculum, they showed that they could create a whole new system that would allow them to learn the curriculum. The students did not just create a new environment in which they could learn in, they also demanded that their voices be heard by tying themselves to school board members’ chairs before they met to discuss the legislation that would end ethnic studies curriculum. They resisted civically in this manner and

they created a new system to learn in which together are effective forms of taking action.

Now more than ever we need transformative resistance across every state. This year we have seen many protests because of police brutality and alike we have seen narratives where organizations like BLM are said to be radical and anti-American. By encouraging the acceptance of ethnic studies classes in classrooms all over the nation we can stop division in the USA. Ethnic studies details the histories of minority groups that have been oppressed in the USA and if others could learn about the systemic oppression that colonial knowledge continues to implement, we would be able to change the systems that continue to oppress minority groups.

Work Cited:

Cabrera, Nolan L, Meza, Elisa L, Romero, Andrea J, & Cintli Rodríguez, Roberto. (2013). "If There is No Struggle, There is No Progress": Transformative Youth Activism and the School of Ethnic Studies. *The Urban Review*, 45(1), 7-22.