CHAPTER 7

The Las Vegas Activist Crew

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This research is a *multidimensional consciousness* analysis of the experiences lived by the immigrant rights activists of Las Vegas (see Covarrubias and Revilla 2003, 466). The focus of this study is im/migration status, but it also provides a critique of race, ethnicity, class, gender, phenotype, sexual orientation, age, and religious and spiritual orientation discrimination. This study is a *counterstory* that examines the collective experience of the Las Vegas Activist Crew, the desire of activists to create social change, and their ability to transform their communities.[1]

Undocumented im/migration is perhaps one of the most pressing dynamics of inequality in the United States and the world today; this issue is compounded by socioeconomic and political inequality. In the United States, the scope of this problem is federal, although it intersects at all levels of government. State and local entities grossly benefit from the exploitation of noncitizen populations, and they provide them with limited social services (primarily public education that is financed through property taxes paid by both undocumented and documented citizens). The "im/migration debate" is interwoven with racist and *citizenist* ideologies (defined below). At the core of the mainstream debate lies the impact that noncitizens have on this nation's economy, national identity, national security, and the changing racial and ethnic demographics of the U.S. population. What is overwhelmingly left out of this discourse, however, is the recognition of human,

labor, educational, sociopolitical, and civil rights violations of a vulnerable population that ensure the economic sustenance of the world's hegemony. Sadly, this is a global reality.

CITIZENISM

Contemporary nation-states, immigration policies, and the socioeconomic and political marginalization of immigrants have created a global system founded on the subordination of noncitizens; we refer to this phenomenon as "citizenism." This term was coined during the course of this research, and it was developed through a communal production of knowledge by the authors. Broadly defined, citizenism is the ideological practice of inherent citizen superiority, the right to dominance of citizens over noncitizens, and a system of unearned advantages and privileges based on citizenship granted at birth. These systems discriminate, disenfranchise, exploit, dehumanize, and subordinate noncitizens living within mostly "developed" nation-states. Therefore, activist struggle begins with questioning the very legal foundations that relegate a marginalized existence to immigrant communities. Furthermore, we argue that the terms currently used to identify anti-immigrant discrimination, such as "nativism" and "xenophobia," do not adequately relay the ideologies used to attack and subordinate undocumented immigrants. For example, according to *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary,* nativism is "a policy of favoring native inhabitants as opposed to immigrants," and xenophobia is "a fear and hatred of strangers or foreigners." Clearly, nativism is a misnomer because "native born" can be confused with being native or indigenous to the land. Nativism is an ideology primarily espoused by U.S.-born people of European descent (that is, socially constructed "white" people) and is often used against Latina/o (and other nonwhite) immigrants, many of whom have indigenous ancestry to the Americas and the Southwest United States, such as Mexican-origin immigrants. Clearly, there is an irony that does not go uncontested when people who do not have indigenous ancestry are arguing their "native" right to the United States and are actively attempting to discriminate against people whose roots are native/indigenous to the Americas (north and south). The term "citizenism" is a rejection of white people's claim as "natives" of the United States, especially when used for the purpose of anti-immigrant or racist discrimination. In addition, xenophobia does not address the structural and institutional forms

of discrimination experienced by immigrants. "Fear and hatred" of strangers or foreigners do not account for the systematic legal restrictions enforced upon immigrants by governmental, state, and local authorities, which lead to outright abusive and dehumanizing behaviors at both individual and institutional levels.

The U.S.-Mexico historical and contemporary immigration systems are an unfortunate example of citizenist systems. The United States has historically ensured the subordination of poor and "nonwhite" immigrants:

> U.S. history is full of attempts to exclude people who did not seem at the time to conform to the image of a "real American." And the treatment of immigrants has always been racialized. Over the years racial hierarchies have shifted and racial definitions changed as European immigrants gained status while Mexican and other Third World immigrants did not. Through a combination of straightforward exclusion, bureaucratic exceptions, and the creation of different mechanisms for entering the country, federal law expanded or reduced immigration based on labor needs, economic anxiety, war, and xenophobia. (Sen and Mamdouh 2008, 51–52)

Contemporarily, this is constructed under a racialized and dehumanized language of "illegality," which constructs an undocumented person as a "criminal Mexican." The majority of undocumented im/migrants in the United States emigrate from Mexico. The most recent study on undocumented im/migration estimates that "the majority of undocumented immigrants (59 percent) are from Mexico, numbering 7 million. Significant regional sources of [undocumented] immigrants include Asia (11 percent), Central America (11 percent), South America (7 percent), the Caribbean (4 percent) and the Middle East (less than 2 percent)" (Pew Hispanic Center 2010, 2). The United States has historically relied on exploited (immigrant and slave) labor to sustain its standard of living; therefore, it has enacted labor and immigration policies that ensure the continued exploitation necessary to maintain its economic foundations.

Once immigrants arrive in this country, they face a myriad of structures of domination that are part of its historical foundations (for example, racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, environmental racism, and so forth), but their subordinate position is upheld through the social and legal con-

struction of noncitizenship, or "illegality." Mexican elites also benefit from their migration in the form of remittances and the removal of a vast portion of its poor population that is forced to flee because of economic repression (also referred to as economic refugees). Remittances sent from immigrants from the United States are the second-largest component of Mexico's economy. Ultimately, the government benefits more from having people emigrate because the country's economy is stimulated and the government does not have to provide critical social services to this displaced population. The unequal treatment of noncitizens in the United States is justified through a criminalization of the undocumented person's labor migration, while citizens enjoy de jure civil rights and legal protections. This system is ineffective and shortsighted, much like the immigration policies created around the world. The argument of illegality is contested because immigration laws globally are unjust and irrational. We cannot continue this construction of illegality under the mantra of what is "right" and "wrong" when the premises of these laws are fundamentally inhumane and unrealistic. The idea behind citizenism is that those who are born with the right to inhabit a nation-state are entitled to more rights and protections than others. In effect, those who are not citizens (that is, undocumented people or asylum seekers) are paying taxes without representation or protection. Noncitizens are human beings with the same capabilities as citizens, and they come in all shapes, sizes, ages, genders, and sexual orientations and with a host of abilities and gifts.

THE IM/MIGRANT RIGHTS MOVEMENT

The global grassroots mobilization for im/migrant rights has brought about unprecedented events in the history of the United States. This movement is fomented by the citizenist repression of undocumented im/migrants. This movement continues to mobilize millions of people who are committed to eradicating injustice, through nonviolent strategies, and who ultimately aim to simultaneously transform this, and other intersecting, systems of discrimination. To some extent, this movement is attributed to a legislative backlash produced after the passage of HR 4437, the Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005—in the House of Representatives (with a vote of 239 to 182) on December 16, 2005. However, this peaceful uprising has deeply rooted historical and socioeconomic oppres-

sive conditions that have led millions of people—primarily Latinas/s—to embark on a crusade for justice in the fight for human rights.[2]

Nevada is a southwestern state that has been described as "the Mississippi of the West" because of the historical segregation and racial segregation encountered throughout the state (Orleck 2005, 37–68). In Las Vegas, African American entertainers were banned from staying in hotels or patronizing casinos on the Las Vegas Strip formally into the 1950s and informally through the 1970s. Today, the legacy of this segregation remains evident on the historically African American west side of Las Vegas and has been transferred to the Latina/o and immigrant population residing primarily in North Las Vegas, but growing throughout the city. An early grassroots movement for welfare reform took place in 1971, when demonstrations organized by poor and predominantly black women were held on the Strip, especially inside the Caesar's Palace Hotel and Casino (Orleck 2005). Nevertheless, Las Vegas had never seen the extent of political mobilization that took place in 2006 as a result of the immigrant rights movement.

This local movement has been gradually growing over the last years, but its catalyst occurred on March 28, 2006, when the first citywide student walkout occurred. The height of this political mobilization is yet to be seen, yet the monumental march of May 1, 2006, will be marked in the history of this city as long as it stands, as it is estimated that eighty-five thousand people marched down the Las Vegas Strip on behalf of im/migrant rights (Pratt 2006).

Undoubtedly, Las Vegas has been changed and its political foundations have been steered in a new direction that was unforeseen by most. May 1 and most of the events leading up to it were organized and coordinated by the Las Vegas Activist Crew (hereinafter Activist Crew)—a loosely formed grassroots organization of student activists (of all educational levels) and community activists. Nationally, this grassroots initiative is present in all the major cities in this country. Locally, the power dynamics within the Latina/o community have been altered, with the Activist Crew providing a new political voice to this expanding community.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Utilizing the theoretical frameworks of Critical Race Theory (CRT), Latina/o Critical Theory (LatCrit), Chicana/Latina Feminist Theory/Epistemology,

and Transformational Resistance Theory, this study provides a critical analysis of the lived experiences of the im/migrant rights activists and also critically examines the institutions (geopolitical, legal, governmental, and societal) that im/migrants confront and resist every day. All of these theoretical frameworks embrace social justice as an integral element of the research process.

The Activist Crew is a grassroots organization actively fighting for social justice in the predominantly conservative environment of Las Vegas. They are actively engaged in Activist Crew transformative leadership pedagogy where traditional notions of leadership and hierarchical frameworks are replaced with flat hierarchies. Embedded in this paradigm is the process of empowerment, transformative learning, action, and leadership development. Additionally, these activists engage in a mutual education of *concientización* (consciousness raising) (Freire 1970). They produce grounded theories about social justice while simultaneously developing a critical consciousness. Activist Crew grounded theory is founded upon the lived experiences of youth and community activists in Las Vegas and is committed to the advancement of social justice.

Critical Race Theory

The fundamental vantage point of CRT is the centrality and intersection of race in the experience of human life, along with other intersecting positions based on class, gender, citizenship, sexual orientation, and others. Furthermore, Mari Matsuda defines CRT as "the work of progressive legal scholars of color who are attempting to develop a jurisprudence that accounts for the role of racism in American law and that work toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination" (Solórzano and Delgado Bernal 2001, 311). CRT, as a legal movement, challenges the dominant ideological notions of equality, color blindness, race neutrality, meritocracy, objectivity, and equality, as these are structural foundations of the institution of the law. The centrality of experiential knowledge—counterstorytelling by People of Color—is also a foundation of CRT. CRT sees the experiences of People of Color as legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and fighting racial subordination.

Hence, controversial by the nature of its content, CRT aims to end the structural component of racism, at the same time acknowledging that rac-

ism "has never been a matter of negative attitudes but an institutionalized set of power relations" (Martínez 1998). It is this set of power relations in the law that must be examined and acknowledged in order to "fix" the injustice and oppressive lifestyles under which millions of people have lived. Another important goal of CRT is to "challenge ideologies of white supremacy and help break the oppressive bond between law and racial power" (Crenshaw et al. 1995, 20). Ultimately, the core values of CRT are justice, empowerment, and self-determination for People of Color who have been historically and systematically oppressed.

Also called into question are the mentalities People of Color have been operating under, which oftentimes are oppressive to themselves and other members of their racial and ethnic groups. CRT recognizes that People of Color can be oppressive to each other and embark on "Olympics of the oppressed," also called "oppression sweepstakes" (Martínez 1998; Moraga 2000). This behavior is the consequence of a mentality that traces its roots to colonization and slavery and continues to divide the necessary alliances of People of Color and all people who live under subordinating structures.

Latina/o Critical Race Theory

Latina/o Critical Race Theory was born in 1995 as an extension of CRT. It further examines the intersection of race with ethnicity, culture, language, nationality, color, religion, and citizenship to engage in analyses of Latina/o experiences. Henceforth, LatCrit contends that a black and white dichotomy is utilized to explain race relations and ethnicity. LatCrit focuses on the racism embedded in the historical mistreatment of Latinas/os and their communities. This type of racism against Latinas/os is implanted in immigration laws and internment camps; it is stolen land grants and silenced languages; it is invisibility and lost identity.

LatCrit is considered "outsider jurisprudence," which includes critical legal studies, feminist legal theory, critical race theory, critical race feminism, Asian American legal scholarship, and queer theory. There are two main objectives of LatCrit: "(1) to develop a critical, activist and inter-disciplinary discourse on law and policy towards Latinas/os, and (2) to foster both the development of coalitional theory and practice as well as the accessibility of this knowledge to agents of social and legal transformation" (Santiago Venator, Torres, and Valdes 2005, n.p.).

Transformational Resistance Theory

Oppositional behavior is classified under this theory as reactionary behavior, self-defeating behavior, conformist behavior, and transformational resistance. These categories are determined by the critical level of awareness of the systems of domination and the motivation to fight for social justice. This work focuses on the latter type of oppositional behavior and how activists of the immigrant rights movement fit within it. Daniel Solórzano and Dolores Delgado Bernal (2001) describe in detail the four types of resistance or oppositional behaviors. According to them, those who engage in reactionary behavior have little or no level of critical consciousness; they are not motivated for social justice and have no potential for emancipation. Self-defeating resistance possesses some level of awareness but is not motivated to fight for social justice. Conformist resistance, on the other hand, possesses the motivation to fight for self- or social transformation, yet there is a lack of a sophisticated critique of the systems of domination. Transformative resistance, unlike the aforementioned concepts, is characterized by external and internal behaviors, and it is both overt and subtle. There is a motivation to fight for social justice and a sophisticated critique of the systems of domination. Activist Crew grounded theory expands on this model by delving into the different forms of internal resistance and the levels of consciousness in which this resistance exists: consciously, spiritually, psychologically, emotionally, and physically. As indicated by one of the crew members, Neza, who was raised in Las Vegas and born in Durango, Mexico, "It is one thing to rebel psychologically and spiritually and a complete other thing to rebel physically."

The ideal of liberation, then, is essential for the Activist Crew. Particularly with the public demonstrations and the effects they have on the consciousness of the activists, the idea of liberation began expanding to reach new levels of consciousness and liberation through rebellion—a physical, spiritual, and psychological rebellion toward the institutions that have maintained the system of oppression.

Multidimensional Struggle and Consciousness

Covarrubias and Revilla write about the concept of a multidimensional consciousness, which "consists of a sophisticated critique of how multiple,

intersecting structures of domination . . . interact with each other and impact one's social and political situation as part of a historical condition. Consciousness is understood as a fluid process within which those who are developing it will be at different levels at different times" (2003, 466). Hence, the intersections of race, class, gender, immigration status, sexual orientation, religious and spiritual orientation, age, and other discernible characteristics underlie the foundation of a multidimensional consciousness. Therefore, in order to defeat the structures of domination, there arises a multidimensional struggle to combat colorism, xenophobia, queerphobia, nativism, classism, sexism, ageism, citizenism, environmental racism, heterosexism, and racism. This is the internal and external struggle of the Activist Crew and its members.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research examines the activism that took place and shaped the im/migrant rights movement in Las Vegas. The study uses grounded theory, one-on-one interviews, participant action research, document examination, and analyses of daily interactions of the activists; moreover, this is grounded in our own activism and lived experiences as activist researchers. Hence, the study provides an in-depth look into activist and social justice circles that are typically unknown to academia.

We completed more than thirty semistructured interviews of Activist Crew members, which included students from all levels of formal education and community members. In the interviews, the activists discussed their experiences with im/migration, their political philosophies, and their motivations for being involved in this movement. Further, they delved into their definition of social justice and how this movement has changed their lives.

Participant observation was the primary research method utilized for this project. In conjunction with other activist researchers who have engaged in this form of research, we push to employ the concept advanced by Sandra Harding of "strong objectivity" (1992). Moreover, this project utilizes a Chicana feminist epistemology as outlined by Delgado Bernal (1998). It advances a further developed notion of objectivity, which is centered on fairness, honesty, and detachment and can be maximized when these elements are present. Consequently, this notion of "strong objectivity" examines the power dynamics of our society and how they are "exercised less visibly, less

consciously, and *not on but through* the dominant institutional structures, priorities, practices, and languages of the sciences" (Harding 1992, 567). Thus, as members of several interlocking marginal groups in this society, we subscribe to the notion of relativism and to the challenge of objectivity.

By its very nature, CRT validates the experiences of People of Color, not as biased but as analytical tools to understand the dynamics and social injustice in U.S. society. Counterstory is a powerful and credible source of information of historically disempowered people(s); it is referred to as *counterstory* because it stands in opposition to the *majoritarian* story. The methods of *counterstorytelling* can take various forms, such as parables, family herstory or history, biographies, scenarios, chronicles, and narratives (Solórzano and Delgado Bernal 2001; Yosso 2006). We utilize the Critical Race Theory methodology of *counterstorytelling* to tell the story of Las Vegas activism.

WALKOUTS: *¡LA LUCHA SIGUE!* [THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES!] (1968–2006)

> In March of [1968] . . . over 10,000 students walked out of the predominately Chicana and Chicano high schools in East Los Angeles to protest the inferior quality of their education. For many years prior to the Walkouts, East Los Angeles community members made unsuccessful attempts to create change and improve the educational system through mainstream accepted channels. These formal requests went unanswered. The students received national attention and earned support from numerous people and organizations both inside and outside of the East Los Angeles communities. (Solórzano and Delgado Bernal 2001, 308–9)

The 1960s are remembered in the American consciousness as tumultuous years of social upheaval, including the civil rights, LGBT, women's, American Indian, Black Power, Chicana/o, and Asian American movements. The Chicana/o movement transformed the image of the submissive "*Mexicana/o*" to one of an entire community united to fight against institutionalized discrimination. As articulated in the passage above, students led this movement as they provided a nontraditional grassroots model that gave them sufficient results. Moctesuma Esperanza, a student at the time, described the era in the following manner: "This was a time in which enough Chicano students had gained mastery of the tools that were necessary to shake up the system

and had taken the ideals of the country to heart . . . and so we protested for our rights."[3]

Inspiration from the Past

Las Vegas youth were, in part, inspired by the 1968 high school walkouts, as a recount of them was released in the HBO film *Reading. Writing. Revolution. Walkout: Based on the East L.A. Student Protests of 1968*,directed by Edward James Olmos. This film was released on March 25, 2006, and inspired not only Las Vegas youth but quite possibly youth throughout the United States. As students learned about various alternatives to change the circumstances they faced, they already held a deep understanding of the systems of discrimination that shaped their lives. A fifteen-year-old Rancho High School student articulated this point: "Although I'm not undocumented and was not brought to this country when I was young, I'm still very affected by the proposed immigration laws. Many people close to me are undocumented and limited to what they can achieve as it is so far. With these laws it would make it impossible for them to live out the American Dream. I participated in this march to show the obvious flaws that the proposed laws portray. . . . I've learned a lot by becoming involved" (Flores 2006).

Thus, largely motivated by the injustices the students faced, the Activist Crew concluded that peaceful civil disobedience would be an effective tool to advance their cause. On March 28 and March 31, there were two citywide student walkouts, the first of their kind in the history of the city, in which students from elementary, middle, and high schools walked out of school in unprecedented numbers and sparked the local immigrant rights movement. The students who participated in these events have seen firsthand the separation of their families, the future of their loved ones and themselves limited because they do not have a piece of paper—a legal permanent resident card or a birth certificate—that will allow them or their loved ones to live a life outside of the shadows and obtain a college education.

More important, the youth of Las Vegas are responsible for the awakening of this city toward grassroots political activism and the fight for social justice. Even though there had been a number of previous demonstrations that had taken place, the student walkouts were monumental to the immigrant rights movement. They began the transformation of Las Vegas, even

without the initial support of the community; the students organized massive walkouts that are unprecedented in the city and local consciousness.

The Catalyst: Del Sol High School

It is important to point out that as the anti-immigrant sentiment fomented and entered the classrooms of Las Vegas, even before the nationwide actions, student mobilization and *conscientización* began. On March 16, 2006, the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* reported that approximately twenty students walked out of class after a teacher remarked to a group of Latina/o students, "Well, you guys are immigrants. You guys shouldn't even be here. I could get arrested if I teach immigrants [in reference to HR 4437], and you guys should be thankful that you're in school right now because you're immigrants" (Planas 2006).

Robert Gomez, a senior in the class who walked out, recalled this event when we met him during a march on April 1. We were deeply impressed by his *coraje* (anger) and willingness to speak out. He is representative of the rising consciousness and desire to see change from youth in Las Vegas and nationally.

These students were racially and ethnically profiled and automatically assumed to be im/migrants because they were Latina/o and were further ostracized for their perceived "illegal" status. Francisco Brieno, another student who walked out, "paraphrased his teacher's remarks: 'The illegal people come over here and get a free education. . . . You should be thankful you're in school.'" The students who walked out participated in acts of external and transformative resistance to voice their frustration. After the teacher "apologized," stating, "All I was trying to get across is that there are so many immigration laws that are not enforced," the principal, John Barlow, decided that she would not be reprimanded for the incident (Planas 2006).

However, this was not the first time that students at this school encountered racist conflict. As then cochair of El Movimiento Estudiantil Chicana/o de Aztlán (Movement of Chicana/o Students of Aztlán), known as MECHA de UNLV, Evelyn met with the principal of the school the week following the walkouts. At the meeting, the principal stated that there had been two incidents in which two black male students had been pepper-sprayed, and these incidents prompted the discrimination claims to arise. Consequently, the principal received a petition signed by fifty-nine students a month prior

to the Del Sol High School walkout. This petition stated that the student either had been discriminated against or had witnessed some form of discrimination. Latina/o, black/African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, and white/Caucasian students signed the petition.

The principal further stated that most of the students who signed the petition, whom he talked to after the walkout, did not know what they were signing and that they felt as though they were happy at that school and were not experiencing discrimination. He believed that the majority of the students who signed the petition were those who "need attention," have bad grades, and have bad attendance records. After the walkout, the principal agreed to meet with the students and the community to discuss the issue. Very little came as result of these meetings. In fact, in 2007 the students tried to form a local high school chapter of MECHA, a Chicana/o student organization, and the students were denied and instead encouraged to create a multicultural organization for all students. The administration clearly missed the point on several occasions.

The students attempted different methods to call attention to their concerns, as did the students in 1968 in East Los Angeles. This particular situation exemplifies the paternalistic and dismissive attitude of the concerns presented by students of color. Del Sol High School is a microcosm of the institutionalized xenophobic undertone that is currently sweeping the United States. Hence, the student walkouts demonstrate the transformative resistance of these students as they hold a sophisticated critique of the oppressive conditions they live and the commitment to collectively fight for social justice. They took their struggle to the public and stormed the Las Vegas Strip. One student's poster message that particularly resonated with us read, "What Happened to No Child Left Behind?" The students were fundamentally critiquing the lack of access to education. Undocumented children compose approximately 16 percent (1.8 million) of the undocumented population in the United States. However, nationwide we have refused to aid these students in their quest for a higher education. Nevada, not being the exception to the rule, has considered extreme citizenist legislation for all im/migrant students. In 2006, Senate Bill 415 was introduced but not passed into law; it stated that "certain alien students are not eligible to receive certain types of financial assistance through the Nevada System of Higher Education" (Nevada Legislature 2009). Thus, when high school, middle school,

college, and elementary school students decided to engage in a spiritual, psychological, and physical rebellion, they were not merely "troublemakers"; rather, they were conscious actors attempting to disassemble the segregation-based system of higher education for undocumented and low-income youth.

United We Stand, Divididos Caeremos! (United We Stand, Divided We Will Fall!)

After the walkouts, the Activist Crew created the *Students Stand Up! Newsletter* (edited by University of Nevada–Las Vegas [UNLV] undergraduate student Evelyn Flores). In response to their misrepresentation in the media, the students wrote:

> Below is a list of points that led to the decision to walk out:
> - We want to be heard, taken seriously, and recognized.
> - We want to voice our opinion on the matter of immigration laws.
> - We chose to Stand Up for our rights and those of our people who are ignored and silenced.
> - We demand just laws, equal opportunity, and human dignity.
> - We want it to be known that discrimination stems from fear of the unknown.
> - We unite as one voice.
> - We are setting stepping stones for our future children's education.
> - We want to educate the youth and encourage peaceful demonstrations and student activism in our community. (Flores 2006)

This newsletter's purpose was to provide an avenue for students and community members to tell their stories, given that they never received an accurate representation of their struggle in the media. The youth faced a multidimensional struggle, including ageism, that is, discrimination based on their age. There was an overwhelming patronizing reaction throughout the community, Latina/o and otherwise, that treated the students as "ignorant," immature, and truants and further criminalized them.

Within the community, the students engaged in several meetings to discuss the issue. "Zapata," a community activist, who did not share the majoritarian and ageist sentiment, expressed the following, which summarizes the attitude toward the youth from the community: "[Hay] . . . personas que dicen que ustedes son unos niñitos que no saben lo que están haciendo . . . pero eso no es cierto, ustedes son el espiritu de este movimiento" (There are people who say

that you guys are a bunch of little kids who do not know what they are doing, but this is not true. You all are the spirit of this movement).[4] The purported leaders of the Latina/o community failed to see the potential in uniting with the youth as equals in order to create a binding grassroots coalition. However, this does not include all the members of the community. There were some remarkable people whose support proved monumental.

MECHA de UNLV also proved instrumental in providing support to students during the second student walkout. After the first student walkout, student leaders from the university had lunch together. While eating *pupusas,* they tried to come to a consensus on how to proceed to support the youth and the im/migrant rights movement. Present at that meeting were students from the College of Southern Nevada (CSN), UNLV, MECHA de UNLV, Student Organization of Latinos (SOL), and League of United Latin American Citizens. At the meeting, the university students decided to support the second walkout the high school students were organizing for Friday, March 31, 2006. Contrary to media accusations, the students decided to wait three days until the end of their proficiency exams to walk out. They purposely made the decision so as to not jeopardize students' test scores on the proficiency exams, which are a requirement for graduation.

At the meeting, everyone agreed that no particular organization would take credit for helping the students and they would work together in coalition. Later that evening, in a phone conversation, the president and former president of SOL and the cochair of MECHA had a two-hour conversation in which the SOL members informed her that they would retreat from participating in the walkouts because they could be held "legally liable." They believed that supporting the walkouts would have a negative impact on their "future political careers." Two days later, SOL sent out a press release, stating the following:

> The Student Organization of Latinos (SOL) at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, is asking its members and chapters to stay in the classrooms during the proposed student Walkouts.
>
> The mission of SOL is to promote higher education and the organization is encouraging its members to focus on the issues in an academic environment. SOL is asking its members to host debates and town hall forums at their respective schools.
>
> The Student Organization of Latinos is the oldest, student-based

> Latino organization in the State of Nevada, established on the UNLV Campus in 1968. Currently, SOL has over 1,500 members and has chapters at the University, College and High School level with a combined total of 14 chapters. (Flores 2007, 1)

SOL was mistakenly given credit for organizing walkouts with the students (Lazos 2007). Unfortunately, the stance taken by SOL perpetuates a *majoritarian* narrative that wrongfully accuses students of not caring about their education if they walk out. This kind of narrative attempts to place students who choose not to exercise their right to protest as more committed to education than those who do. We argue, however, that is not the case. Furthermore, under the transformative resistance framework, not supporting the students' decision to walk out could be considered conformist resistance or self-defeating resistance (or both), because even though they had a critique of oppression (racism and citizenism) affecting students and were motivated for social justice, there may be a lack of a critical *multidimensional consciousness* that values all forms of transformative resistance. Furthermore, it is likely that ageism may be at play, as it is likely that the middle and high school students were not viewed as mature enough to make the decision of whether to walk out. Indeed, the fear about their careers being affected points to a conformist perspective rather than a transformative one that is critical of institutions and careers that maintain social injustice.

The elementary, middle school, and high school students proved to be the visionary leaders of the community when they decided to walk out again on Cesar Chavez Day (March 31, 2006), and they successfully and peacefully carried out the largest student walkout in the history/herstory of Las Vegas. In reference to the walkouts, Zapata stated, "Los estudiantes fueron la causa principal para que después las demás personas que se dieron cuenta que realmente esto iba enserio y que los estudiantes tenían razón entonces ya fue que las demás personas asistieron" (The students were the principal cause for the rest of the people to realize that this was going to happen for real and that the students were right all along was apparent. Then the rest of the people participated).

Feminist activist scholars Baumgardner and Richards write, "Superficially, high-school students are often seen as powerless. As minors, they can't vote and thus don't have the presumed value that comes with being a constituent.

. . . A more positive and accurate assessment of high-school students is that they are unique as social change-makers" (2005, 32). The students are not jaded, and they are connected to hundreds of other students—which is ideal for organizing as they demonstrated during the walkouts, which they organized primarily using MySpace, e-mail, text, and notes made during class. In Las Vegas some of them walked more than twenty miles from school to downtown and back in order to embark on a pilgrimage of justice. As Revilla articulated in an online blog:

> Injustice Causes Revolution:
> Reflections on the Las Vegas Student Movement
>
> On Tuesday (3/28/06) and Friday (3/31/06), Las Vegas elementary, middle, and high school students walked out of class to protest the racist laws and attacks being made against their families, friends, and communities. The numbers of student protestors were estimated at 1000 on Tuesday and 3000 on Friday. I want to acknowledge the students' passion and motivation for this protest and recognize that throughout history the youth have been largely responsible for social change in our society. I want to further recognize the support that MECHA de UNLV and other students from CCSN [the Community College of Southern Nevada, now CSN] and UNLV offered to the students. It was indeed an inspiration to witness such amazing defenders of justice!
>
> Saturday, there was another protest organized by high school students. It began at Rancho High School and ended at City Hall. The numbers were estimated between 250–300. Again, I want to applaud the students and community members that organized this demonstration against the xenophobia/nativism sweeping the country. It was inspiring! However, I was discouraged to see that the media portrayed the main message of this protest as a negative judgment of students' actions on Tuesday and Friday. (Flores 2006)

Students have described this movement as a "revolution"—a peaceful uprising whose ultimate aim is to liberate those who live within the shadows. Many of them indicate that it is also an intellectual revolution, in which the daily lives of those who have been impacted by the movement will never be the same. Ultimately, the words of the youth will better articulate the mean-

ing of the movement to them. According to "Nate Guanaco Pipil," a high school senior from a predominantly Latina/o school:

> Walking out on Tuesday was probably one of the best things that I have ever done. Being surrounded by a large group of Latinos who were ready to fight for La Causa truly overwhelmed me.
>
> But now it seems as if the media is giving us nothing but negative feedback. Well let me tell them this . . . How can you call these students ignorant and uneducated?! Just because they do not know the name of the bills or what the Senate Judiciary Committee is, does not mean they are ignorant! Just by witnessing the labor their parents or families must endure on a daily basis due to their status or color of their skin makes them aware of the social injustice! So who's really ignorant?! Personally, I believe that the individual who speaks about ignorance without being aware of the oppression we face on a daily basis in this country is the ignorant one! (Flores 2006, 2)

The Activist Crew was the core organizing entity of the April 10 and May 1 actions in 2006, as well as the subsequent marches in 2007 and 2009. They also orchestrated several other important forms of activism (both external and internal) such as press conferences, newsletter publications, and other educational forums for the community. They came together during the walkouts and continue to organize into the present. Many of the students have joined with Hermandad Mexicana in Las Vegas, several Mexican federation organizations, and other community groups to form the United Coalition for Im/migrant Rights.

The year 2006 was a catalyst of unprecedented social upheaval in Las Vegas. This movement continues to be fomented by the repression that undocumented im/migrants live under citizenism. This movement continues to mobilize millions of people who are committed to eradicating injustice—through peaceful measures—and who ultimately aim to fight for justice using a *multidimensional* vision. This peaceful uprising has deeply rooted historical and socioeconomic oppressive conditions that have led millions of people to embark on a crusade for justice for human rights.

Las Vegas has never seen the extent of political mobilization that is currently taking place, particularly coming from an overwhelmingly overshadowed community such as the Latina/o community. The youth of Las

Vegas were the leaders who sparked this mobilization, given the institutionalized *multidimensional struggle* they face every day through the intersecting and simultaneous oppressions they endure in their lives. Even though the power of their actions is not yet acknowledged, history/herstory will prove their actions courageous and necessary. There will be an entire generation of Latina/o youth who will remember the power of their collective action and the effects these actions had in transforming their lives and their environments.

May 1 and most of the events leading to it were organized and coordinated by the Las Vegas Activist Crew. The Activist Crew was born out of this collective action. The lessons learned by the activists were meaningful, life changing, and painful. The interviews conducted have a common link: all indicate that their lives are forever changed. On a daily basis, the Activist Crew members developed their grounded theory in their struggle for social justice. The activists engaged in a collective *conscientización* that produced and developed the theoretical concepts to explain their experiences. Hence, the local immigrant rights movement contributes to the cannon of CRT because it is a CRT movement that actively critiques the multidimensional matrix of rights.

Activist Crew grounded theory delves into the different forms of internal and external resistance and the levels of consciousness in which this resistance exists—consciously, spiritually, and physically. This transformational resistance becomes a process of liberation. The challenge is to continue growing and developing a critical consciousness and maintaining a critical lens in order to engage in transformative resistance. As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. told us, "I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. . . . Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial 'outside agitator' idea. Anyone who lives inside the United States can never be considered an outsider anywhere within its bounds."[5]

NOTES

The backslash in "im/migration" is used to denote two words that are used as one throughout the article: migrant and immigrant. The former denotes the move-

ment of people within a territory (that is, the continent of the Americas), and the latter denotes the movement of people in and out of territories. This is of sociopolitical significance for the migration of Latinas/os to the United States given their indigenous/native ancestry.

1. A *counterstory* critically recounts the experiences of discrimination and resistance from the perspectives of those on society's margins; a *majoritarian* story is told by those who have historically been in power. See Yosso 2006.

2. We utilize "Latina/o" as an umbrella term to encompass the differing national identities of im/migrants, including Latin American, Hispanic, Latina/o, and Chicana/o.

3. As seen in the PBS film *Chicano! History of the Mexican-American Civil Rights Movement.*

4. "Zapata" is a self-chosen pseudonym for a community member in his fifties, born in Mexico and longtime resident of Las Vegas, who participated in the 2006 immigrant rights movement.

5. Letter from Birmingham Jail (http://abacus.bates.edu/admin/offices/dos/mlk/letter.html).

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