

# Temporal Politics of Coalition

## Learning from Student Activists and Responding to Attacks on Critical Race Theory

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**Abstract:** This article examines student activists' coalitional leadership at the University of Arizona during the civil rights movement. Through a detailed archival study of the university's student newspaper, their case study outlines how two student organizations combatted evasive administrators who maintained white hegemony through "race-neutral" policies and appeals to the "silent majority." In response, student activists in the Black Student Union (BSU) and the Mexican American Liberation Committee (MALC) articulated demands for institutional change and built widening coalitions to support those demands. We argue that these past attempts to silence student-led coalitions mirror the current conservative attacks on teaching Critical Race Theory (CRT). Studying the rhetorical strategies of past student activists from our own campuses can help students in our classes combat attacks on CRT, which are specifically targeted at undercutting the coalitional capacities of BIPOC students.

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### Introduction

Histories of student activism within rhetoric and composition have looked at The City University of New York (CUNY) open-admissions policy to demonstrate the foundational influence BIPOC students have had on our profession. In particular, Carmen Kynard's work in Vernacular

Insurrections famously resituated CUNY's open admission policies in "the larger constellation of Black and Puerto Rican activism in New York City" and thereby challenged our discipline's identification of Mina Shaughnessy's role as a founding figure in basic writing and the broader "white integrationist narrative" (150). Revealing how our profession has suppressed the legacy of Black and Latinx student activism, Kynard challenges historians in rhetoric and composition to constitute our discipline based on the coalitional leadership of BIPOC student activists. Responding to Kynard's challenge means researching the institutional contexts impacted by and responsive to student-led social movements and analyzing the archival materials related to those movements. In opposition to the seminal histories of our discipline, which considered the publications of major professional journals (Berlin), the classrooms of Harvard professors (Brereton), the intellectual histories surrounding the first-year writing classroom (Crowley), and the major textbooks used by composition instructors (Connors), Kynard looked to the activism of Black and Puerto Rican students that worked to transform their university to resemble their neighborhoods and communities.

Many scholars have echoed Kynard's call to center histories of our discipline on BIPOC students' activism (Gilyard; Trimbur; Molloy). These studies have coincided with a turn toward the local histories of HBCUs, HSIs, Normal Schools, and high schools (Kates; Gold, *Rhetoric at the Margins*; Enoch; Mendenhall). Similarly, our goal is to center the student activists on our campus at the University of Arizona who fought to make their institution responsive to the cultures and languages of their communities, and it builds on the movement among historians in rhetoric and composition who research the experiences of teachers and students who worked in institutions responding to the social, political, and economic challenges facing students. For example, the research featured in Donahue and Moon's edited collection, *Local Histories*, captured the diversity of writing instruction across regional and educational contexts in the US by studying a range of archival material: students' notes, accounts of institution celebrations, teacher's formal writings, annual report, course catalogs, and faculty minutes (5). Ostergaard and Wood's *In the Archives of Composition* extended *Local Histories* by featuring research on the sites where a majority of students in the US were taught to write: high schools and normal schools. Ostergaard and Wood argue that "local stories can reveal powerful counter-narratives as well as co-narratives that may productively complicate our sense of our own disciplinary past" (20).

We build on these histories by centering (via Kynard) how Black and Mexican American student activists disrupted white hegemony at the University of Arizona during the 1960s and 1970s. Specifically, we examine two parallel initiatives during the 1969-1970 academic year: (1) the Black Student Union's (BSU) campaign to cancel all athletic events with Brigham Young University because of that institution's affiliation with the Church of Latter-Day Saints, whose racist doctrines at the time excluded Black people from becoming priests, and (2) the Mexican American Liberation Committee's (MALC) campaign to revise the "tokenizing" and "concocted" Mexican American Studies (MAS) program used to "appease the Chicano community at large and the Chicano student body in particular" (Bradford, "MALC Rejects"). The parallel efforts provide critical

examples of how students today might craft their own coalitional tactics among constituents on their campuses and within their surrounding communities to defend the rights currently under attack with the demonization of CRT. In other words, we argue that teaching the history of coalitions on our campuses may promote coalitional thinking among teachers and students now.

Our approach draws from Natasha Jones's concept of coalitional learning. Jones defines coalitions "as relational, dynamic configurations that are attuned to issues of power, privilege, and positionality while actively pursuing options for addressing and redressing inequities and oppressions" (519). This notion of coalition is rooted in the legacy of black feminists who recognize "that the major systems of oppression are interlocking" and require collective and integrative action ("Combahee River Collective"). Jones and a chorus of transdisciplinary scholars in technical professional writing and composition studies build from Black feminist traditions to theorize how "an intersectional understanding of oppression requires a coalitional approach to change" (Walton et al. 12). Importantly, coalitional learning asks teachers and students to work across boundaries of discipline, privilege, power, and difference to address the specific problems they face. In this way, we believe that coalitional learning provides historians in rhetoric and composition with an important call to teach the history of coalitions to inspire coalitional thinking.

We also invite scholars to conduct their own archival research on student activism on their campuses and consider how that activism speaks to current political moments. Our study and others like it encourage students "to show solidarity with a broader transhistorical community" of student activists who have combated white hegemony at their universities (Graban and Hayden 8). We hope our study of the archives of past student activists will help readers consider how they might use such research on their own campuses to combat attacks on school curricula, especially those centered on CRT efforts.

In the following sections, we first explicate how, in 1969-1970, the University of Arizona's President, Richard Harvill, delegitimized Mexican American and Black students' demands for social justice. We, then, outline the coalitional lessons present-day students can learn from studying how BSU and MALC representatives worked together to expose the racism that motivated Harvill and his administration's claims of neutrality and how the BSU and MALC representatives' arguments might be extended to also understand and combat the racism that has continued to motivate educational disparities in Tucson's public schools in 2010 and again in 2022. We also consider the ways these historical BSU and MALC characterizations of Harvill's rhetoric parallel Tom Horne's (superintendent in 2010 and now again in 2022) more current demonization of Tucson High's MAS program. Finally, we highlight the legislation that former MALC student activist (1969-1970) and current Arizona congressman Raúl Grijalva has now proposed to continue to defend schools from conservative attacks on CRT. Considering these efforts together enables students and educators to examine patterns in coalitional movements and apply those patterns to the ongoing efforts of those engaged in social justice work to create systemic change.

## Harvill's Dismissive Rhetoric and Student Activists' Coalitional Lessons (1969-1970)

The president of the University of Arizona, during the 1969-70 academic year, Richard Harvill, underwent drastic measures to ignore and silence the demands of student activists. He employed two main dismissive strategies: 1) he claimed that student activists did not represent the majority of the student body, and 2) he argued that administrators needed to remain neutral on social issues.

### The Bear Down Incident

It is important to note that this was not the first time activists found Harvill's rhetoric to be a disservice to the larger student community at UA. In 1968, BSU leaders submitted a list of demands to Harvill that included "the establishment of a non-discriminatory off-campus housing service, the inclusion of a Black Studies Department in the campus academic structure, the recruitment of Black instructors and students, and a full-scale investigation of employment practices" (Kornman). These demands included a one-month ultimatum forcing Harvill to respond publicly. In a series of articles, Harvill explained that he was unwilling to respond to the BSU's ultimatums because they were "improper methods of voicing views regarding policies and procedures in the academic community" (Kornman). In response, BSU organized a broader coalition of students called the "Committee for Students' Rights" (Staff, "Committee"). One of the organizers of this committee, Karen Schwartzman, described the reasoning for the coalition: "All students must become aware of and will be informed about the pressing issues of this time in history. Students at the University have a particular responsibility toward knowing the issues of their own campus..." (Staff, "Committee"). In this way, BSU leaders began to make the work of combating Harvill's dismissive rhetoric an issue for all students.

A detailed reading of the Arizona Daily Wildcat (ADW) from the 1969-1970 school year reveals that the Black Student Union (BSU) continued to dominate the public discourse on campus—a historical fact that previous studies of student activism at UA have not emphasized<sup>1</sup>. For months, student leaders of the BSU wrote newspaper articles and organized public demonstrations that demanded their university and the Western Athletic Conference (WAC) cut athletic ties with Brigham Young University (BYU) because of its affiliation with the Church of Latter-Day

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<sup>1</sup> These histories do not discuss the leading role that Black student activists played on campus and fall into a larger historical trend to render Black Arizonans "indiscernible" (Glegziabher 347). Meskerem Glegziabher's recent article for the *Journal of Arizona History* outlines the "comparative dearth of scholarship and archival materials about African Americans within Arizona" (347). Glegziabher points out that the Arizona Archives Matrix Project reported "less than 1 percent of archival materials in the state" related to African Americans (347). Despite this lack of Black representation in the archives, Glegziabher traces the "long-standing Black institutions and communities in contemporary Arizona" in order to dispel the "dominant public narrative that persists in characterizing Black people as newcomers and outsiders" to Arizona (355).

Saints. These protests came in response to the Mormon church's racist doctrines that prohibited Black people from becoming priests and culminated with members of the BSU and leaders of Tucson's NAACP chapter staging a protest on the center court of Bear Down Gym during a basketball game against BYU (which came to be known as the Bear Down Incident). at UA have not

These student activists were acting in solidarity with fourteen Black football players at the University of Wyoming who, earlier that year, had protested their game against BYU. The Wyoming football coach suspended these athletes, causing a wave of student support across the Western Athletic Conference. As students from various institutions consolidated support for Wyoming's Black student-athletes, they also called for the WAC administrators to cut ties with BYU. John Heard, a member of the BSU, published an article in the campus newspaper arguing, "Black Athletes should not help support policies held by a church institution which denies his humanity and the humanity of the group to which he belongs...BYU as a representative of 'Mormonism,' degrades the black athlete and his race through financial assistance provided by his athletic endeavors which support the state institution" (Staff, "BYU Investigation"). Heard's arguments represented a consensus among Black activists across the WAC and the student body at UA.

On October 24th, 1969, UA's student senate passed a resolution that asked athletic directors in the WAC to disassociate with BYU (Nathanson, "Senate Asks"). At the WAC's annual council in Denver, Colorado, fifty student representatives from Black student unions at eight different institutions interrupted the council and demanded that the WAC break ties with BYU. Despite these demands, the faculty senate and UA's university president, Richard Harvill, maintained a "neutral" position on the WAC's relationship with BYU. In multiple letters to the campus community, President Harvill explained that the university could not get involved in social issues and that student demands would be better directed toward administrators at the central offices of the WAC. In response, the BSU chairman, Gale Dean, referred to Harvill as "an example of the buck-passing bureaucracy" (Staff, "Racist By").

## **Program Reform**

Harvill used these same evasive strategies to stunt efforts by the Mexican American Liberation Committee (MALC) when they tried to reform the established Mexican American Studies (MAS) program that they had successfully argued to establish during the 1968-1969 school year. The movement to reform this curriculum was led by MALC chairman Raúl Grijalva, who noted that Chicano students felt that President Harvill, when establishing the original program, "concocted" a "token" program used to "appease the Chicano community at large and the Chicano student body in particular" (Bradford, "MALC Rejects"). Unsatisfied with the state of the MAS program, in 1969-1970 MALC presented the Dean of Liberal Arts and the Vice President of the University with a petition signed by 122 of the campus's 250 Mexican American students to revise the MAS program.



MALC leaders Raúl Grijalva, Herminio Rios, and Fausto Alarcon argued that President Harvill's version of Mexican-American Studies was a "Spanish language major program under the guise of Mexican-American Studies" ("MALC Rejects"). Instead, Grijalva called for a program that would "present a true historical, sociological, political, anthropological, cultural perspective of the Chicano presence and experience in the Southwest" ("MALC Rejects"). Joe Molina, MALC's president, presented a series of memorials for reforming the MAS program over the course of the 1969-1970 school year. Molina presented arguments for revising MAS during the same student senate meetings where representatives passed a resolution that asked WAC athletic directors to break with BYU. In the same semester that Harvill ignored the BSU's calls for administrative action against BYU, MALC leaders felt Harvill "blatantly ignored" their proposed revisions to the MAS program (Staff, "University Weighing").

## Tactics for Response

The central focus of the BSU and MALC's response to Harvill's dismissive rhetoric was to expose the racism motivating his arguments for political neutrality by elucidating the historical positioning of UA and demonstrating current community relationships and needs. They employed two coalitional tactics to accomplish that task: (1) they framed their critiques of Harvill's politically neutral policies as deliberate attempts to disadvantage minoritized communities on their campus and in Tucson's community, and (2) they circulated those critiques among sympathetic audiences in order to mobilize coalitional action.

### Tactic One

BSU and MALC student activists framed their critiques of Harvill by explaining that the university historically only served white students, so remaining politically neutral on social issues impacting Mexican American and Black students meant perpetuating the standard of serving only white students. Importantly, BSU and MALC representatives extended this framing to critique how administrators were unwilling to serve not only Black and Mexican American students on campus but also the predominantly Mexican American and Black communities surrounding the university.

For example, at the start of the 1969-70 academic year, Gale Dean and Raúl Grijalva, the respective spokespeople for the BSU and MALC, explained in an interview with the *Arizona Daily Wildcat (ADW)* that their organizations' main goal for the 1969-1970 school year was to serve marginalized students in Tucson's public schools. They framed their work with high school students as a service to Tucson's community. Dean explained that the BSU wanted to "form a closer unity" with the "minority groups" who made up Tucson's community (Bradford "Campus"). Grijalva called out UA for being "in the center of the Southwest surrounded by Mexican Americans" but being more "responsive to its white community than Chicano community" (Bradford, "Campus"). Both Dean and Grijalva appealed to the larger city of Tucson to expose how Black and Mexican Amer-

icans existed in a government and education system that did not serve or even recognize them. By engaging in public discourse through authoring *ADW* articles and organizing public demonstrations, the BSU and MALC successfully demonstrated how to challenge Harvill's continued dismissive rhetoric—a rhetoric designed to silence and ignore the Black and Mexican American students who constituted the university and the city's community.

While MALC activists worked in coalition with the BSU, they focused on exposing how Harvill's unwillingness to serve minoritized students on campus reflected a larger trend in public education. Raúl Grijalva and Joe Molina criticized Tucson's local government for the unequal educational opportunities it provided to Mexican American students. They called on Tucson's public schools to create spaces where students could learn about the problems facing Mexican Americans in the Southwest. Grijalva and Molina articulated these demands in a series of *ADW* articles addressing a report from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW Report) documenting racial inequities in Tucson schools and at UA. When interviewed about the report, Grijalva celebrated that someone was investigating the “discriminatory practices by the University against Chicanos, Black, and Indians” (Grijalva). The report condemned the university's mistreatment of minoritized students and was published against the will of UA administrators. Harvill openly attacked this report saying that researchers interviewed “irresponsible” people—e.g., “Chicano, Black, and Indian students” (Grijalva).

At the same time, a similar HEW report was conducted in the Tucson School District, and the similar results caused six hundred Chicano students to walk out of their schools in protest; however, erasure continued in the community, as another member of MALC, Frank De La Cruz argued that the *Arizona Daily Star* and the *Tucson Daily Citizen* celebrated the school district's work without recognizing the Chicano parents who protested the inequities their children were experiencing. The Tucson Commission on Human Relations defended the *Star* and *Citizen* by declaring that “the District is completely innocent of any discrimination” (De La Cruz). De La Cruz explained that Tucson's school district, the *Daily*, and the *Citizen* ignored these disparities, but “la mentira dura hasta que la verdad llega—the lie lasts until the truth arrives” (De La Cruz).

Like the student-led movements at CUNY, which we discussed in the introduction, student activists at UA demanded that their university serve all the communities that surrounded it. Roderick Ferguson's account of the CUNY protests points out that these demands for universities' responsiveness to local communities are an “epistemological proceeding necessitating the reorganization of knowledge” (97). Ferguson argues that the communities that host our universities “are the material catalysts to epistemic shifts and transformations” within them (109). The BSU and MALC's demands for revising white hegemonic policies on their campus and in their local schools, then, were not simply about admitting or preparing more Black and Mexican American students for college; they were about transforming the epistemological structure of a white education system to better reflect minoritized and the larger local communities experiences and ways of knowing.

## Tactic 2

BSU and MALC student activists enacted their second coalitional tactic by circulating their critiques of Harvill's dismissive rhetoric among sympathetic audiences—both within their university and city—mobilizing minoritized students and teachers in local schools, other student organizations on campus, and civil rights leaders in the community. As these coalitions expanded, their critiques of political neutrality engaged with the racism that motivated educational disparities in Tucson's public schools, and they argued that all levels of education should be held accountable for serving all of Tucson's communities, not just white ones.

For example, BSU leaders created a coalition of student organizations, including the main student governing body, the Associated Students of the University of Arizona (ASUA), to organize months of public demonstrations against UA's athletic affiliation with BYU. These ties were so strong that the President and Vice President of the ASUA were leading voices arguing for breaking ties with BYU. After the police violently removed student demonstrators from a UA basketball game against BYU (the Bear Down Incident), President Harvill pursued felony charges against eight students for inciting a riot. In response, the BSU worked with the student governing body to demand Harvill's resignation (Nathanson, "Senate Wants"). A week later, the BSU's coalition with other student organizations, the United Student Front (UFO), organized a campus-wide rally with over 3,500 people in attendance. One report for the *ADW* noted the crowd "was made up of students with long hair and beards, clipped locks and ties, hip clothes and conservative dress and attitudes that ranged from casual detached interest to fervent advocacy" (Gold, "Sampling"). Reverend John C. Fowler and Arizona's ACLU chapter representative, Ted Mote, called on the administration to drop the criminal charges against the eight student activists arrested after the Bear Down Incident (Nathanson, "Harvill Accuse"). These community leaders spoke alongside the BSU president, Gale Dean, and MALC representative, Sal Baldenegro, in solidarity against Harvill's prosecution of the Bear Down protestors. Harvill avoided responding to student demands until two hundred and fifty members of the BSU and UFO organized a "campout on the porch of the Administration building" waiting to talk with him (Nathanson, "Harvill Grants").

Like the BSU, MALC's calls to address the educational disparities that existed at UA and in Tucson's schools were inherently community-based and stemmed from relationships they had built with UA professors, high school students, and college students from across the Southwest. Still, MALC leaders worked hard to build coalitions among Mexican American students on campus by aligning their efforts with the national movement of Chicano students. In the spring of 1968, MALC member Sal Baldenegro attended the first Chicano Youth Liberation Conference in Denver, Colorado. The conference aimed to coordinate efforts among Chicano student organizations across the country by establishing a shared definition of Aztlán—"a proclamation of solidarity with all Chicanos who are oppressed regardless of where they may live" (Baldenegro). Aztlán refers to the homeland of Mexico's indigenous ancestors, the Aztecs and Mexica, and necessitated that all



Chicanos had “a moral obligation” to address problems facing Chicanos on that shared ancestral land. Aztlán would be the guiding “cultural-nationalist ideology” that would inspire activist efforts to achieve their goal of “full equality for” all Chicanos in the Southwest (Baldenegro).

After returning from the conference, Baldenegro and other MALC representatives focused on building coalitions between Mexican American students and Tucson’s Mexican American community. Darius Echeverria’s book, *Aztlán Arizona*, provides a detailed account of how this coalition of Chicano activists successfully organized an annual Chicano Senior Day for local high schools and established the first La Semana de La Raza (or Chicano Culture Week), an event that “served to inform the larger Tucson community about ongoing discriminatory practices against Arizonan-Mexicans” (98). Consequently, efforts were both local and national, as the organizers combated the dismissive rhetoric of university administrators and initiated political action on their campus and in their community.

### **Tom Horne’s Dismissive Rhetoric and Tucson High Student Activist Responses (2007-2010)**

For present-day educators in Arizona, President Harvill’s dismissive rhetoric is echoed in Tom Horne’s three-year crusade (2007-2010) to end the Mexican American Studies program at Tucson High School. Fifty years after BSU and MALC student activists fought to make their university and public schools responsive to the lived experiences of Black and Mexican American students, Tom Horne enacted a racist legislative initiative that banned ethnic studies in Arizona schools and employed similar dismissive rhetorical strategies as Harvill to silence student activists that challenged his legislation. Horne justified his dismissal of student activists by claiming that a majority of Arizona voters agreed with his policies and, like Harvill, that the education system should teach color-blind individualism to remain politically neutral.

At the center of Tom Horne’s rhetorical attacks against Tucson High’s MAS program was the belief that students should see themselves as individuals, not as members of a particular ethnic or racial group. He supported this appeal to individualism by appropriating passages from Martin Luther King Jr.’s speeches, saying King “wanted his children to be judged by the content of their character rather than the color of their skin...and Ethnic Studies teaches the opposite” (qtd. in Cammarota 525). According to Julio Cammarota, Horne promotes “an idealized...vision of race neutrality” that does not align with “the current and real existence of systems and ideologies of oppression” to maintain white hegemony (526). Horne’s appeals to individualism promoted colorblind racism in a way that “perpetuates the subordination of racialized groups,” privileging “the right of comfort when the topic of social injustice” is invoked (Cammarota 526; Martinez 227). Conversely, we embrace the importance of critique as “the very genuine effort of engagement in coalitional solidarities” and recognize our study of Black and Mexican American student activists’ coalitional

leadership as an essential response to Horne's color-blind individualism (Martinez 228).

Horne framed his call for teaching individualism as an appeal to unity. He accused the MAS curriculum of dividing Americans. These appeals to unity were veiled attempts to maintain white hegemony and are born from anxieties around demographic shifts in the US. Horne's strategy is to incapacitate students of color by preempting any attempt to foster the sort of coalitional thinking that could lead to political action. Horne has spent his career enacting legislation meant to undercut the coalitional capacities of BIPOC students just as they are becoming the majority in American schools, and fewer are planning to pursue higher education ("The NCES"; *Class of 2022*). Over his initial time as superintendent of Arizona schools (2003-2011), Horne introduced legislation to ban ethnic studies three times (Cammarota and Romero 55). To be clear, each piece of legislation was directed at Tucson High, because Tucson was the only school district in Arizona with an ethnic studies program. In 2010, Arizona's majority conservative state legislature passed House Bill 2281, which stated:

A school district or charter school in this state shall not include in its program of instruction any courses or classes that include any of the following:

1. Promote the overthrow of the United States government.
2. Promote resentment toward a race or class of people.
3. Are designed primarily for pupils of a particular ethnic group.
4. Advocate ethnic solidarity instead of the treatment of pupils as individuals.

(State of Arizona House of Representatives, Forty-Ninth Legislature)

Many scholars and activists have written about this legislation (see Cammarota; Huizar-Hernandez; Cabrera, "The Fight"; Owens; Santa Anna et al.). This scholarship emphasizes that Horne was "deliberately sabotaging the state's k-12 public education system," because there was precise data that Mexican American students enrolled in Mexican American studies classes were "twice as likely to graduate and three times more likely to go to college" (Sheridan 397). Nolan Cabrera's research demonstrated that Mexican American students who enrolled in MAS classes at Tucson High increased their grades and test scores in reading, writing, and math (Cabrera, "Missing"). Teachers, students, and parents across Tucson's school district repeatedly fought Horne's initiatives throughout those three years. Similarly to BSU and MALC student activists, they organized marches on the state capitol, disrupted school board meetings, and repeatedly wrote editorials combating Horne's fearmongering.

Horne blatantly ignored Tucson High teachers, students, and parents who tried to save the MAS program in 2010. He also repeatedly refused invitations to observe MAS classes at Tucson High. Instead, he hosted news conferences decrying the program as “anti-American,” because he believed it fomented resentment towards white people and denied the idea that the US is the “land of opportunity” (Bustamante and Gargulinski). Hundreds of students and teachers from Tucson High protested at these news conferences and public hearings (Bustamante and Gargulinski). White and Mexican American students from Tucson High MAS classes wrote editorials directly confronting Horne’s ignorant portrayals of their program. For example, Adrian Laruenzi wrote, “Contrary to the assumptions of Horne...I have experienced only love and respect as a white student” in MAS classes (Laruenzi). Selina Rodriguez explained that the MAS program did not “brain-wash” her. It helped her become a “critical and conscious person” and “opened her eyes” to the barriers her Mexican American community faced in Tucson (Rodriguez). These tactics are similar to those also undertaken by BSU and MALC students in 1969-1970.

Despite these protests and public outcries, the conservative majority on Arizona’s Education Committee refused to hear testimony from Tucson High’s parents, students, and teachers when debating the legislation that would ban ethnic studies programs in Arizona (Cammarota and Romero 56). After the bill passed, district administrators in Tucson stationed over one hundred police officers around Tucson High and ordered a helicopter to monitor the campus to stave off potential protests (56). These intimidation tactics did not work. Immediately following these events, a coalition of teachers and students called “Save Ethnic Studies” filed a lawsuit against Arizona’s state government, challenging the ban’s constitutionality, and the student organization UNIDOS “took over” the school district governing board meetings by “chaining and locking themselves” to the board members’ chairs (61).

Like Harvill, Horne’s appeals to political neutrality were veiled attempts to maintain white hegemony and explicit attempts to undercut the coalitional capacities of BIPOC students. They fly in the face of the transhistorical community of student-led coalitions that have fought for their school curricula to reflect their lived experiences. In response to the conservative calls to teach individualism, we must teach toward coalitions. As Kynard has effectively argued, student activists have been and continue to be the catalysts for social change across educational contexts. Without student-led initiatives, structures of whiteness in education do not change.

## **Attacks on “Woke Education” are Attacks on the New Majority (Present)**

Federal courts deemed HB 2281 unconstitutional in 2017, but advocacy efforts have reignited since Horne recently won reelection as the superintendent of Arizona schools in 2022 (Depenbrock). His first legislative action was to introduce a bill banning CRT. <sup>2</sup> The conservative state

2 Using the same language as the 2010 law, the bill would have prohibited teachers in K-12 schools from creating courses that “are designed primarily for pupils of a particular ethnic group or advocate ethnic solidarity instead of the treatment of pupils as individuals” (“Arizona

legislature passed the bill, but Democratic Governor Katie Hobbs, who narrowly defeated 2020 election-denier Kari Lake in one of the most watched gubernatorial races of the 2022 midterm elections, vetoed the bill. Hobbs noted that “it is time to stop utilizing students and teachers in culture wars based on fearmongering and unfounded accusations” (Hobbs). Horne has since attempted to remove funding for dual language immersion programs throughout Arizona. Graduates of those dual language programs, like state representative Alma Hernandez, and director of Stand for Children Arizona, Georgina Monsalvo, are leading efforts to defend multilingual students’ right to their own language (Bootzin).

Horne’s attacks on CRT in public schools are only one example of the forty-four state legislatures that have launched a “nationwide anti-CRT crusade” (Schwartz). Forty other state legislatures are working to dismantle diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives within institutions of higher education (Chronicle Staff). The attacks on students and teachers in Arizona mirror those orchestrated nationally by Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and his political strategist, Christopher Rufo (Khalid and Snyder). Rufo has openly discussed his strategy for “unlocking new terrain in the culture war” by demonizing CRT (Goldberg). Rufo’s rhetorical templates have been widely circulated among conservative politicians attempting to pass legislation prohibiting CRT in K-12 curricula and DEI programs in higher education. The formula includes two basic strategies: 1) accuse schools of promoting “woke indoctrination” that does not align with the views of the “general public” and 2) implement accountability measures that make sure schools celebrate “individual rights, patriotism, and Western Civilization” (Khalid and Snyder).

DeSantis laid out the next steps in this national movement in his interventions at the New College of Florida, where public accountability now resembles totalitarian state control. In fall of 2022, DeSantis hand-picked six conservative politicians, Rufo being one of them, to implement anti-DEI initiatives at New College. Since then, the conservative-dominated board replaced the college’s president, abolished its diversity office, and denied tenure to five professors because their teaching and scholarship did not align with the board’s goal to move “towards a more traditional liberal arts institution” (Anderson). These appeals to public accountability assume that conservative politicians speak for a “general public” that is predominantly white and conservative. This assumption does not align with the demographic realities of the US. Using state mandates to silence teachers and students committed to race-conscious education poses a serious threat to our democracy. As educators ourselves who work in Arizona, our response has been to look to the histories of student-led coalitions that have responded to similar attacks on our democracy. This approach invites educators across contexts to research the history of student activism in their contexts and use that research to craft courses that center coalitional work.

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House”). If a “violation” was reported by a student or administrator, teachers could have been fined up to \$5,000. During Horne’s 2022 campaign, he promised that he would not only pass his ban against CRT but also investigate two hundred and fifty Arizona teachers who signed a petition that they would “defy the law” and teach CRT if Horne passed his bill (“News”).

Our analysis of the coalition tactics of student activists in Arizona highlights the effective tactic of circulating organizers' arguments among sympathetic audiences. Importantly, former MALC student activist and current Pima County representative to the US Congress, Raúl Grijalva has employed a similar strategy for building support for the Right to Read Act. He does not directly engage with Horne's arguments or evoke Horne by name. Instead, he frames conservative attacks on school curricula as anti-democratic attempts to "erase the representation and histories of marginalized groups" and the role they play in constituting our national imaginary ("Grijalva: Protecting"). By centering the education system's role in constituting our democracy, Grijalva reframes the demonization of CRT as an attack on students' rights to access the histories and cultures that constitute not only their communities but also their democracy.

Present-day activists combating attacks on CRT can also adopt the coalitional tactic of approaching the community. A community frame for critiquing Tom Horne's attacks on CRT exposes how his arguments for color-blind individualism are deliberate attempts to limit students' access to the histories and cultures that constitute their local and national communities. Grijalva has used this appeal to the community to outline how our national education system perpetuates a standard of only teaching the history and culture of white communities. Grijalva frames the demonization of CRT as an attack on liberal democracy by emphasizing that our democracy is constituted by diverse cultures and histories and arguing that students have a right to learn about their community's histories in their classrooms and curricula. In response to recent Republican efforts to "ban books; censor curriculum; restrict students' civil rights; and/or punish teachers for accurately recounting our nation's history," Grijalva has introduced the Right to Read Act ("Rep. Grijalva"). The bill addresses disparities in access to library resources by increasing federal funding for school libraries and protecting students' access to reading materials that "highlight the experiences and histories of these marginalized individuals and groups" ("Grijalva: Protecting").

## Conclusion

Grijalva's work rings alongside a symphony of voices in solidarity against conservative attacks on our curricula, but we have more coalitional work to do. In Texas, the lieutenant governor, Dan Patrick, has made ending DEI initiatives and denying tenure his main legislative priority (Surovell). In early May, the Texas state senate voted to oust tenure lines for new faculty hires (Brown). Patrick explains that this legislation ensures that professors can no longer "hide behind" tenure as they "continue blatantly advancing their agenda of societal division" (Patrick qt. in Surovell). These attacks on DEI and tenure discourage new faculty from applying to or "accepting jobs where their research or teaching could be subject to political interference" (Zahneis). Ohio's senate passed legislation ending several diversity efforts in public colleges and disallowing any policy or program "designed explicitly to segregate faculty, staff, or students by group identities such as race, sex, gender identity, or gender expression" (Marijolic). The bill also stipulates that "students in associate and bachelor's degree programs would have to pass an American history



or American government class to graduate” (Marijolic). Thirty-four other states have proposed similar legislation (Chronicle Staff).

Students have been and will continue to be the catalysts for change in our schools and on our campuses. As historians, scholars, and, most importantly, educators, we must study the trans-historical coalitions of student activists that have responded to the discourse surrounding attacks on our curricula in order to effectively respond to the present attacks on CRT. As educators, we can teach these histories to learn from the student activists of the past to inspire coalitional thinking in the present. Working in coalition with the legacy of student activists from our local communities means historicizing contemporary discriminatory educational policies. Building on the tactics of student activists, past and present, bolsters our ability to dismantle an education system that perpetuates white hegemony and undermines the promises of our liberal democracy.

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