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Nosotras Somos el Futuro: Futurity in Latine Activism and Futurism

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Forward Note

In entering into the work of Latine history and culture, I feel the need to disclose that I identify as a white woman. My experience of being raised and socialized in late the 90s and early 2000s of central Connecticut, white, suburban culture shapes the lens through which I perceive the literature shared in this unit and the voice with which I propose this curriculum. The experience of engaging in the YNHTI Latinx History and Culture seminar has widened my understanding of the way the Latine community has shaped both my personal and professional identity. Therefore, I feel called to dedicated this unit to: my father, the Polish-Lithuanian man who tried his best to teach me his passion for the Spanish language but successfully ingrained his passion for learning and embracing Latinx cultures across the diaspora; my Puerto Rican and Dominican childhood friends who became family and who taught me to dance bachata despite my stiff hips while also demonstrating the linguistic and societal complexities of their multigenerational identities; and finally, my students who continue to expand my view on the historical and present perspectives of the Estados Unidos. For, I would not want to know myself as I am today without the acknowledgement and deep appreciation for these individuals and the unique way they each embody and share the power of Latinidad.

Note on Etymology of Latine

While I acknowledge the importance of self-identification or disidentification (Muñoz, 1999) and the history of government classifications, in light of the CT State Bill H.B. No. 6909, I will use the term Latine in reference to the community, culture, and expression of folks of the Latin American diaspora.

Introduction

We as humans are always interested in knowing the future. From trivial weather predictions to governmental decisions that impact an entire country, we constantly seek to understand how the world and our experience within it will shake out. Though our collective fascination with the future is almost as old as time, the words and phrasing of such concepts are relatively new. In the English language, Futurity is an interesting word in

itself. In fact, looking at the first popularized uses of the term demonstrates the unique meaning of the term. The first known use of Futurity occurs in Shakespeare's *Othello* (1604), when Cassio, confused by Othello's betrayal asks Desdemona to tell him whether his present service and "purpos'd merit in futurity" can win over Othello's "love again." Not too soon after, Benjamin Franklin wrote in his autobiography, ". . . but futurities are uncertain" (1791), to Sir Walter Scott followed as he wrote of events "still in the womb of futurity" in *The Legend of Monstrose* (1819)(Merriam-Webster Dictionary). Each western writer, in considering relationships, status, and new beginnings, helps establish the concept of futurity as a determined place with undetermined outcomes.

Although the documentation of the word futurity is only four hundred years or so fresh in the English written word, the concept of wondering about the shape of things to come is not. Across centuries and millennia, people using varied languages, expressions, and modes of communication, have aimed at the same goal of predicting and interpreting the future. Yet, methodology of the practice has looked different across time and culture. The most drastic methods of prediction have been between individuals who have an intrinsic gift or ability to predict the future, and systems that provide rules for calculating futures. The most enduring is the practices of oracles, shamans, and prophets, for example, which depend on the capacity of these individuals to access other planes of being and receive divine inspiration. Strategies of divination such as astrology, palmistry, numerology, and Tarot, however, depend on the practitioner's mastery of a complex theoretical rule-based system, and their ability to interpret and apply it to particular cases (Reese, 2021).

In particular, elements of futurity, including premonition and prophecy, are deeply rooted within Latine history. Latinefuturists recognize that the Spanish conquest itself was an apocalyptic event within the Mexican national imagination. In his analysis of descriptions of the apocalypse in contemporary Mexican sci-fi, Samuel Manickam, writes, "for the Aztecs the Spaniards who rode in on strange four-legged beasts and donned seemingly unassailable shiny armor and wielded fire-throwing weapons might as well have come from another planet. The clash of these two incompatible civilizations, which in turn gave birth to modern Mexico, seems the fantastic stuff of a science fiction tale" (Merla-Watson, 2019). Furthermore, as critic Merla-Watson and Ben V. Olguín suggests, "it perhaps is no accident that the genre of Latinefuturism and related genres begin to take shape around the same time that scholars are beginning to excavate and document these and other previously invisible historical atrocities" (Merla-Watson, 2019). Both writers bring to focus the importance of speculation and futurity in the Latine cultural consciousness.

However, speculation on futurity is not limited by practices of divination; it can also be pursued through harnessing the power of the people. Modern advances have taken a more democratic approach by implementing the strategy of crowdsourcing predictions of the future. Turning to the public with the use of polls and private opinions allows for a greater source of input. The process then requires careful interpretation to analyze and process results. Other methodologies include receiving input from highly specific crowds or assembling a panel of experts to discuss a given topic for more accurate results (Rees, 2021). This is apparent in strategies used to unite and mobilize the Latine-American community in the latter half of the 20th century and continue to be utilized today.

No matter the method or the forthcoming results, the critical question of who and what predictions are for still remains consistent. In her article "The History of Predicting the Future Historian," Amanda Rees ultimately proposes, "those who can influence what people think will be the future are often the same people able to command considerable resources in the present, which in turn help determine the future. But very rarely do we hear the voices of the populations governed by the decision makers" (2021). She continues in acknowledging the role inequities in power play in determining the future in by citing regional or municipal

levels as the places where efforts by ordinary people to predict and shape their own communal and familial futures is most actionable. This movement is often in response to the need to distribute scarce resources or to limit exposure to potential harms. Reese suggests that “rather than depending purely on innovation to map the future, it’s more sensible to borrow from history, and combine newer techniques with a slightly older model of forecasting—one that combines scientific expertise with artistic interpretation” (Rees, 2021). It is through communal organization that the Latine community has sought to determine its futurity. By examining the historical rhetoric of futurity, we can begin to understand the way in which speaking, writing, and imagining futurity can shape what is yet to come.

Curriculum Overview

Amongst the present topics upon which folks often speculate about the future of is the United States public education system. This social institution seeks to prepare youth with a set of predetermined skills and concepts for the future, or as the US Department of Education’s mission states, “to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access” (2011). Despite the systemic history that has traditionally viewed students as products that must be shaped and molded to fit a predetermined future, the current system is working to reorient itself. Even more educators acknowledge youth, especially brown and black youth, as the agents of societal advancement and change with the need to create, organize, and problem solve for an undetermined future.

At the small, magnet high school located in New Haven, Connecticut, the majority of the student body identify as Hispanic (50%) or Black (38%), though greater diversity exists within these labels as students claim connection to places across the diaspora from West Africa, The Caribbean, North, Central, South America and beyond. With High School in the Community’s magnet theme of leadership, social justice, public policy and service, HSC takes pride in being a “small school for students who want to do big things” including recognizing, interrogating, and reimagining what the future means and looks like for each student and their community as a whole. Through project-based curriculum and mastery based grading policies, HSC strives to empower students to step up and make a positive impact on society while pursuing their individual educational goals. In addition, many students are interested in elements of futurism in pop culture such as superheroes, hypothetical technology, alternative worlds. Their interests in futurism can be harnessed to dive deeper into conversations of futurity. The goal is to help students connect their interest in pop culture with their ability to develop their own ability to imagine solutions to present and future societal injustices.

The unit draws upon the framework proposed by designer, educator, and activist, Laura McBain proposes in her article “Educator as Futurist: Moving beyond ‘Preparing for the future’ to ‘Shaping the future’” that suggests that educators become co-creators with youth in the pursuit of “imagining a wider range of the possible, plausible, probable futures in which we will be learning and living” (2020). By taking a design approach, giving form to ideas, rapidly experimenting, and learning through iterative processes, schools can become a space where learning communities can build toward more preferred futures. We must also teach our youth to become “adept time travelers — to make sense of the past in order to envision new futures; to be sense makers of disparate types of information — moving seamlessly between what’s known and unknown; to flex their imagination in expansive and applied ways, and to become critical and contextual thinkers”(McBain, 2020). Faced with generation-defining crises like climate change, perpetual war, weakening social safety nets, biased artificial intelligence, and resurging fascism, our youth need to analyze and interpret both failed and successful historical events to envision and create a pathway through the chaos that keeps the humanity of the masses intact.

Furthermore, through a futurist approach, educators and students can “uncover and solve complex challenges in the hopes of creating a more equitable, humane, and anti-racist future” as well as “understand the equitable and ethical considerations of policy, technology, and power dynamics of systems and structures” and “integrate emotional intelligence and mental wellbeing into our curriculum as a core investment in the future health and resilience of our students” (McBain, 2020). By specifically studying Latine and Afro-Latine artists, activists, and leaders of resistance students will be able to identify the systems, knowledge, and actions that benefited the collective in the face of oppressive political, social, and economic control.

In the unit, *Nosotras Somos el Futuro*, students will first study key movements in Latine political mobilization in US history. Throughout the unit, students will also engage with grounding ideas such as culture, representation, appropriation, and futurism through various media genres of short fiction, music, art, video, and essays. In pursuit of developing their own futurist craft and style, students will learn to: identify and analyze how artists create text that draws from culture to represent the future; gather and reflect on personal knowledge of family traditions and culture; share understandings of Latinx culture; and present their own stories about the future advancement and cultural evolution. By examining Latine history and culture with an emphasis on Futurism, the hope is that students have the opportunity to become empowered by their connection to the past and recognize their community’s cultural capital to design the future.

Historical Context: A Look at Futurity in Latine Activism of the 1960s

“We have the numbers! We Latinos can now decide who will win and who will lose this election year.” During the 2012 census year, the US Bureau announced a 40 percent increase in the Hispanic population since 2000—one of the largest surges in growth the demographic had seen within the history of the census. The report concluded that Hispanic children would soon make America a majority-minority country. Activists and community leaders quickly capitalized on the bureau’s announcements by appearing on Spanish-language media to discuss the political implications of the Hispanic census figures. Univision, the nation’s largest Spanish-language television network, also broadcast a series of news segments and special programs designed to showcase the size and scope of the Hispanic vote and to mobilize political participation among viewers. The 2012 Latine community response to the US Census and political implications is one of the more recent moments of mobilization for activists and organizers, and it should come to no surprise that Latines have a rich history of visionaries and revolutionaries who, out of moments of injustice and inhumanity, sought to change the future of their community. The Chicano Crusade for Justice organization Puerto Rican Young Lords Party are two of the many groups who sought to capitalize on communal power in pursuit of a more promising future.

Crusade for Justice Organization

Founded by Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales in 1966, the Crusade for Justice offered the Chicano community such benefits as job training, a food bank, and a bilingual school for children that encouraged cultural pride. Crusade for Justice also protested against police brutality, racism in the media, and employment discrimination. The Crusade for Justice also joined other civil rights organizations in national movements such as the Poor People’s Campaign and the National Farm Workers Association. The organization upheld “El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán” (The Spiritual Plan of Aztlán—the ancestral land of the Aztecs that the United States annexed from Mexico under the treaty ending the Mexican-American War in 1848) as a key document that

encouraged Chicanos to strive for economic, cultural, and political freedom and, ultimately, self-determination. The First National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference, which Crusade for Justice hosted in 1969, chose the plan as the Chicano Movement's manifesto.

The "El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán" contained action steps necessary to stoking future Chicano nationalism and included: awareness and distribution of the plan; a national walk-out by all Chicanos of all colleges and schools in perpetuity until the educational system procured met the needs of the community; self-defense against the occupying forces of the oppressors; community nationalization and organization of all Chicanos; an economic program to control their own production through cooperative effort; and the creation of an independent local, regional, and national political party. Actions were aligned with the organizational goals, which included the enduring statement. "where we are a majority, we will control; where we are a minority, we will represent a pressure group; nationally, we will represent one party: La Familia de La Raza!"

Young Lords Party (Organization)

While "Corky" was working to ignite Chicano nationalism, José "Cha-Cha" Jiménez established the Young Lords Organization at Lincoln Park, one of the most impoverished barrios of Chicago, Illinois. Originating in 1968, the organization was modeled and inspired after the Black Panther Party, and evolved from a Puerto Rican street gang to a community-based organization involved in advocating for minority access to healthcare, education, housing, and employment. The Young Lords was multiethnic and inclusive to African American, Latines, women, and LGBTQ membership, self-identified as "revolutionist nationalists" who rallied for Puerto Rico's independence and power to the people, and adopted a 13 Point Program and Platform—a set of policies, responsibilities, and principles the organization lived by. The organization expanded to other cities, including New York City, where a group of college students established a chapter and renamed it the Young Lords Party.

Under Jiménez, the Young Lords formed coalitions with other groups and expanded to New York's East Harlem, where a group of first-generation college students headed an independent chapter. The New York City chapter aroused national headlines during their Garbage Offensive. In retaliation to the city's poor sanitation services, members led a week-long neighborhood cleanup and burned a garbage pile in the middle of a street intersection, causing the arrival of the police and fire department at the scene. In New York and in Chicago, members led a series of protests and building occupations, held free breakfast programs for children, which helped standardize the current federal children's nutrition program, established free medical clinics, and created Puerto Rican cultural centers, celebrating the history and heritage of all Puertorriqueño/as. In addition, both chapters published a monthly newspaper to promote community services and events.

Similar to the Crusades for Justice Organization's "El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán," the Young Lords oriented their work around the thirteen-point program. Written in English, the document presents the Young Lords Party platform calling for the liberation of all oppressed people. Some of the points that stand out from the list, include a call for the self-determination of Puerto Ricans, Latinos, and Third World people; an end to racism and male chauvinism; and freedom for political and war prisoners. Furthermore, the party positioned themselves as revolutionary nationalists who opposed racism, sought true education of Creole culture and Spanish language, and claimed community control of institutions and land. The platform also supported international socialism and the belief in armed struggle as the only means to liberation.

The Language of Futurity

While both organizations were built upon the representation of their respective cultural identities, leaders of the Chicano Crusade for Justice and the Young Lords developed close ties. As Gonzalez states, in a joining

interview with Jiménez, "There are no formal treaties, no formal signings, we just come together in a common cause" (1970). The extent of the connection between the two organizations go beyond common interest in their collective actions towards justice for their communities, and is even recognizable in the patterns of and expression present in speeches, poetry, and art.

Poetry

Gonzales's "I Am Joaquín (Yo Soy Joaquín)," which was published in both English and Spanish in 1967 turns its attention to Mexican and Mexican American history and outlines the struggles that Chicanos have endured in their quest for a cultural identity and equal rights. In its entirety, the poem describes the then modern dilemma of Chicanos in the 1960s trying to assimilate with American culture while trying to keep some semblance of their culture intact for future generations. In the poem, for example, the speaker, Joaquin, traces both his ancestry to the Spanish conquistadores and the Aztecs they "conquered"; he also identifies with revolutionary figures of Mexican history. The poem creates a "multivalent identity" in the figure of Joaquin, one that serves as a "collective cultural identity that contains within it a call to action."

Throughout the epic, Gonzales's use of anaphora unites the multiple identities his narrator claims ancestry, including both colonizers and the colonized, and which culminate within him. The poem follows the pattern of exploring lineage through detailed description of previous generations' experiences, actions, glory, or pain, and, despite the didactical comparison of each story, ends with a common claim the likes of "I must fight/and win this struggle/for my sons, and they/must know from me/who I am". The poem, though reflective of the past, makes continuous claims of moving into the future with: proclamations of change "The music of the people stirs the/Revolution"; determination to remain free of assimilation— "I am the masses of my people and/I refuse to be absorbed"; and at moments both "The odds are great/But my spirit is strong, /My faith unbreakable" (1967). The poem ends with a promise to futurity as the narrator vehemently pledges, "I SHALL ENDURE! /I WILL ENDURE!" (1967).

It is important to note that although Nuyorican poet Pedro Pietri had claimed ties to the Young Lords earlier in his artistic career, his poem "Puerto Rican Obituary" was not published until he had moved on from the political organization in 1973. Despite ideological differences to social change, his poem calls out many of the societal issues that the party sought to address in their platform. In the poem, Pietri "sketched the lives of five Puerto Ricans who came to the United States with dreams that remained unfulfilled. By turns angry, heartbreaking and hopeful, it was embraced by young Puerto Ricans, who were imbued with a sense of pride and nationalism"

Again, the poem relies heavily on anaphora to build an enduring feeling of hope from initial tones of darkness and remorse. The beginning stanzas make use of the repeated phrases "They worked...They died" to paint the scene of Puerto Ricans united only in their constant struggle to sustain life in the capitalist New York society. Throughout the poem, the line "All died yesterday today/and will die again tomorrow" reinforces the past and present pain, while also introducing the dreadful picture of futurity. The cycle is continuous as the characters in the story continue on "waiting for the garden of Eden/to open up again", "dreaming" for the promises of the mainland to be fulfilled while their bodies become tired. By continuing the repetition of indefinite adverbs such as "always owing" and "never knowing", Pietri continues to develop the notion of restriction and oppression especially as he completes each line by referencing the beauty and ancestral history that these allegorical characters will never know. The narrative voice turns to warning, building a litany of "if only" statements with the inclusion of tuning into "imagination" and using their "Latino souls" as "the religion of their race". Pietri ends the poem by describing the paradise, which celebrates the Spanish language, cultural pride, and

community, that could be built through Puerto Rican collectivism. With the final call “Aqui Que Pasa Power is what’s happening/Aqui to be called negrito/means to be called LOVE” (1971), Pietri creates a message that propels the audience into envisioning this possible future if they turn from capitalistic and individualistic values imposed by US assimilation.

Publications

Beyond policy and poetics, the presence of futurity persisted in the Latine activist ethos through the continued distribution of publications, such as newspapers and pamphlets. Young Lords leaders in Chicago and across the nation saw the production and distribution of independent newspapers as an important part of their political work as it presented a way to spread their message and grow their organization. Newspapers were viewed as an educational tool as they were a medium through which to: engage people in dialogue, raise the level of class consciousness, gaining new recruits, connect with outside activists, secure financial support, and strengthen bonds of solidarity. In 1969, the Young Lords Organization began publishing their newspaper, *Y.L.O.* which was intended to be a monthly publication with each issue containing articles, artwork, and photographs, in both English and Spanish. The content focused on a variety of local, national, and international struggles including issues of police brutality and the role of the police force in suppressing movements, city planned community destruction through “urban renewal” projects, and the promotion of the movement for Puerto Rican independence.

The inaugural edition includes an editorial entitled “Why a YLO newspaper?” which details the purpose and the intentions of the paper within the organization’s framework. The article states, “A newspaper is not merely a collective educator and a collective agitator, it is also an effective organizer,” and elaborates by including, “groups who are clarifying their strategies, and developing goals must be constantly aware of their actions and motives, and develop forums for discussion and criticism of their strategies and goals” (1969). Furthermore, the first issue features articles written in both Spanish and English on the demand for a new director of welfare, the organization’s occupation of a local police station, and a pocket lawyer of legal first aid. By bringing these issues front and center, the editorial team is able to highlight the demands and actions the organization is making that align with their tenants. In this way, they inspire fellow activists to consider joining future political actions.

As the organization spread across the states and local chapters began to vary in ideologies, more publications were produced to vocalize these nuances. The New York chapter, renamed as the Young Lords Party, released their newspaper *P’alante* (onward) and the YLO chapter of Milwaukee the *El Young Lord: Latin Liberation News Service*. While still devoted to similar communal goals, the publications sought to reflect the local concerns and challenges of Puerto Ricans and members of their pan-ethnic organization. Similarly, as the Crusade for Justice Organization grew overtime and began to change shape, neighboring Chicano activist organizations turned to publications to declare their perspective on their nationalist movement.

Perhaps one of the more notable critiques of the Crusade for Justice was published in *The Reactionary Crusade for Justice...A Preliminary Study* Pamphlet produced by the Colorado Organization for Revolutionary Struggle (CORS). The pamphlet begins by declaring the Crusade for Justice to be a reactionary organization that stands in opposition to working and oppressed people living within the United States. The proclamation launches into an examination of the wrongdoings of the intended, but not before delivering a rallying cry of, “LONG LIVE THE CHICANO STRUGGLE! /LONG LIVE THE MULTI-NATIONAL STRUGGLE! /DOWN WITH THE CRUSADE AND ALL REACTIONARIES! /AND DOWN WITH IMPERIALISM!” By inserting this call into the initiation of the study, CORS builds unity with Chicanos and pan-national communities in the determined goal of pursuing justice. In closing,

the CORS reminds the people of their shared responsibility as revolutionaries, stating, “We must make sure that the fallen sons and daughters of the Chicano people have not died in vain. We must grasp correct political ideas and win the liberation of the people” (1978). The declaration moves to ignite a liberatory movement that mobilizes in pursuit of a better future for Chicanos.

Furthering the Notion of Futurity Through a Futurist Lens

While the concept of futurity has been growing within the English-speaking public consciousness since the early 17th century, futurism has only been acknowledged for a quarter of that time and predates the civil rights era, referenced above, by sixty years. The origin of Futurism is recognized by the western art world Italian Poet Tommaso Marinetti in 1909 as an artistic movement expressing the ideas of dynamism and the energy and movement of modern life. Elements of Futurism included speed, technology, youth, violence, and objects such as the car, the airplane, and the industrial city. The movement stands in denunciation of the past, and seeks to free poets, artists, and creatives from the oppressive weight of Italy’s historically dominant culture (Tate Modern). While the inclusion of technological advancement and dynamism, which corresponds with the industrialization and expansion of Western nations, are unique qualities of Futurism, the speculation of future societal change and advancement are essential elements of artistic, intellectual, and religious belief systems across the global diaspora.

Similar to the connective and collective dynamics of mid-20th century revolutionary organizations, cultural groups have worked within and across communities to reenvision Futurism as an intersectional genre featuring dynamic histories, values, and identities. In the way that organizers like “Cha-Cha” Jiménez sought inspiration from Black nationalist leaders in building the collective power of Puerto Ricans, the Latinefuturism genre has gained insight from the emergence of Afrofuturism. Although the futurist elements have been a part of Black art, literature, and music almost since the birth of science fiction itself, the term “Afrfuturism” was not introduced until 1993; scholar Mark Dert, used the word to define the existing focus on Black literature and 1980s technoculture. Explored by Black artists, musicians, and writers pursuing speculative perspectives in their work, the themes of Afrofuturism are not just about creating imagined worlds, but have also been and continue to be offered as an escape from real-world troubles or can be used as a way of examining the problems that African Americans currently face in the world.

Octavia Butler, pioneering Afrofuturist and feminist author, questioned in her 1980 essay “The Lost Races of Science Fiction,” why indeed “is science fiction so white?” Butler continues, “A more insidious problem than outright racism is simply habit, custom.” As consumers become comfortable with the way things are, the current state of media, they perpetuate the status quo and thus act in a way opposite of the futurist elements they are attracted to. Butler acknowledges this redundancy by stating, “Science fiction, more than any other genre, deals with change—change in science and technology, and social change. But science fiction itself changes slowly, often under protest.” Delena Hunter, librarian, archivist, and Afrofuturist scholar, supports the concept by adding, “With Afrofuturism, the point is to challenge what it means for Black people to be free on our own terms. Liberation is a very important part of the genre” (Bruce, 2020).

While Latinefuturism shares many connections to Afrofuturism, it does not seek to replicate, but rather reappropriate elements of futurism. Specific to Latinefuturism and the expansive counter-consciousnesses is treatment of disidentification. Queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz, defines disidentification as the “survival

strategies that the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship” (1999). Understanding Latinefuturism through the lens of disidentification brings into view the creative and resilient ways that Latina/o/e cultural producers since at least the 1960s have continued to repurpose and blend futurism. However, the misconception that Latines do not write sci-fi has continued due to the related issues of underrepresentation in the publishing industry. As a Chicano author of sci-fi novels, Ernest Hogan has faced the difficulty of getting published and questionability on his appeal to general readers. He reflects,

Chicano is a science fiction state of being. We exist between two cultures, and our existence creates new cultures: rasquache mash-ups of what we experience across borders and in barrios all over the planet. As mestizos we have no sense of cultural purity. Mariachis on Mars? Seems natural to me. Even when I try to write mainstream, or even nonfiction, it’s seen as fantastic (Merla-Watson, 2019).

In contrast to traditional historical fantasy, futuristic narratives explore identity and historiography through a lens that allows nuance and multiplicity to live a limitlessly. In doing so, these texts maintain “a more active relationship to resistance and the politics of the possible” (Merla-Watson, 2019) as they seek to address the intricacies of anticipated crises and imaginative solutions unique to addressing the needs of each community.

Latine Movement in the Marvel Universe

In United States popular culture, the influence of futurism is perhaps most apparent in audience fascination with Marvel Studios. Marvel, started in 1939 by Martin Goodman as Timely Comics, has provided readers with almost a century of stories of super heroes, alternative worlds, and high-tech tools and weapons. The last two decades have witnessed Marvel’s successful transition from comic books to film as part of its acquisition by The Walt Disney Company. However, much like the original setbacks of the futurist genre, depictions of racist tropes and stereotypes continue to be perpetuated in Disney’s ever-expanding catalog. And while the company has made recent attempts to atone for its past, it begs the question: can it move forward without repeating the same mistakes? While the moral messaging of the movies, which are centered on a fight against evil forces, people like New York Times reporter Jenna Wortham are appalled by the lack of nonwhite characters. Wortham notes, “You mean to tell me they’ve been making these movies for over a decade — 12 years — and you have still not managed to decenter the whiteness of this universe?”

The evidence supporting Marvel’s overwhelming whiteness is most apparent in its near decade-long wait to feature a starring hero of color. While other franchises with similar box office success are as white as the MCU, many of these films focus on the same character from film to film (i.e. Harry Potter, James Bond) or focus on one family (i.e. Star Wars, The Lord of the Rings/The Hobbit). All fourteen of the MCU films center around a white male lead, there are no women of color portraying women of color in heroic roles (Zoe Saldana plays the non-human Gamora in green body paint and Elizabeth Olsen plays a white-washed version of the canonically Romani-Jewish Scarlet Witch). Furthermore, prior to the introduction to Black Panther, there were no Native American, Latinx, Middle Eastern, or Asian superheroes on the Avengers’ roster, and the few Black male superheroes are relegated to supporting roles.

<https://www.vox.com/culture/2022/11/21/23467145/black-panther-wakanda-forever-latino-colorism-racism-na-mor-tenoch-huerta>

In Marvel Studio's most recent Black Panther film, the studio took greater steps towards diversifying the narratives of heroes and villains. In the comic book fans meet Namor, the mutant son of a human sea captain and a princess of the mythical, and his undersea kingdom of Atlantis. However, in adapting the books into film, director Ryan Coogler sought to take an internal approach in considering the "idea of a hidden place in the water—lost continents and things like that" (Ramirez, 2022). Acknowledging that much of society's thought is permeated by Western thinking and ideas on the Greco-Roman concept of Atlantis, Coogler wished to explore other concepts, ones that have not been displayed so much cinematically and detailed as well. The director states, "We were after something that felt truthful, and real, and we can take a deep cultural dive [with]. That felt like it was on theme, felt like they belonged in a world with Wakanda that was believable, but also felt like myth; felt like people could see themselves in it" (Ramirez, 2022). Thus Coogler and his team, developed Namor and his Talokan countrymen in close connection to the Mayan and Aztec cultures and to a time before the Spanish were able to systematically oppress Mesoamerican people and their lands and hold close. The inclusion of Mesoamerican people in the film subverts a narrative that has been left untouched by Hollywood, opening the opportunity for disidentification from a narrative of oppression.

It's important to note that Latines are not a monolithic group. There are indigenous and black Latines as well as mixed and white people. There are also indigenous groups who don't identify as Latine at all but live in Latin American countries. Most indigenous groups agree, though, that to identify as indigenous requires more than a distant ancestor — there has to be lived experience, community acceptance, and shared understanding of the past (Ramirez, 2022). However, the racial dynamics of Latin America were not built on such understanding. The Spanish, who were coming to Mesoamerica from Spain, had already experienced intercultural and racial mixtures via the Moors and other racial groups. So, they then mixed with Indigenous and Black peoples, often violently, and imposed a caste system to subjugate others, with white people at the top. The caste system still lingers today but is intentionally ignored and denied by Latin American countries. A large part of that is because ignoring differences was fundamental to creating a national identity when so many countries were fighting for independence against Spain. In Mexico, specifically, nation builders claimed that everyone was mestizo.

While *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* makes moves in exposing viewers to a more diversified marvel-verse, the film focuses on the forging and failing to find solidarity. The premise is that ever since the now-deceased King T'Challa (Chadwick Boseman) revealed Wakanda's wealth and strength to the rest of the world, other nations clamor for their primary resource: vibranium, a super-powerful metal. Because Wakanda, rightfully, does not trust these other countries, they refuse to share it, leading to attempts at theft and mining of the ocean floor. This is where the Wakandan and Talokan people's interest intersect as the Wakandan's seek to reduce capitalistic use of vibranium and Talokan seeks to keep their kingdom from discovery. Namor approaches Queen Ramonda and Princess Shuri after his people dismantled an American-made vibranium detector. Like Wakanda, Talokan is vibranium-rich, and has spent centuries keeping this a secret from other nations. Alternatively, to the historically ancient civilizations, the Talokan are able to escape smallpox and certain death by migrating underwater (with the help of an in-world magic plant). There, they shielded themselves from slavery and kept their culture intact of colonization. Perhaps this moment in the film where the promise of Latinefuturim is most apparent. The Talokan represent a moment of a past possible futurity, of what could have been, as they manage to escape from colonization through the use of unrealized power and not only preserve but also prevail in the continuation of their advanced society.

Yet, the film continues to contend with reflecting reality as two futuristic kingdoms content for power and resources. Namor pleads for help and political allyship out of desire to protect the Talokanils, and when things go sideways, the two nations are pitted against each other, despite their shared appreciation for one another.

This dynamic orchestrates a race war; the Talokanil versus the Wakandans. While this conflict does resolve itself, more or less, there's something to be said about how the pressure from Western, predominantly white nations creates an environment where colonized peoples feel like they have to fight each other for resources or support. As Alicia told me, "It's the neocolonial tactics of they no longer have to, you know, beat us and kill us — they just have to feed us these stories that we are each other's enemies, and then we do the dirty job for them" (Ramirez, 2022). It is here that the audience can heed a warning from taking a look into the speculative; as communities struggle in the face of ongoing war, climate crises, and white supremacy, they will need to band together in time to persist against the oppressor.

Graphic Novels *Puerto Rico Strong & Ricanstruction: Reminiscing & Rebuilding Puerto Rico*

Two comics anthologies, both published within the aftermath of 2017 Hurricane Maria, seek to push the boundaries Latinefuturism in pursuit of Puerto Rican futurity. Building upon themes of community, identity, ancestry, and futurity, both anthologies create windows into how the world may look if communities band together as they persist in the wake of challenges.

The first set of comics, *Ricanstruction: Reminiscing & Rebuilding Puerto Rico* was produced and also features stories written by Edgardo Miranda-Rodriguez, and features his original character LA BORINQUEÑA who teams up with some of DC Comics most famous superheroes, such as the likes of Wonder Woman, Batman, Superman, Aquaman, Flash, and Harley Quinn. Throughout the novel La Borinqueña uses her power to improve the lives of citizens on the island, through means such as regenerating power to towns, while also inspiring Puertico Ricans on the mainland to contribute to the relief efforts. However, La Borinqueña's fight for justice persists to include halting the efforts of those who try to interfere with the equitable distribution of relief and even those who attempt to profit off of peril for capitalistic gains—and she doesn't do it alone. Towards the beginning of the comics anthology, La Borinqueña asserts, "¡El pueblo unido jamas sera vencido!" and recruits Wonder Woman to contribute her powers to the fight. Despite differences in culture and origin, La Borinqueña insists that "We are here now and we will rebuild, because we are all Puerto Ricans" to which Wonder Woman adds, "Every last one of us, and just like you—¡Yo soy Puerto Rico!" (2018). Thus, propelling the arching development of a pan-international community within the human world and the superhuman world. The text itself transcends genre by ensuring that all profits from this anthology go to providing solar-powered lamps, food, clothing, and continuation of other relief aid.

Through the lens of futuristic elements, the stories explore the cultural history of the island alongside ones with envisions of a stronger and rebuilt community. Due to the nature of anthology, many characters with different racial, generational, geographical, gender, and sexual identities are able to contribute their voices to the collection. In fact, this is reflected in the many different illustrations of La Borinqueña, where in some she appears with tighter, natural curls and in others in a glossy face of makeup or a shade of skin darker than the story before. These illustrations in themselves demonstrate the multitudes of the island through the appearance of La Borinqueña. Community strengths unique to Puerto Ricans such as knowledge of nature and growth of representation are sources of beauty and pride. In particular, the comic "Bohio Girasol 2050" highlights the importance of farmers, healers, storytellers, peacemakers and builders to the future of the island. The origin story imagines Hurricane Maria as the birth of a new life for the land and traditions which are reclaimed by people of Africana and indigenous origin in the year 2050. Now engineers, having worked with the natural resources, have built solar generators and supervises water desalination which provide sustainability. In the closing of the brief story, the lead elder of the now thriving Bohio reassures the youth that "this is our land and we will never give it up again!" (2018). Derived from the debris of natural disaster and the sustaining struggle of the Puerto Ricans, this futurist depiction of the island provides an image to

propel rebuilding efforts and restore faith for its people.

The second comics anthology, *Puerto Rico Strong* centers on Puerto Rican identity and the multitudes that exist within the community. Edited by Marco Lopez, Desiree Rodriguez, Hazel Newlevant, Derek Ruiz, and Neil Schwartz and published in 2018, the anthology explores the unique history of Puerto Rico as a US territory that is often thought of as a foreign land or neglected by the average American. Stories feature the expansiveness of the island's diaspora across mainland and the differing generational connections to the island, telling of those “who have come to the states in search of a dream but struggle to integrate into an unfamiliar culture, while there are those who have lived in the United States all of their lives but still have the same struggle because of the color of their skin or their sexual identity” (2018). Like *Ricanstruction*, all profits of the book go towards disaster relief and recovery programs to support Puerto Rico. Although the book contains vast genres of comics ranging from political satire, to autobiographical pieces, and history, two specific stories stand out for their ability to articulate futurity and futurism.

Though the story *Of Myth and Monsters*, which tells the mystical story of a family outing in the El Yunque National Forest after Hurricane Maria, is not steeped in elements of futurism, it demonstrates the power of speculative fiction in establishing futurity. The story begins with what is meant to be a check to ensure the security of a dig site turns into a battle between a Zemi (deity/ancestral spirit) and three teens assisted by a chupacabra (mythological creature). As the battle ensues, the siblings inexplicably free the Zemi from its monstrous form which reveals its true identity as the trapped soul of a Taino man who turned against the gods due to the inescapable oppression of the Spaniards. During this moment, the illustrations depict three Taino spirits emerging from the Zemi which are illustrated to mirror the modern-day siblings. The image establishes a sense of ancestry that connects the past to the present moment. The parallelism continues when Zemi mistakenly greets the siblings as “Taino warriors”. Although the teens inform him of the lost existence of the Tainos, in his departing words the Zemi expresses, “I will be with them once more. All that matters now is that you remember where you came from. What was lost and sacrificed and what can be again...the only way for the Boriken to have a future is for its people to believe in themselves, to rely on each other” (2018). The call to connect with one’s identity as a source of power for rebuilding the future not only exists in reference to the rebuilding of the island post-Hurricane Maria but also to the refortification of the resilience and endurance of the island’s community and culture.

Meanwhile, the comic *Pasitos Grandes*, written by Tristan J. Tarwater and illustrated by Cynthia Santas, not only continues the theme of futurity but quite literally imagines the future as a group of children on an AR (augmented reality) tour of “Diaspora of Puerto Rican People, 20th-22nd centuries” (2018). The tour begins with quick acknowledgement of the formation of Boriken by the indigenous people known as the Tainos, the colonization of the island by Spanish conquerors and colonists, and the role African enslavement played in developing the island as an economic outpost for the sugarcane production. It continues by shining light on the persistence of the Taino and West African cultures despite the violent oppression enforced by the Spaniards. The presence of foreign policy is furthered in economic profiteering, the Jones Act, natural disaster, and debt. In this way, the narrative uplifts the struggle of Puerto Ricans by detailing the contributions of Puerto Ricans as they fought for independence even during exile, pioneered migratory movement to northern mainland cities for the promise of higher wages and steady work, and continued the fight for independence as well as better healthcare, housing, and more. As the children travel through history via AR, they not only bear witness to the immense struggle but also have moments of community as they are depicted being served “desayuno gratis” by a member of the Young Lords and playing in the sprinkle of a fire hydrant in front of the “El Rincon Grocery.”

The final pages of the comic participate in the formation of the futurity of the Puerto Rican people by speaking into, imaginative, existence: the repeal of the The Jones Act as a result of “pressure from elected senators and congress people”; the creation of non-predatory companies, interested in renewable energy, technology and building infrastructure; rebuilding of the island through the work of Boricuas and their scientific advancements; breakthroughs in agricultural practices on the moon with preference for heirloom seed companies that value traditional foods. The narrator closes by paying homage to the pan-Laine efforts needed to “making manufacturing in space”, the Taino culture in the naming of “Atabbey (goddess of the moon) Space station” a resource for any nations building in the stars, and the continued contributions of Puerto Rican scientists working on “other stations for Jupiter’s moons”. With the final note to the children, “Maybe one of you will take that big step to living on another plane. Just know...you come from the many small steps our people took before you” (2018). Here the promise of futurism comes full circle, as the teacher acknowledges the children as agents for change that can further the values of community, collaboration, and justice for future generations.

The Power of Latinefuturism for Teaching Youth

Lisa Kay Solomon, teacher of innovation at the MBA in Design Strategy program at San Francisco’s California College of the Arts, asserts that “having a futurist mindset means being comfortable that tomorrow might be quite different compared to today based on unfolding trends, patterns, and external signals... it [also] means getting perspectives from multiple sources, being a sense maker, and having a willingness to change a point of view if new information conflicts with what drove past decisions... and constantly [existing] in a learning mindset” (2021). Educators conscience of ever developing global crises such as climate change, population displacement, wealth inequality, and political warfare, understand that they are responsible for preparing students for an uncertain future. These educators also understand the unique perspective that youth offer as they develop inquiry into unknown topics and provide new insights to prevailing conditions of traditional practices. Thus the following learning activities draw upon the histories, legacies, and rhetoric of past and present Latine visionaries, while also providing students with the opportunity to develop the skills and strategies necessary for cultivating a futurist mindset.

Learning Activities

Activity #1: Developing an activist manifesto

Materials: Copies of Young Lords and Crusades for Justice documents, chomebook. Directions: In this activity students will spend time performing a close reading of both *13 Points and “El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán.”* The texts will be read aloud in class with different students reading each statement. Students will be asked to focus on the style of writing, including: diction, voice, and tone. Students will also be asked to identify the actionable steps proposed by the leaders of each organization. Next, students will put both texts in conversation to identify similarities and differences between style and purpose. This will lead to students engaging in evaluative questions such as identifying the strongest assertions that each text makes and the tenants that students suggest adding to teach text. From here, students will be asked to imagine themselves within a collective organization. Working with small groups of three or four, students will be tasked with developing an outline manifesto featuring rationale and action steps directly connected to local community impact. Each group will engage in the editing and revision process before publishing their manifesto on the

classroom walls and reading their tenants to the class. This series of lessons will culminate with a classwide Socratic seminar on the topics of activist rhetoric, conceptualizations of the future, and the purpose of calls to action.

Activity #2: An activist poetry slam

Materials: Copies of “I Am Joaquín (Yo Soy Joaquín)” and “Puerto Rican Obituary”, chromebooks, printed copies of student poems, stage or room for performance. Directions: Inspired by the poetry performed by 1960s Latine revolutionaries, students will engage in the process of creating their own activist poetry. This series of lessons will begin with a close reading of the poems of “I Am Joaquín (Yo Soy Joaquín)” and “Puerto Rican Obituary.” Each student will be provided with a copy of each poem and together we will listen to videos of Gonzales and Pietri performing their poetry. Students will be asked to follow different themes such as history, futurity, conflict, and identity. The class will then discuss the narrative perspective in each poem and selected lines from the close reading. Students will then brainstorm aspects of their own identity including: community, family history, conflict, hopes, and dreams. From their brainstorm, students will then develop a draft of a poem that focuses on the connection between student identity and activism. Students who need further support will be provided with templates based on the poetic forms of “I Am Joaquín (Yo Soy Joaquín)” or “Puerto Rican Obituary.” After developing, editing, and revising their poems with the help of their classmates and their teacher, students will perform their poetry. The performance will take place within the classroom, but students will be encouraged to share their poetry at school wide events and publish in the school literary magazine.

Activity #3: Publish and disseminate a newspaper or pamphlet

Materials: Young Lords Y.L.O. or *The Reactionary Crusade for Justice...A Preliminary Study* pamphlet, chromebook, printer. Directions: Students will partake in the creation of a publication focused on a common topic. Students in the class will first decide on a common topic for which they choose to contribute their writing. Based on student input, the topic with the highest interest will be selected and students with differing topics will be guided to find a way to connect their topic. Students will be provided with copies of the Young Lords Y.L.O. or *The Reactionary Crusade for Justice...A Preliminary Study* pamphlet as models as they are asked to develop articles that feature different aspects of the class topic. After engaging in the writing process, the students will be tasked with developing a publication reflective of each of their voices. The publication will be distributed throughout the grade level and students will be asked to provide reflective feedback on the publication process and reception via survey.

Activity #4: Illustrating the Future Through Comics

Materials: Art supplies, drawing paper, *Puerto Rican Strong* and *Ricanstruction*, Directions: In this activity students will be asked to partner with a classmate to develop a comic strip that depicts a future relevant to a specific cultural, environmental, or organization future. In teams, students will be tasked with the responsibility of writing and illustrating a comic that features a futuristic answer to a present conflict. Students will be provided with models from *Puerto Rican Strong* and *Ricanstruction* to help guide their creations. From here students will draft both writing and visuals featuring narrative which seeks to provide an answer to the students’ proposed areas of struggle. The students’ comics will be featured along with the classes’ publication (mentioned above).

Activity #5: Envisioning the Future a student choice project

Materials: Chromebooks, art supplies, notes template, rubric. Direction: After engaging in multiple activities which require students to utilize a futuristic mindset, students will culminate their learning with a project of their choice. Working in groups of three or less, students will be tasked with the responsibility of creating a project which envisions the future. This project may take the form of an essay, a comic, a video, a model, or medium of their choice, but it must clearly articulate the vision of a future dependent on community power and social justice. The project must also include proposed action steps toward issues such as, healthcare, education, environment, political organizing, crisis response, and cultural identity. Students will be provided with a notes template and rubric to guide them through the drafting, editing, and revision stages. Students will have time to develop their projects and will present their visions to the larger school community through means of posters, videos, or websites. Students will conclude the project by reflecting on their use of skills, such as collaboration, design, detail, and presentation of ideas, as well as an evaluation of the project's application to their future college, career, or community plans.

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Suggested Student Reading and Viewing List

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Materials for Classroom Use

Reading materials (as listed above)

Construction paper

Notebooks

Poster paper

Computer/laptop

Video projection

Appendix on Implementing District Standards

As a research unit within an English classroom context, the Inquiry and Research, Speaking and Listening, Writing, and Reading Standards are embedded into the content as well as lessons of this curriculum. By engaging in this unit of study, students will learn to use rhetoric and design skills as well as grow their understanding of community identity, power, and justice. Students will engage in critical reading and analysis of historical and contemporary writing to inspire their own work. Students will sharpen their presentation and speaking and listening skills by publishing their work to the classroom and school community. Below is a summary of standards and skills students will focus on throughout the unit.

Inquiry and Research

- Develop and pursue questions to demonstrate and expand understanding of a subject

Speaking and Listening

- Prepare for a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners (CCR.SL1)
- Participate in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners (CCR.SL1)
- Present information, findings, and supporting evidence appropriately for task, purpose, and audience (CCR.SL4)

Writing

- Use language appropriate for audience and purpose (CCR.L3)

Reading

- Comprehend complex literary and informational texts by determining what the text says explicitly and what it implies (CCR.R1)
- Analyze the text to determine how author's choices relate to each other to shape the meaning of the work as a whole (CCR.R4-6)

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