



**Universidad Sin Fronteras
Liberation Spring Semester
Detroit Campus
Agenda Tuesday May 7, 2013**

Class Two: “The Land Eaters”

What is Universidad Sin Fronteras?

It is a critical moment nationally in terms of education, because public education is under attack, it is being privatized. So the opportunities for an education have withered and shrunk for all and even more so for poor working class, indigenous, women and peoples of color. Even the public education curriculum left standing is test-based teaching making it less and less, pedagogy based on critical thinking.

At the same time we see nationally more and more popular and political education and leadership development education happening and growing in the social movements particularly with youth leadership development. The emphasis in this last decade has been on youth leadership workshops, institutes and seminars. The goal of the social movement educational programs and institutes has been to develop new ‘cadre’ and ‘leaders’, but still railed to the ‘training model’ of popular and political education.

A need exists to ‘upgrade’ the popular and political education programs into a ‘University’ setting and level that create ‘convergence’ of multiple educational

efforts on-going and 'integrate' them to become alternative institutions to the system and the beginning of dismantling the old and building the new 'other world is possible'. The social movement organizations at the grassroots and in Indigenous or poor and peoples of color communities need to have Universities with out walls allowing learning and shared learning to take place outside and inside the classroom and in non-traditional settings. Many social movement leaders and staff have at this very moment a big need to continue or finish their higher education but they find it too difficult to go to a higher institution with a traditional curriculum and degree programs. They need a University that can go to them where they work and where they struggle and organize, in other words where the learning and teaching and theory and practice is actually taking place. Hundreds of social movement organizers, leaders and activists are in need of a higher education at their workplace and community.

- The classes in the Universidad Sin Fronteras will follow a pedagogy of circular learning. Everyone will share their knowledge rather than self-defined experts presenting their ideas to passive recipients presumed by "the experts" to have no knowledge of their own.
- In circular education, instead of competing for who can come up with the most "correct answers," we will put everyone's knowledge on the table as we develop ways to move forward together.

Intro Question :

Say your name and share one moment when you felt connected to your neighborhood or your neighborhood looked out for you.

Responses under 2 minutes, please

1. When younger, at the end of the school year a bunch of neighbors got together and threw a block party for the kids in the neighborhood school. Bounce house, barbecuing, etc. Was a beautiful thing.
2. There are a lot of kids that come to play with the chickens in the back yard. Last summer, some boys were going to stay with dad during the summer. No one was sure when they were going to be coming back. Showed up in August and came over to say hi. Felt good that they missed us.
3. People were responsive to what I had to say. Felt really connected.
4. Coming home on the bus. A man sat next to me. Got off the bus and ran to another person, said the man was following me and he took me into his family home and looked out.
5. House caught on fire. Me and younger siblings came out - on one side trucks were coming and on the other side neighbors were coming to get the children.

6. Would go trash picking with friend in the alleys. It was a way at that age that we owned the neighborhood.
7. Grew up in the country - no neighborhood. So many times I would sit under trees. So many experiences of that silence, hearing birds, and just being still. A feeling like I am part of this all. There have been many times feeling embraced in nature. It more involves people - the more I am in an urban environment, the more the neighbors are people. Feel like tragedies or the sense of danger bring about a sense of unity. Last week a coffee place caught on fire and a lot of neighbors were out for that. Hearing screaming in the alley and heard friend come out to look.
8. Felt connected whole time in neighborhood. When felt connected, we were kicked out of the house because we had the porch and everyone would come and sit on our porch and sit and talk. There was a bush next to the porch called the thinking tree. When people were talking, they would pick at the tree. Eventually it became bald on that one side. When we left we saw how important that tree was to the community. When we left, I realized how the front porch had created space for young people to do a lot of things.
9. As a teenager knew folks in the neighborhood and they knew us.
10. As a child, we had some basketball hoops in different backyards around the neighborhood. After school, seeing who was outside, where you're going to play. Playing football, running across the neighbors' front yards.
11. Sports in the neighborhood. Finally got a pass and ran into a sign. An older boy came and picked me up. Was nice to feel connected with neighbors through sports. Being helped up.
12. When bike got stolen. A man called grandpa David who showed everyone how to make a bike from scratch. My bike was stolen. And the next day someone spray painted the bike I had made and Grandpa David made them give it back.
13. . Been living in Detroit for 35 years. There was a community organization that organized white folks in Detroit along Michigan ave. made them politically active. Moved on the block with some young Catholic workers. Connected to one another but not to the neighborhood. Some of the children of those folks are still on the block. Since NAFTA, a lot of the folks are from Guatemala. Done a better job of building community on the block. Several crises dealing with INS. Some hospitality support given to families.
14. Went to spend time with father when he was married. Step mom was a mixed lady. Was only black kid on the block. Went outside in the neighborhood and they embraced me.
15. Went to a friend's house and family gave him a nickname and welcomed him into the house.
16. Growing up in Detroit. Could walk down street, speak to people.
17. Grew up in Detroit. When really little, like 4, was only one home and didn't have anything to do. Wandered up and down the block. Would go house to house and sit on porches and they would tell stories. Mrs. Rocky

was 87, when I was 4. And she would send me to the store. And one day, told mom I went to the store. After that, mom would make a plate for her and cover it with foil and give it to Mrs. Rocky. And she would tell stories every day.

Group Reading and Discuss **full articles can be found at:

Article 1: <http://truth-out.org/opinion/item/15584-critical-moment-what-is-the-state-of-black-detroit-2013>

Article 2: <http://www.bebblackandgreen.com/content/land-food-and-social-justice>

Article 3: <http://www.bebblackandgreen.com/content/land-and-power>

Debrief

What did you learn from the article and the discussion?

Article 1: <http://truth-out.org/opinion/item/15584-critical-moment-what-is-the-state-of-black-detroit-2013>

Talking about the way things were termed. “Doesn’t make sense to have this many poor people. Isn’t it bad for the economy to have so many poor people?” This question deserves dissecting. Anyone would think it would be better if everyone could eat. That makes sense. To have this question is an assumption that needs to be addressed. Not everyone’s assumption. Good for whom? Bad for whom? The question an innocent heart raises - doesn’t it hurt the economy to have all these poor people?

One thing that was wonderful was when earth cannot be privately owned, but held for future generations. Agree that the importance of collectivity and creativity, self-determination. We have a lot of power when we do this. All of us work and we don’t own anything. Those who own are the millionaires and bankers. Detroit has most urban agriculture in the U.S. So many are working the land together. Everyone working together is how we can move forward.

Strength in numbers. There was a statement that we are at war. Who supports us? There is a strength in having people educated in a position, in the things that are going on around us.

“This is not only just a war but it is spiritual warfare. “We believe in this movement toward justice equality, but don’t hear the word spirit. When hear spirit - hear morals, ethics, identity, values. How do we define the

spirit we want to move forward with and combatting a spirit that is oppressing others? If it is spiritual warfare, how do we combat it? Communities coming together.

Reminded me of - Mama Sandra was doing an exorcism of sorts in front of the bank. I am down with this. Started a conversation with her about it. Believe the banks have their own legal apparatus on how they control the city. Part of it is pure spirituality that needs to be broken. Cast it off. There are lots of other traditions that would feed into this in the way that resistance happens in this country. Related to the land - the blood in the land cries out. Claiming the land has to do with cleansing the land, listening to the voices that have been removed and killed. Summoning those voices is part of the spiritual work of the moment. Just starting this conversation with her. And am interested in seeing where it could go - exorcism as a political tactic.

We are naked fundamentally - stood out because we have gotten so far away from the basics, share and give back. The love has gone, the peace has gone, there is no togetherness.

Article 2: <http://www.bebblackandgreen.com/content/land-food-and-social-justice>

Article 3: <http://www.bebblackandgreen.com/content/land-and-power>

There are all these problems in Detroit, we have all this land, so what are the challenges? He asked - how can a developmental strategy be implemented "that allows for commonly held land to be entrusted to city residents for beautification, recreation, gardening, environmental stewardship, teaching and generating income?" This is a challenge for us. Many of us are anti-capitalist. But there is a challenge between now and then that we must decide what we will fight for. We need to think about this. He also asks, what should we get in exchange for the sale of land to developers? We should say no, but he says, what if they are going to do this anyway? Who should determine what developers pay and to whom? Do we pay the debt down? How do we move forward in the face of all that we are dealing with?

What stood out - population of the city declined from 2 mil to 700,000 by 2010 census. My neighborhood seemed like as time progressed, a lot of white people moved out of neighborhoods. And now you see a lot of white people moving back into neighborhoods. Would see a white guy riding his bike in the neighborhood. In the article, talks about everyone moved out and there is all this land. People only live 2 houses out of the whole block

and others are abandoned. It says we need to find a way to renovate, bring city back to life and own them.

Land is the basis of power. Remember seeing lots of cornfields driving while young. There was a lot of power held in wallstreet making decisions about land. We talked about the way that Native Americans saw land as not being able to be bought and sold. Land and money are not the same. Making this “connection” is detrimental to land. If it is a source of money, leads it to being fought over.

To me, “Land is power” is a colonial thing to say. Brings up conceptions of property.

Thinking about land and where the values about land come from. Most of the people who are housed in prisons in Puerto Rico are from the U.S. When you speak with some people coming out of prison, this is what they learn from the U.S. - theft, taking from people. Society has taught us about having and what this means. Hard when you come back to your land and what you know from people is causing everyone harm.

My Family is from the South and it made me think about land and how every generation goes through its own thing. Always someone is trying to take the land rather than sharing it. Thinking about family’s history on land. Great granddad owned a lot of land in the area. But was tricked into handing it over. All these big corporations bought land from a white person that didn’t even own the land. Sometimes people stab each other’s back over land. See it as land grabs. I think about how is the future generation going to get land? What is it going to be worth?

There was a story of farms in Arkansas. There are many different ways that land is stolen and questions on who benefits from owning it. The land I grew up with, memories where families used to have several hundred acres. And people would sell it. And all these acres are out of the family and down to the 5 acres that my parents own. And used to walk across it. But can’t do it now in the same way. Have own feelings of our land being taken away. I like idea of commonly owned land. So many ways that people fight over land. Lots of questions come up about owning and sharing.

A lot of people who claim to be progressive say that race doesn’t exist or class doesn’t exist. But you see these stories in which various black people are holding land or businesses that are being attacked or subverted. They were not attacked for poverty but were attacked for their racial/national identity.

Finally, there is not enough people in Detroit who understand how the dispossession has occurred. How systematic it has been. Not knowing about redlining, suburban sprawl, how corporations took work from Detroit to the south and other parts of the world. Bridging the gap between colonization

and where we are today...not common enough of a story to combat what is out there in the media and the news stories.

When we put media out, think about how our own words are taken from us, appropriated and used in mass media. Would like to dive deeper into this.

There is something to be said about people owning own economic means. If we want this land, need to generate ideas about how to get it. Privatization of land. An important idea - things that are commonly held, public parks, land trusts, etc. ideas of common good are being whittled away for individualism and privatization. Think about this when think about people being disposed from land. We discussed the ease at which larger more powerful institutions get land and how hard it is for residents to get land.

And where would we be if there were millions of acres still in the Black community. What would we be able to do? I appreciated this context. How do you give the people back the ability to realize that this is for your well being. Having this land and having it in tact is more beneficial than not.

Other comments:

Are people making connection to the land grab in the Jones day takeover? When the Indian Village manor got taken over, it got condo-ized. There was language in the city charter to protect residents from landowners. And required that companies get permission from city before they could do anything with the tenants. The dismantling of the departments - Yakini discussed it at length with the Hantz farm...you couldn't just be able to take apartments and put the residents out. The removal of the governance is creating the conditions that make this removal possible

...

Mike Ilitch owes the city 260 mil. You can't enter into a bond arrangement with someone who owes the city money. But if you have an EFM, you can get around it. He wants to build around the downtown stadium. He has been consolidating land around that area. The EFM enables the impossible to happen. The bond money that built his stadium, Detroiters will be stuck with the bill.

Why would the EFM not force Ilitch to pay the debt to the city? Because the EFM is here on behalf of the bank and corporations who are taking over the city. And pulling resources out of other neighborhoods. The EFM is trying to facilitate it, not help the people.

If you don't know your history, if you don't know the charters and the laws, if you are working each day to keep food on the table, then you don't know about this. And it keeps you poor. The past few years, I have had conversations with transplants and many of them aren't understanding what gentrifications means.

We take land and commodify it. Is it how our relationship with land should be? What are our spiritual traditions? What is our program on how we live in relation to land? For Pan-African nationalists, we are not doing it from an economic frame, but a food system frame, relationship, reciprocity, etc. There is nothing we put in our bodies that doesn't come off the land. The blueprint for life is wrapped up in land. Are we now ascribing monetary value to butterflies, earthworms, fungi?

I'm starting to realize and acknowledge what we are up against, what we are facing. Bringing in an EFM is really big. There was a statement that we are at war ...if they are making such powerful moves against us, what powerful and big moves are we going to make?

What made me think about it was what Baba Charles said...all of us are working toward something. But we should be channeling it toward one thing together. Have people working on all these different things we are trying to bring justice to. The way I define justice isn't how others define it. But if we can agree that this is something big and it is an attack on people. Everything involves land in some way. Every experience people have has to do with land. I appreciate these sessions - we have been taking notes so that the stories are not just being held in this room but they are being documented and we can do something with it beyond these walls. That leads perfectly to our written exercise.

Written Exercise (last 10 minutes)

"What does it mean to take away land from its native people? And how does this removal affect culture in your neighborhood? How can we keep our culture in Detroit?"

Books and Resources

An article that explains gentrification in New Orleans (similar to what's happening in Detroit) and the four stages/waves of gentrification. I thought this piece gave an in-depth and accessible explanation of how our communities are taken from us.

<http://www.newgeography.com/content/003526-gentrification-and-its-discontents-notes-new-orleans>

On the topic of spirit (especially within movements), NPR's The Takeaway recently ran a story on how faith intersects with movement. In particular, around the 5:30 mark is powerful.

<http://www.thetakeaway.org/2013/may/07/trespassing-vandalism-and-peace-activism-oak-ridge/>

These books really hit home what people did and what they had to give up to come to the north. They talk about this story in a personal way:

“The warmth of other suns” by Isabel Wilkerson -

“The Dollmaker” by Henry Arnot

ONE PAGE REFLECTIONS:

“What does it mean to take away land from its native people? And how does this removal affect culture in your neighborhood? How can we keep our culture in Detroit?”

Taking away land from Native people means killing them and settling on stolen land.

Historic, cyclical power grab

20th street by the bridge. Developers, removal.

“who exactly is native?”

“Take away” implies theft, or a forcible removal of the native person. It means that the power of the taker is greater than the power of the person whose land is taken. In the mind of the taker, the potential reuse of that land, the gain from taking, must outweigh the current use of value (not necessarily monetary) of that land under the care of the native. In a sense, this is belittling, even dehumanizing towards the native, because it suggests that her connections, feelings, and potentially, life, is worth less.

It means removing people(s) from a place of rootedness, grounding, home. It displaces a soul, lose a sense of place, humanity. If you have no place you come from, then you have no place to go. You have no value. Therefore, others have no value to you & that’s what breeds violence and sweeping crime.

Removing native peoples from land creates a very racist-colonialist state or government. This has occurred in many places from the US, Australia, New Zealand not to mention much of Africa. The dispossessed peoples are often slaughtered [King Leopold’s Ghost]

The destruction or debilitation of native culture occurs and the creation of culture poisoned by the land theft occurs also.

To impose whatever cultural identity you see fit.

(Native people gets deep—that I'm not ready to approach)
To take land from them evokes harm and should not be done.

If you take land away from a people/ tribe/ community, you take away their foundation.

It means to break the fundamental connection of land, human beings (and other creatures). It is an assault on relationships, wholeness, health. It is genocidal in denying people the sources of life.

When land is taken, people are displaced (as happens with Gentrification). The former cultural pride and identity is also displaced and weakened.

Removal affects memory and limits memory, shortening our sight. The forces that are removing (and are encouraging YOLO and historical shortsightedness) benefit if we don't connect our narratives to centuries long struggle and development.

I was told when I was 13, "perception is reality." I can only live life through my eyes, my feelings... my hopes and dreams. How I perceive actions, life is very much my reality. Every ground that I've ever been on was once owned and taken away by people who had no rights to the land. It seems so distant until it happens around you. It seems like history, until it's right down the street. It's a cycle that sees to repeat itself. Land being taken, used, abused, then thrown away to people of color. Is the seizing of land legitimate even if it is legal? Is the united states built upon valid foundations?

Displacement disperses, scatters developed communities. Church, clubs, front porches, schools, businesses, playgrounds—it all is community and from these places culture grows. Culture is dance, talk, attitude, ideas, music, food, pride, memories, & traditions.

Land gives a context to culture—to remove land from its people is separating/ removing people from their context.

Therefore, if you take away the land, you take away an "organ" of the culture. Culture is about those relationships- always local, rooted, placed, landed. It is nourishing and remembering in the language of those relationships.

Detroiters live on stolen land. It means that we have a culture of oppressors and oppressed.

Displacement becomes the new culture

We now have double, triple, and quadruple trauma on the land. There have been so many waves of removal and dislocation.

The occupation of the city. Indigenous (Miami, Ojibwe, Potawatomi) used this land as a religious area and for sustenance, the French as a trading post, the English as a fort and for agriculture, then as the city of Detroit, whites began to abandon, and Detroit was used for creation of music, culture. Now many areas of Detroit face a return by the children of those who abandoned it.

We can deepen our culture by honoring and remembering those who were on the land before us, especially if our presence contributes to displacement. We can build our culture to honor rootedness, and tell the truth about migration and displacement. We can call the question on “progress” and “moving on up” and question how does “success” build culture and where do definitions of success come from?

The reappropriation of the land as well as the effects of the removal of the native will dictate the effect on the cultural shift that will accompany it. The removal of enough natives can radically change the culture of the organization. The culture will undergo a cultural shift indeed, but the underlying concern in my mind is how will current residents, those who have weathered those storms, be affected?

The removal of the land deeply affects the culture in the neighborhood. It tears people apart, moves people out of their homes, and forces them to give up the place they grew up in. Removal erases culture and distorts it. As a result, a new culture is put in place. Neighborhoods take on new identities.

There has always been a sense of “they don’t really care about us” in Detroit. Now, you walk down the street and see the condos being built and you think “Wow, improvements!” But those aren’t for you.

How can we keep culture? Remembering.

Perhaps we need to be watching, especially our neighbors. If someone is losing or having something taken away from them, this should draw our attention. If it is turning off of electricity = RED FLAG. Take notice.

Why is this happening? Are their needs being met?

If people are losing their land, houses, shelter, livelihood (Basic Amenities) --this equals removal.

Detroit culture must be preserved through the education of newcomers on this culture and through the preservation of institutions that represent our culture. Newcomers must mix and mingle with current Detroiters in the neighborhoods.

We can keep our culture by getting to know our neighbor, our community, and ourselves. Teaching and sharing resources & skills and banding together to take care of each other. The weakest of us is cared for first.

I think that dedicating a specific place(s) for the display and growth of our culture will be a great way to preserve it.

We need to get collective ownership of everything and build a new culture in which we work together for the common good without the banks and billionaires.

Keeping and developing our own culture (Detroit) requires the possession of our land, collective control over how the land is used; but these conditions will also transform our culture since we do not currently control our land (space). The act of reaching collective control will be a fruition of our culture, too.

By not allowing anyone to define who we are.

We keep our culture, collective identity, history by telling stories—passing on knowledge/ wisdom and culture through inter-generational relationships. We keep culture by maintaining its value & teaching others to appreciate its value. Perhaps the uniqueness of the threatened culture can challenge the outside bulldozers. The culture itself can be fanned like flames to accentuate the beauty and life it creates.

Creating art, creating music, rallying our fellow storm riders, to remember and transfer knowledge and history of the land so it is not forgotten. Writing stories, celebrating victories & that art; that way, even if the people leave, their stories and their creations can live on.

In regards to keeping our culture in Detroit, let's not. Let's improve Detroit ourselves involving the current people who live here. Let's bring communities together, so that it is not as easy for large corporations to move and shift the people who live here and work hard.