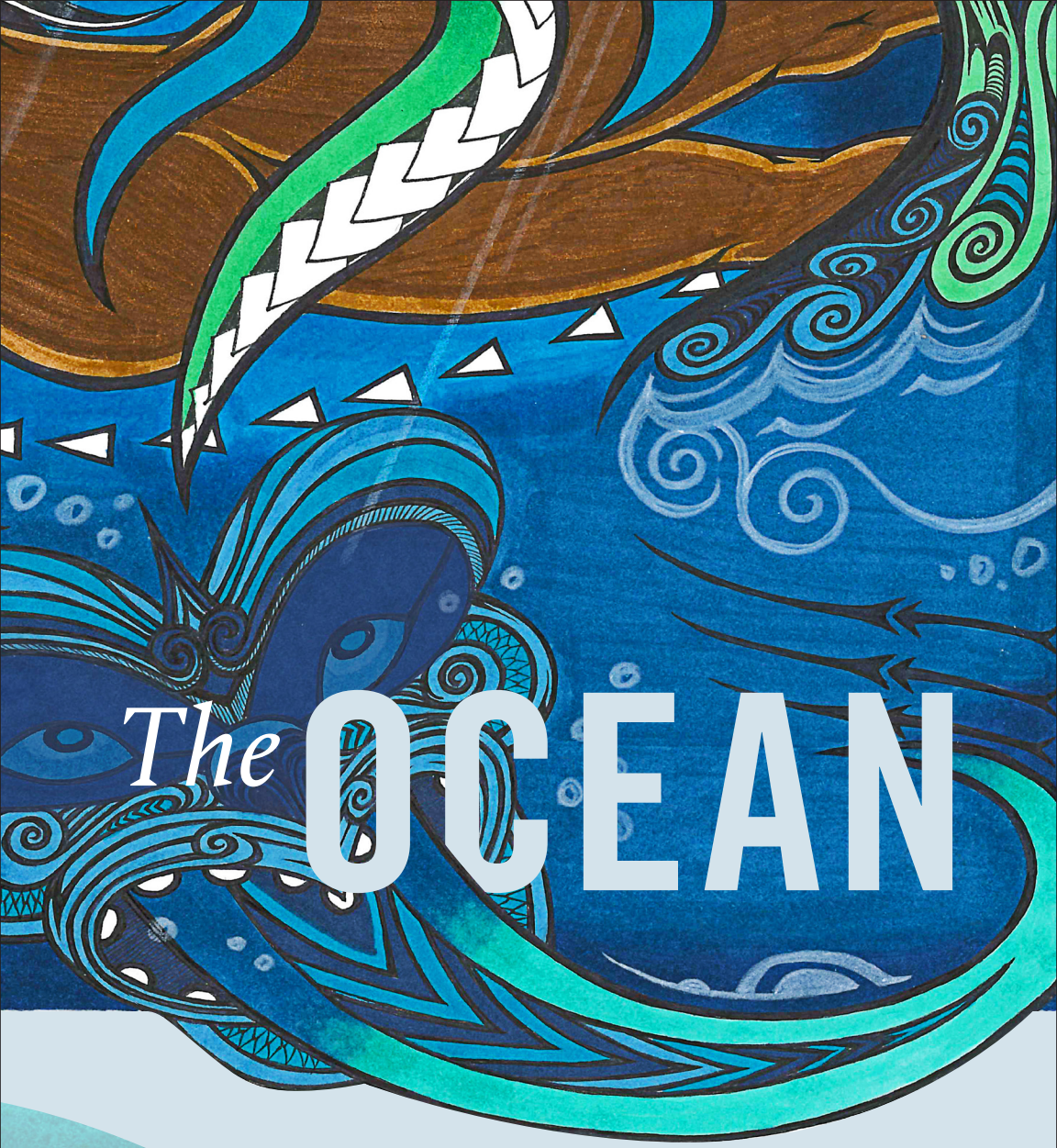
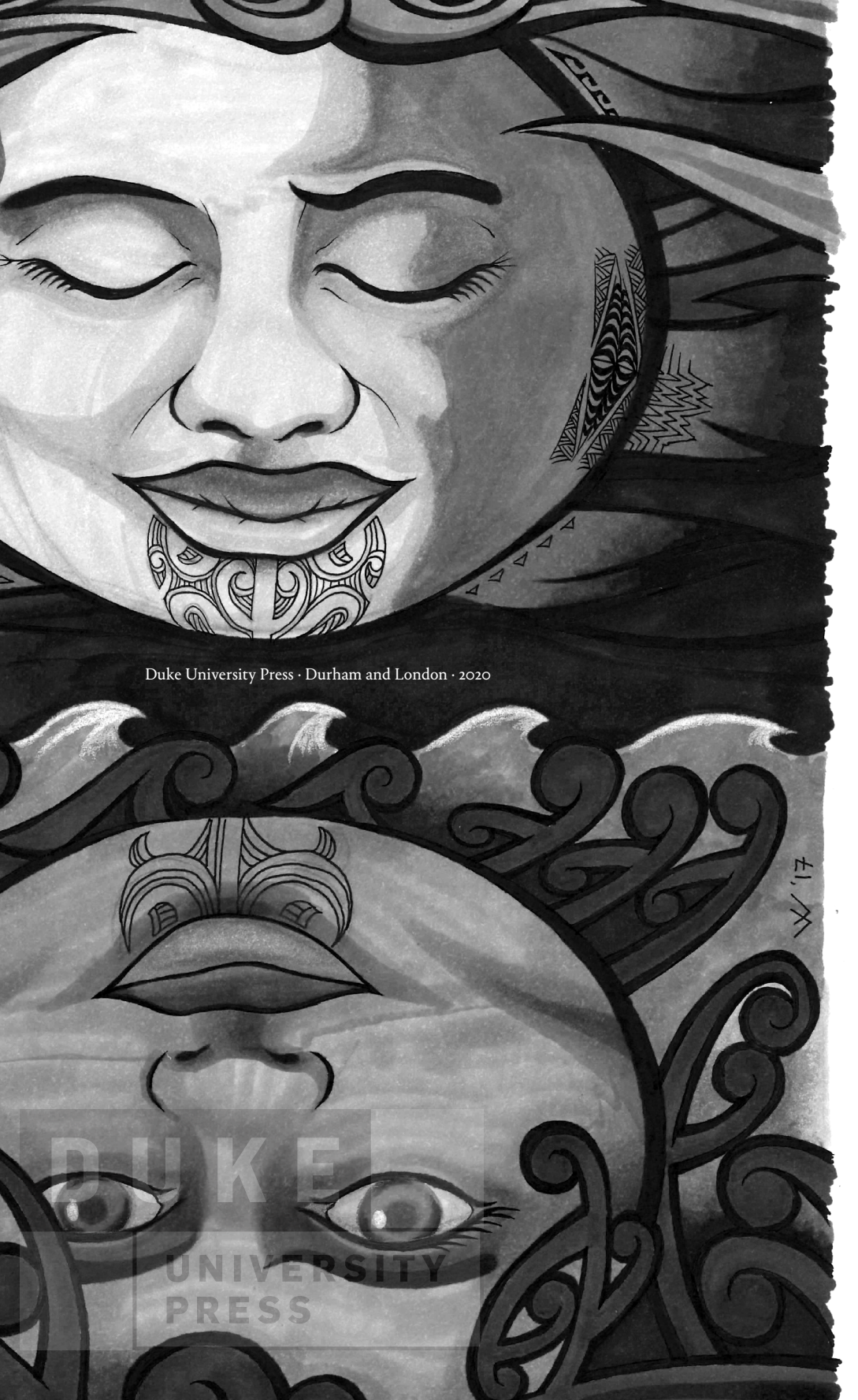


The OCEAN *in the* SCHOOL

PACIFIC ISLANDER STUDENTS TRANSFORMING THEIR UNIVERSITY

RICK BONUS

The **OCEAN** *in the* **SCHOOL**



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FOR MY STUDENTS,

FOR OUR OCEAN.

Contents

Preface and Acknowledgments

The Ocean in the School presents a set of ethnographic tales and analyses about Pacific Islander students and their allies who attempted to transform a university that they thought did not value their presence on campus. It is an account of the struggles that underrepresented and nontraditional students faced in light of educational programs that attempted to promote "diversity" without much structural change, and the ways in which such struggles were generative of alternative attitudes and practices that enabled college "success" for them. It is a story of how students turned to their indigenous and evolving conception of the "ocean" to understand their world, their school, and themselves, as much as it is a chronicle of how the students' "ocean" became a site of unlimited possibilities in their quest for meaningful schooling.

All of the students mentioned in this book have been or are still mentees of mine, and it is to them that I express my fullest gratitude for being part of my work. They are the reason why this book project began, they were my partners when this ethnography proceeded, and they became my primary motivators for writing and finishing this manuscript. For those who know them, you will probably recognize David G. Palaita and Michael Tuncap in this book, as you will Nestor Enguerra Jr., Brukab Sisay, Deborah Tugaga, Staliedaniel Uele, Taylor Ahana-Jamile, Benjamin Lealofi, Toka Valu, Hork Chay Do, and so many others. Research protocol forbids me to name them directly in the book, but I have no qualms about thanking them profusely out in the open. They, and a whole array of students that I have closely worked with over the course of doing this ethnography—more than sixty-five in number, and growing—have shown me how loving and caring for each other in a school environment is *constitutive* of meaningful schooling, not decorative or supplementary to all the learning that takes place within and outside of our campuses. I am forever indebted to all of you, and this book is but one expression of my desire to always keep you close in our ocean.

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INTRODUCTION

What Does It Mean to Transform Schooling?

Going to this campus introduced me to many people and definitely changed my life. But me and my friends . . . we also changed this campus.

. . .

I dropped out of college because I couldn't take it anymore. I was ditching class, I was angry at my teachers, I was not havin' a good time. But hey, I didn't drop out because I failed. I didn't fail, you know. School failed me.

. . .

On the eve of her graduation from college, a young Pacific Islander woman told me how excited she was that, at last, her school was graduating with a degree *from her*. I did a double take and responded, "Say what?" "Yup," she said. "It's not just me who's really graduating, you know. It's the school too! I taught [this school] what our culture is, I taught it how to respect us, I taught it how to practice it. So yeah, I'm giving it a diploma, ha-ha, even though it's barely passing, you know. Congratulations!"

That same year, during the summer school session right after graduation, I was cleaning up my office when a young man, a Filipino who also identified as Pacific Islander, came knocking unexpectedly. I was surprised. I hadn't seen him for a while. And I wasn't sure if he was still a student, or had left school, or was somewhere in between. I wondered quietly, but I didn't want to ask

him about school right away. So, after our usual hugs and how-are-yous, as well as brief social updates, I half seriously asked, "So where are you now? Are you gonna be back sometime soon? Or have you finally given up on school?" "Ha-ha," he replied. "You're funny. I haven't given up on school. School gave up on me!"

I begin with the two epigraphs above, and the parallel anecdotes after them, to frame a set of ethnographic tales about the multilevel meanings and critiques of schooling for select groups of students of color in a major research university in the U.S. Pacific Northwest—the Seattle campus of the University of Washington (UW). These were students I taught, mentored, advised, and interacted with as a professor and academic program director in this university. I offer these narratives, along with my framing and analysis of them, as an engagement with ideas and practices of transforming schools—making them more meaningful to the cultures and experiences of all their students so that they can thrive in them—by proposing that we consider seriously how students themselves define and make meaning out of their own schooling experiences.[1] Transforming schools entails reworking places of learning in a structural sense, instead of focusing solely on making students individually conform or change in order to do better in them. I propose that in this affirmation of student meaning making, we make antiracism and the larger struggles toward social justice be the central practices of changing schools, from those that emphasize the subjugation and control of students' minds and communities into those that value meaningfulness, respect, and critical thinking of everyone who participates in them. In this regard, I present the specific university experiences of mainly Pacific Islanders, including their allies at the UW—students who also identified as Filipina/o Americans, African and African Americans, Native Americans, Southeast Asian Americans, and Chicanas/Chicanos/Latinas/Latinos—to provide a glimpse of how such meaning making looks from the perspectives of selected members of these underrepresented groups and within the context of a large urban university that has expressed a strong commitment to the well-being of its increasingly diverse student body.[2] This is a study, then, of some members of a higher educational institution—about sixty-five of them[3]—and what they thought about their university and their experiences in it, including especially how they attempted to change or transform it. It is not a formal study of the school per se, although one major part of this work looked into a university-supported student retention program, and a chapter touches on a study abroad program offered as a university course.[4]

Through ethnographic fieldwork conducted from 2004 to 2009, and continuing informally until 2018, I offer a set of student voices that fundamentally critiques certain schooling practices that ignore or devalue racial difference and

consequently impede meaningful college education. Such a critique, I argue, can be most adequately understood not when it is just seen as responding to local school-specific occurrences that appear isolated and decontextualized, but only when it is placed constitutively within the larger historical conditions of racism and other forms of school inequity in the United States. These conditions are principally mediated within long-standing arguments and debates about the presence of nonwhite bodies in schools and the power that these bodies hold (or not) in relationship to dominant school cultures.[5] Hence, we can imagine these student voices as coming from those whose underrepresentation does not merely emanate from a position that denotes their on-campus marginality or powerlessness; they are expressions of what contemporary university schooling looks like in a moment when more and more nonwhite students are entering our schools, while many of our ways of teaching all of our increasingly diverse students have remained quite unchanged.[6]

Contemporaneously, and most critically, we may also begin to limn how the experiences of such an ignored and "underrepresented presence" on many campuses signify the realities of U.S. schooling within imperial, global, and transnational frameworks. These optics allow us to recognize, for example, how the university in the United States was and has been a central defining apparatus for the disciplining and constructing of "American citizens" and workers, especially of nonwhite populations in places here and abroad, and through circuits of power and control over the resources and destinies of those who are subjected to it.[7] So, to say that the college experiences of Pacific Islander students and those who are similarly situated are merely the mirror consequences of their perceived outsider or even "foreigner" status is to discount their colonial relationship to the U.S. state and their parallel histories with others who have been enslaved, exploited, and dominated under the aegis of U.S. global imperialism.[8] To wit, many of these students and their parents may have come from places outside of the United States and the U.S. mainland, but all of the students' historical and continuing encounters with U.S. society—whether through formal and informal colonization or within global circuits of economic exploitation and cultural domination—had most assuredly already begun long before they arrived on the mainland and enrolled in its educational institutions.[9] To assume, then, that all these students unwittingly enter our schools as ignorant and empty vessels ready and willing to be filled with Western knowledge and skills that they have no prior critique of is to undervalue the impact and critique of U.S. imperialism, settler colonialism, and white supremacy here and abroad.[10] Such omissions of historical and sociopolitical contextualization often drive many of our

school engines to run at idle despite the increased presence of these students on U.S. campuses.

In so many ways, then, the student critiques that I represent in this book are informed by the contexts I mentioned above—a consciousness of both the historical and continuing effects of racism and social inequality, as well as imperialism and neoliberalism,[11] in several forms and locations that students were already well aware of before entering college, but that they learned to think about in more complex and sometimes unsure or contradictory ways during my conversations with them. In varying forms and intensities, then, the students in this book, like many students in general, belonged to off-campus and on-campus communities that defined and gave meaning to their lives. But what set them apart from most other students were their experiences of realizing, once they set foot on campus, that their prior communities, backgrounds, and histories had little or no value in relationship to their college education. These, they connected most directly with racism and imperialism. And then, yoked with this set of experiences were the multiple strands of student and community devaluation that explained why their people's histories were not taught, why most of their teachers and classmates did not know anything about them (or knew them only in demeaning ways), and why most everyone made them feel that they did not belong in a campus that ironically acknowledged them loudly, but only when their nominal value needed to be proclaimed.[12] They felt that they were struggling to succeed, or at least exist, in a place that did not know, value, or truly care for them. This was at the heart of their critique.

In considering both the students' specific historical and contemporary contexts, along with their critiques of the educational institution that they became a part of, I place this study within the academic literature of educational research that has been concerned with minorities in schools. This subject encompasses such a wide range of interests—from studies that assess the impact of institutional desegregation all the way to policy recommendations regarding culturally sensitive teacher training—so I wish to train our attention to a more specific research focus here, which is the study of college-level school transformation from the perspectives of underrepresented students. Numerous studies point to students' identities and their personal and social development as keys to understanding their higher education experiences and, to a great extent, their performance as students—something that I interrogate centrally in this book.[13] But fewer studies consider at the same time, or with equal attention, the "identities" of schools themselves, particularly in the ways they are made manifest to minority students, as principal variables that significantly shape student and school performance. These, in daily transaction

with the collective identities of underrepresented students, are what I more substantively focus on here. By school identities, I mean to say that similar to how students comprehend and "develop" their own personal and social identities, they also observe, experience, and question how their school is racialized, classed, gendered, sexualized, and differentiated through other interrelated forms of social categorization.[14] Despite appearing to most others as neutral, unremarkable, or simply possessing innocuous institutional "character," the university, as the students reveal here, has everything else but those qualities.[15] It has a culture of a dominant and dominating kind, a set of practices that privilege some over others, and a smug attitude of exclusivity and elitism that is oftentimes regarded as "the way things work" or something that has very little connection with inequity. The individuals in this study lived with and through these university identities, so much so that their experiences as students and, for many, as student activists were most definitively influenced by the critical attention they directed at figuring out how such institutional identities mattered to them and affected them so. Later on, students would realize the extent to which their efforts at school identity transformation—with the angle of intervention pointed most directly at their university, along with their relationship to it—would butt heads with emerging pressures for their school to cut costs, increase class sizes and tuition fees, and rely on other free market approaches to education in a neoliberal moment of decreasing state support for all levels of schooling.[16]

How, then, did school transformation occur? As minority students, Pacific Islanders and their allies felt the deep hold of their institution upon their on-campus lives, adversely affecting their motivation to succeed or limiting their opportunities to do better even when they or their teachers thought they were being successful. But simultaneously, these experiences and school conditions were also generative of a set of proactive gestures and attitudes that altogether comprise what I consider to be a cultural politics of transformative schooling for youth of color, a set of practices that students and I would collectively and metaphorically connect with conceiving "the ocean in the school." We attribute the intellectual and cultural/community source of this conception fundamentally to Epeli Hau'ofa, a Fijian anthropologist, essayist, storyteller, and poet of Tongan ancestry, whose writings about Oceania as an alternative episteme for those who inhabit it, or have a deep relationship with it, were an important source of knowledge and inspiration for students who have traveled far away from their ancestors' homes.[17] Looking to the ocean, as Hau'ofa writes, not only as the referent for many Pacific Islanders' sacred ancestral space, but as a repository of values, conditions, and resources that are specific to those

who are connected with it, was something that students found meaningful in making sense of their struggles on campus.[18]

The ocean, or at least the imagination of its presence in everything they did in the university, represented to the students a most highly regarded aspect of their social lives that somehow extended the reach of their relationships to distant ancestral locations—since the ocean connected, not separated, them—and deepened the recognition of their current fates.[19] In reference to their particular situations, then, to regard the ocean in the school was to name the students' strategic resolution of their alienation as a consequence of their physical sensory distance from what they regarded as home, as much as it was to signify the compendium of struggles and strategies that students had to go through given their political and cultural distance from the power to determine their schooling process. It meant grappling with the realities of imperialism, underrepresentation, and minoritization while devising creative ideas and actions to mitigate, circumscribe, or transform such realities through and within the contexts of oceanic sensibilities. It drew from what they knew by heart about what it meant to be related to one another, the importance of respecting nature, ancestry, and religious belief, and how paramount it was to care for the community above the self—almost everything that they thought their university did not care much about. It was through these imaginations and practices of "the ocean" that these students were able to find clarity and clarification in figuring out the complications of their historical and cultural locations, especially for those whose comprehension of indigenous culture was something wedded to native land set amid a vast ocean. And, as participants in an elite university, it also became the students' wellspring of critical thinking and source of alternative practice against color-blind discourse, ignorance, and understandings of "diversity"—a term that was so much in vogue during the conduct of this study—that were shallow, empty, and toothless.[20] Such strategies derived from what students understood as their communities' cultural practices, indigenous traditions, and moral values, in tandem with their homegrown and transplanted experiences of family and social upbringing.[21]

As such, *The Ocean in the School* presents a most historically fraught, collectively inflected, but site-specific set of conditions that students experienced, which effectively generated particular practices that students and their teachers and mentors devised, tested, applied, and promoted. These advocacies included building and sustaining on-campus communities that valued students' cultures and histories, supporting off-campus networks that mitigated the separation between student lives within and outside of campus, and reimagining specific nondominant cultures not just as practiced within the space of the

"extracurricular" but as cultures and conditions that were justifiably integral to overall university learning. These were advocacies that recognized and appreciated the crucial connections between notions and practices of cultural identities and experiences—mostly imagined as racial in these cases—and school performance, connections that are pursued by a subfield of education studies that this work is in conversation with. Scholars of multicultural education, principally trailblazed by James A. Banks, Cherry A. McGee Banks, and Sonia Nieto, have made numerous claims about how schools perpetuate racism and other forms of injustice, which, in turn, cause profound harm to all its students, especially those coming from minority backgrounds. Critical of pursuing antiracism in campuses by merely celebrating "heroes and holidays" or by simply offering courses in native languages and cultures in order to foster tolerance and "good feelings" among students, such scholars call for more direct and purposeful challenges to racism and all forms of discrimination in schools and the larger society. These challenges may take the form of culturally conscious pedagogy, multicultural and socially critical curricula, and schooling opportunities that promote reflections on and actions against institutional and systemic forms of discrimination, white privilege, and white supremacy, including the disempowerment of minority groups. In all of these, the educational goals are directed toward the attainment of social justice through a critique of and set of actions against different forms of oppression within and outside of schools.[22]

For this ethnography, I extend the discussion of these critiques and advocacies by calculating their specific significance within long-standing debates regarding postsecondary student performance in particular. Many of our preoccupations about how students fare in college, especially in a period of radical changes in student demographics in most urban universities, as well as the increasing prominence of neoliberal ideologies in running educational institutions in general, enable us to think more deeply about why we run our schools the way we do and ultimately behoove us to ruminate on the overall significance of university schooling in our society.[23] In this book, I will build and sustain these interests regarding the logic between student performance and school significance as thematic hooks that will run across each and every ethnographic portrait. Why do our students perform in particular ways? And how are these performances linked to our thinking regarding the role of schools in society? I will use this logic to frame and inform my arguments regarding the students' quest for change and transformation in our schools. In the following section, then, I will introduce you to a good part of the world that students in this book inhabited, as a way to familiarize us with a specific

set of academic frameworks and attitudes within which we gauge their college performance.

FAILURE AND SUCCESS

Why do certain students fail in college, while the seeming vast majority of students succeed? When such students fail, how do we understand their failure and to what do we attribute such failure? Or when they succeed, besides asking what enabled them to succeed, how do we define and measure their accomplishments? What accounts of failure and success get privileged in the discourse and practice of university schooling, and which ones get submerged or excluded especially when calls for repairing student failure or for applauding student success are voiced? I focus on these questions to highlight the principal thematic aspects of this ethnography. In truth, I began this work, over ten years ago, with a different set of questions that poked at the reasons why certain students who are usually thought of as "high risk" were surprisingly doing well in school. They were earning grades in the high Bs and As, and they were graduating on time, in six years or less, rounding up our conventional ways of referencing "college success." I was interested in finding out what was motivating them to succeed; what strategies for success were they alternatively, if not inventively, deploying; and what impact did they have on others. I was on my way to preparing what I envisioned to be a blueprint for college achievement.[24] But as I got to know the students more deeply, both those who were flourishing and some who were leaving school (as a way to perform a comparison), I began to ruminate about what I thought was a more profound set of questions that plumbed deeper than what my original interest in student achievement could potentially reveal.

What changed? I was, first of all, struck by my subjects' extraordinary levels of academic engagement both as students in the classrooms *and* as campus activists who demanded what many would call "school reform" right in the offices of our university administration. Their acute sense of the ways in which schools deprived them of what they thought of as meaningful and culturally relevant education, their firm grasp of the historical depth of social injustice within which their demands were contextualized, and their insistence that they be heard and valued even though their numbers were small, all gave me a vivid impression that something much greater than highly engaged school performance was afoot here. These students were bright, accomplished, and high achieving. They entered and were enduring the university with the so-called right tools to enable them to succeed, and their successes were both envied by

other students and lauded by their teachers, including me. Yet they were also demanding that the very place that was giving them academic accolades left and right be changed. They were challenging their university to treat them and others like them differently, not similarly. They were daring their teachers to be educated on who they were and why their histories and communities mattered. They wanted their school to be transformed.

These college students, the first batch of those I observed and interviewed, identified themselves collectively as Pacific Islanders. They were troubled by the historical failure of their university to recruit, retain, and graduate substantial numbers of Pacific Islander and other underrepresented students and were poignantly appealing for greater inclusion of minorities in all levels of the university and a more diversified curriculum from their location as straight-A students, but it took me a while to figure out the logic of their claims.[25] One would assume, say, that these high achievers should not have been having problems with racial isolation and white-exclusive curricula precisely because they were succeeding despite such conditions.[26] Why would they bite the hand that was enabling them to succeed? And why would they want to change the terms and conditions that were allowing them to flourish? These incoherencies and contradictions captured my interest in exploring how particular kinds of students who are not the majority on their campus experience uniquely the realities of underrepresentation, a telling reminder that minority status does not translate neatly into predictions and expectations of (low) student performance. I was also awed at how these realities coincided with or, in fact, generated a specific narrative of advocacy that demanded a transformation of how we understand student achievement and student failure or, even larger, the meanings of a university education as a whole. As we will see in the rest of the narrative of this ethnography, the subjects in it draw eloquent distinctions between school success that can only be narrowly defined as assimilative or conservative and school success and *failure* that can both be powerfully marshaled toward, dare we say, revolutionary change in our schools.

To a similar degree that these students were advocating for an enriching experience in their school via a counterintuitive internal politics of transformation, another group of students—in particular, a less vocal group who identified individually as Pacific Islanders, Filipino Americans, and Chicanos—were reckoning with their struggles in schooling as an effect of their exclusion from it. These students stopped going to school at different periods in their lives, and because I knew them as mentees when they were still attending college, we maintained close contact with each other even after they left. I should venture to say right from the outset that these students withdrew themselves

from school not because they were not intelligent. They were not students who could no longer afford college, nor were they unprepared to do well in college, as most explanations for dropping out of or stopping college would offer.[27] Our typical and intuitive understandings of why certain students fail almost always imagine failure as something that is located within and produced by the students themselves.[28] They are the only ones at fault. But in this case, we will have to imagine these students differently, for they quit school not because they were failing in it. They left school because university schooling had lost its appeal for them. They could not find the reason for staying on as college students; their university held no significant meaning for them anymore; and to them, the school did not make attempts to lure them back, anyway. These students represent a break from our usual understanding of student failure as personal or family or community failure, to instead comprehend student failure alternatively as *school* failure. And it is through their testimonies that I also pursue a set of related claims about schools as they are critiqued not only from the outside but from the purviews of the continuing experiences of those who are excluded from them.

These twin poles of failure and success—of not passing classes and obtaining the highest grades, or eventually graduating—that are embedded within opposite ends of a continuum of student performance indicators have the ability to tell us much about the consequences of ways of teaching as well as ways of learning, studying, and taking tests on the part of students. But they can also tell us very little. When I asked students if studying hard and getting As were things that made them feel successful in school, many of them shrugged their shoulders. Sure, nice grades would make you feel successful. But is that all there is to a really successful college experience for them? Education scholars overwhelmingly agree that grades and the ability to graduate on time are just two of the many markers of worthwhile schooling, in a diverse list that can include a host of other variables such as having effective teachers, a recognized athletic record, and an accessible team of counselors, as well as a focus on beyond-the-classroom social activities and relationships.[29] And yet many students in this study thought that their teachers' and classmates' preoccupation with and valorization of grades, and their counselors' (and parents') relentless fixation on urging them to graduate on time, dominated so negatively the campus environment they inhabited.

Furthermore, and without a doubt more pressing for all of the students in this study, a most palpable sense of their collective identity and subjectivity—the ways in which they thought they were being looked at and treated—as students of color mattered in all aspects of their lives on campus.[30] All angles

and analyses of their school performance, they felt, were drawn from lenses and categories of race, gender, class, and other kinds of social differentiation that deterministically judged them narrowly, erroneously, or unfairly. They constantly wondered anxiously about other people's expectations and assumptions about who they were and what they could or could not do, they themselves oftentimes felt unsure or conflicted about their own abilities or lack thereof, and they also could not find clear and neat answers all the time when their beneficial presence as minorities in their school or if their school was the right place for them as minorities was questioned. Many students found the heavy weight of such anxieties about their presence as brown bodies terribly distracting and unnecessary, but a good number of them also found ways to make their unique status itself the reason for and the engine of their attempts at school transformation. Of course, they experienced success as well as disappointment, for even when the students and I turned to education scholarship for solutions, we found no guaranteed answers.[31] Struggling to be represented while resisting forced assimilation, wanting inclusion without saying yes to exploitation, and desiring recognition within an institution that was organized to discipline and control them—all of these conjointly made up their daily lives as students and thoroughly complicated the usual expectations everyone had about how they should behave and perform in college.

EXTRAORDINARY STUDENTS

I really wanted to stay and keep goin' at it, at UW. That's where my friends were at, that's my community . . . of love, of care, you know. That's my community too. But other than that, school meant nothing else to me. It was like I wanted to go to school to be with friends, not really to go to school and go to class and all that.

. . .

I'm a part owner of this school. It's a public school . . . for the public of our state and our country. As part owner, I have a right to change it . . . to make it better.

. . .

I got to know many of the students in this study, almost all of them from working- or lower-middle-class statuses and many of them first-generation college students, even before they were in my classes and academic programs. Many of them were born and raised in the United States but had significant ties with their homeland nations, states, and cultures (American and Western [or independent] Sāmoa, Tonga, Guam, Hawai'i, Palau, New Zealand, the

Philippines, Mexico, Ethiopia, Cambodia, Duwamish, Nooksack, Quinault, Yakama, and Klamath), so much so that they had either full or practical proficiency in several non-English languages. With the exception of Native Americans, all of the students had parents who either immigrated into the United States or migrated into the U.S. mainland. These parents came into the state of Washington to become skilled and unskilled workers, as military recruits or refugees, and with less educational attainment than most immigrants. They all mirrored a national statistic regarding the preponderance of working- and lower-to-middle-class statuses in these population groups. It was, therefore, common for almost all of the students' parents to have multiple low-paying and low-status jobs, become unemployed or underemployed at least once in their lifetimes, and have children who work while attending school.[32]

Of the sixty-five individuals who were part of this study up close, thirty-eight identified as Pacific Islander, nine as Filipino, six as Chicana/o/Latina/o, four as black, four as Southeast Asian (Vietnamese and Cambodian), and four as Native. At the time of the study, these students ranged in age from eighteen to twenty-five years old, forty-two were male and twenty-three were female, all were single (although a few were married later), and almost all were working full- or part-time in the school and its neighborhoods. About twenty-nine of these students were on full-scholarship status, and a good number of them, close to thirty-six, were receiving some form of financial aid. Half of them were daily commuters (usually from working-class neighborhoods south of Seattle), a quarter rented apartments within the vicinity of the campus, and the rest lived in the university dorms. They were students majoring in different areas and disciplines, from American ethnic studies to biology.

I underscore the category "Pacific Islander" in this study to echo the signifier of choice for the majority of the respondents who were involved in the conduct of my ethnography. They were mostly Sāmoan, Chamorro, Tongan, and Hawaiian, including some Filipinos and Filipinas who identified as Pacific Islander or who were products of both Filipino and Pacific Islander unions. Although they had a common understanding of "Pacific Islander" as a collective name for themselves, and given their awareness of shared histories, social practices and statuses, heritage, and language usage, they were heterogeneous in other ways. They were not all from the same religious groups, they had varying family migration patterns, and some of them did not identify as working-class, first-generation college attendees, single-raced, and straight. Like all U.S. racial groups, then, this category had traces of commonalities as well as heterogeneities within its nominal designation, indicators of both the complexity and

fluidity of race construction in American society.[33] Concurrently, I have also added the phrase "and their allies" to mark the certainty that there were indeed other students in the ethnography, besides those mentioned above, who associated themselves with Pacific Islanders and allied with them socially and politically. These students were careful not to recklessly claim a shared "identity" with their Pacific Islander classmates and friends, an identity that is usually bound up in strict definitions of blood or heritage connections. Instead, they discovered how the appellation "Pacific Islander," along with those who identified as such, provided them with a most vivid account of shared histories and contemporary realities they did not know existed outside of their own racial and ethnic groups. Hence, they were drawn to such an affiliation—a tight relationship, actually—with another category over a process that was organic, thoughtful, and respectful. I welcomed them into my study, just as I was prodded to do so by the Pacific Islander students on campus who embraced them and me into their group's culture and politics.

Some of my early student subjects were directly involved in the recruitment process for a faculty position on the UW Seattle campus that I was applying for. So, when I was eventually hired in the Department of American Ethnic Studies, they were among the first to welcome me into their university. I was touched by their gesture because I did not know beforehand their involvement, and I was even more gratified when they welcomed me, a Filipino American from Manila and Southern California, into their circle of Pacific Islanders and allies who were thinking seriously about the university, particularly its relationship to their racial identities and race-related experiences. I thereafter cultivated multidimensional teacher-student relationships with many of them, especially those who were recruited to be a part of this study. Two students who stood out in this group were Migetu and Tavita, who, at that time, were emerging campus leaders bent on making more visible the presence of Pacific Islanders on the UW campus despite and because of their small numbers.[34] They were engaged in establishing their own race- and ethnic-based student organizations, disentangling their groups from their forced and unwanted assignment into the Asian American category, and educating students, staff, and faculty on their otherwise unknown, misunderstood, or devalued cultures and histories. And they were relentless in seeking out any opportunities, rare as they were, in making the university work for them instead of the other way around almost all of the time.

I helped establish a peer mentorship program with Migetu, Tavita, and other Pacific Islander students, the story of which I detail in chapter 2, along with a similar program formed later on, specifically targeting Chicano and

Chicana students, which student organizers fondly and formally named Adelante, Spanish for "forward" or "ahead." Angelica and Eduardo were my principal informants for this program. Their college tales mirrored to a great extent the experiences of their Pacific Islander schoolmates, including the Filipino Americans who allied with them, and whose narratives I present here as well. Two other programs, Yəhaw̓ali and Ubuntu, geared for Native American and African diasporic and African American students, respectively, were formed later.[35] My protracted conversations with them usually began with me asking them how they were doing in school, evolved into discussions about how school was treating them and how they were treating their school in turn, and eventually progressed into how their schooling experiences, including their own school as a whole, could be proactively transformed or changed for the better. The mentorship programs—mainly our "study tables"—became the principal setting of and context for many of our conversations and activities.

From the early years, when I was hired as a regular faculty member at UW in 2000, and up to the present, my interactions with youth of color on campus, especially with Pacific Islanders like Migetu, Tavita, and their college mates, flourished into deep and lasting relationships that occurred on many levels: inside and outside of classrooms, within formal and informal mentorship environments, in family and community settings, and in larger contexts of activism and advocacy both on and off campus. During these years from when I informally started talking with the students and all the way until the end of data gathering for this project, I developed significant friendships with them that continue to this day, in ways that have made me regard them as more than mere subjects of analysis for this ethnography. I have since called them extraordinary students in the sense that they were quite different from most of the students I have known—mostly in terms of the deep passion with which they regarded their schooling—and because of the powerful ways they have had a positive impact on my work and my life, and the lives of the many campus communities we have touched. Many of them have graduated, and some of them are now academics like me. I enter this conversation about the meanings of schooling with all of them as my partners and allies in the struggle for change and transformation in our schools. And I recognize and acknowledge that the work that all of us do, principally in operation through and as an expression of our identities as activists of color, is part of a larger set of struggles against social injustice that find recognition here in collective forms and are now represented through the accumulated student testimonies that I have organized and opened to analysis.

TRANSFORMING SCHOOLS

On the other end of the thematic logic that *The Ocean in the School* is engirded by, one that transacts with ideas and practices regarding measuring student performance, is the attention students paid to evaluating *school* performance. The research work that I detail here is fundamentally an account of people who do not fit into a predetermined mold of university education. It is about students who enter college almost always already prefigured as outsiders primarily by virtue of their nonwhite and nonelite status—and relatedly, on account of the lack of the legacies of former students like them that these current students should have stood to inherit once they came in—and on the basis of a numerically insignificant number of students counted as part of their groups who are already in the university. This latter reason is usually invoked as an ideal illustration of their outsider status, as a cause and effect of their distance from centers of power, and as evidence of their alleged unpreparedness for college (and, therefore, their unsuitability for retention and graduation, despite being admitted), a kind of circular argument that explains low enrollment numbers as indications of deficiencies that are internal to the students and the communities they come from.[36] But how do we expect outsiders to fit in an environment that is designed to not make them fit in the first place? What are the conditions that generate and sustain expectations of fitting, and what happens when these expectations are not met? More importantly, how are these incommensurabilities directly experienced by those who inhabit such spaces of otherness? How do they comprehend their unfit status, and how do they work through their conditions of domination not as outsiders or marginal players, but in their position as insiders and stakeholders in the university system?

In many ways, then, this project engages with a desire to transform how schools may deal with extraordinary students by offering alternatives to the ways they conventionally deal with student failure and success and by using the perspectives of those who themselves experience unfitness and nonrecognition. Education scholars Angela Valenzuela and Marcos Pizarro ask parallel questions and provide unconventional answers in their work, arguing about the critical necessity of understanding student failure not as a consequence of laziness, indifference, or lack of intelligence "displayed" by the students, but as something that ought to make us question at least two things: how such "displays" may actually be representative symptoms of a larger systemic failure of schooling and, more specifically, how these "displays" may be the very same ones that mirror the ways in which schools treat such students.[37] Students' indifference and laziness, in both studies conducted by Valenzuela and

Pizarro, are but the effects of schooling indifference and laziness toward students, notwithstanding the schools' inability to provide access to resources, high-quality and culturally competent teaching, and environments that are nontoxic especially to particular groups of marginalized students, including campus spaces that respect their voices. And to address student failure, they say, the angle of intervention must be recalibrated to focus on schooling practice and resource allocation instead, accompanied by changes in attitudes that uphold racism against students of color. Valenzuela reveals in her ethnography the myriad ways in which schooling "divests youth of important social and cultural resources, leaving them progressively vulnerable to academic failure," hence her use of the term "subtractive schooling" to emphasize (as a negative critique) how students' cultural assets can instead be harnessed for productive use on campus.[38] And for Pizarro, it is the pursuit of social justice itself that will require the understanding of "Chicana/o experiences in conjunction with communities, under the direction of these communities, and *with a recognition of the unique knowledge systems and knowledge bases in these communities*" in order to make a difference.[39]

Schools and universities constantly undergo change. But the students and I believe that the conditions we face in our universities these days demand a specific and deeper account of what to do with change and, even before that, how to recognize and define change—beyond one version that celebrates how the "face" of schools has changed because of demographic diversity, for example, while ignoring how schools have themselves not changed in providing the kind of education that is appropriately designed for such a different and diverse demographic. When our schools' criteria for teaching courses and evaluating students worked well for a good majority of students all these years, how do we expect the same criteria to work well this time for a good newer crop of minority students? This question pokes at the core of how we define education and schooling especially in American society and, in particular, at how we define and interrogate the relationships between race and schooling as indexes for determining student performance. What does it mean to attend a university for someone who has never known any family member who has been to a university? What is the experience like for students who take a lot of courses in school that have nothing to do, or are not made to be connected, with their culture and history? How significant is it for nonwhite students to go to a university where very few students and faculty look like or understand them and where the conditions are such that their histories are ignored, misrepresented, devalued, or, worse, not known? How do these combined condi-

tions affect the ways in which students fail, succeed, and make meaning out of their schooling?

ONGOING AND UNFINISHED STRUGGLES

I'm always seen here as someone who represents diversity, as someone who was given a chance because she's different and comes from somewhere not usual. So the pressure is always there for me to do well. I make this university look good. But I do most of the hard work for it.

. . .

I don't represent diversity. I represent inequality! Just take a look at people around us. Very few people look like me.

. . .

I argue in this book that Pacific Islander, Filipino, Chicana/Chicano, Latina/Latino, African American, Southeast Asian American, and Native American students, including those students who are similarly situated, provide us with a glimpse of contemporary college experiences that enlighten us about the inadequacies of many of our attempts to address diversity in our schools. These attempts range from those that ignore the specific historical conditions faced by newer, emerging, or minoritized student populations to those that forget the impact of an unrelenting set of institutional forces that resist change despite the influx of different presences of bodies in academia.[40] Through the perceptive voices of my student interviewees, I propose that the struggle to make diversity advocacy real and effective on a college campus must include a direct challenge to reimagine a more nonalienating environment for students so that classrooms are transformed as places for meaningful learning and so that students get better equipped to transform their worlds. And in this transformation, we strongly suggest that knowledges of and critiques against the continuing realities and impact of imperialism, settler colonialism, white supremacy, and identity-based discrimination—everything that structurally shapes and determines the life chances of all students—be placed at the center, not at the margins, of all schooling practice.[41]

I began the explanation for these arguments by contextualizing them within conventional frameworks of student assessment that assume a universal and, therefore, problematic set of definitions regarding success and failure. This is a bipolar set of standards that is difficult to escape because the alternatives to it are hard to configure. Students, for example, are evaluated on the

basis of the degrees of success or failure by which they comprehend course material. What happens if the course material is not presented to them as relevant to or connected with their lives? Who gets to be blamed when a student ends up failing to comprehend course materials or when a student does not utilize the appropriate language to express a connection between course material and culture? And what needs to be done instead? Our suggestions are outlined in this book.

In chapter 1, I open with a large picture of the contemporary university within the context of race relations in American society, as drawn by the students I interacted with. We will see how students experienced the space of the university as dauntingly majestic and replete with the trappings of elite cultures that are not theirs. Yet they will also show us how they mitigated their anxieties and feelings of loneliness about such a forbidding place by simultaneously constructing it as a space of desire, pleasure, and possibility, especially within the seemingly boundless parameters of the ways in which they imagined "the ocean in the school." In these senses, I attempt to explain how schooling may be understood as a site in which contemporary politics of diversity and the dynamics of power relationships are played out especially from the point of view of students of color and against the backdrop of the changing and increasingly diverse demographics of students, teachers, and communities who turn to history and culture as sites of transformative struggle.

Chapter 2 names and narrates the activities of two mentorship programs, the Pacific Islander Partnerships in Education (PIPE) project and Adelante, as sites for configuring how a cultural politics of a transformative college education looks as they are originated and sustained by students. These programs are the principal sites where we will meet the students in closer view, where we will understand their struggles from the ground and within the context of their underrepresentation in school and in society, and where we will consider how their collective meaning-making and practices of community building converse with larger questions regarding college success and failure, and to a good extent, in relationship to social injustice.

In chapter 3, we will meet those students who have left school, either temporarily or permanently. We will hear the reasons why they decided to leave college, and, as we do so, they will reveal to us how they framed such a departure not as a simplistic and unfair calculation of their individual deficiency but largely as a critique of ideas and practices of uniform schooling. We will see how their notions of school as a place of discovery, family and community sustenance, and collective resource building ran in contrast to dominant atti-

tudes regarding how to behave and succeed in college. Along with citing some students who stayed in and graduated from the university but had something to say about student departures, I will attempt to cohere the sentiments of these students who left by way of an argument about building and sustaining meaningfulness in school in order for students to succeed in it.

Chapter 4 pays attention to certain site-specific schooling activities—student organization meetings, cultural events, recruitment projects, and the experiences of being in a study abroad program—to see the breadth as well as depth of students' engagement with school and life transformation inside but also outside of the confines of typical classrooms. All of these sites were sustained by, as well as generative of, alternative thinking and practice with respect to culturally relevant curricula, an acute sense of the historical and ongoing struggles regarding the measurement of academic performance, and critical questions regarding the value of schooling for nondominant cultures. I eventually culminate this chapter with a visit to a classroom where a Pacific Islander historical and contemporary cultures course was offered and taught by one of my mentees who eventually became a professor like me.

I offer a concluding chapter to ruminate on the connections between transformative schooling and the notion of schooling that is not afraid of boundaries and change.[42] In determining bases for measuring those who succeed and those who fail, in designing curricula that are meant to comprise and produce various understandings of human existence, and in deciding who and what counts in addressing unequal relationships of power in our schools, we tend to enforce distinctions drawn according to received assumptions regarding the values of competing group identities, particularly racialized and gendered ones. We are also often hampered by conventions and universal notions of education, we almost always assume that schools are bounded spaces discrete from larger society, and we tend to forget that schools are not meant to simply reproduce and disseminate knowledge. My students and I believe that schools are also sites for resisting and transforming knowledge, that schools are and should not be disconnected from the communities outside of them, and that schools are places where we can find meaning and where we can have imaginative and pleasurable ways of knowing and acting. On grander levels, we understand schools as oceans of real lives, real struggles, and real destinies. They are sites of rich resources as much as they are sites of fantastic possibilities. They are sites of unfinished business, simultaneous to and parallel with thinking of and reckoning with racism and other forms of social inequality as incomplete, imperfect, and ongoing struggles.

STUDYING STUDENTS

Professor Bonus, you and me, and all of us, we are the ocean. We are vast, we are complex, we are profound. Most of all, we are connected and our love for one another is boundless.

. . .

May our ancestors guide you well, Bonus, in writing this book.

. . .

This book of ethnographic tales, complemented by my analysis and supplemented also by my individual narratives, emanates from a position of collective interest and inspiration.[43] I became initially interested in documenting student lives because they largely mirrored my own and they reminded me of my struggles particularly in attending graduate school as an underrepresented minority student myself. I experienced and continue to experience out-of-placeness in the several schools I attended and at UW, where I work. I felt and continue to feel a disjunction between my cultures and the mainstream cultures of schooling. And I am constantly negotiating my underrepresented status between a politics of nominal representation and a politics of meaningful recognition; between my obligations to my institution and my ethical responsibilities to my students, colleagues, and communities; and between my identity as an individual and my membership in and belonging to larger collectives. I admire and am inspired by my students not only because I see myself in them, but especially because they decided to include me as a partner in the struggle to transform our schooling and, consequently, our lives. They are the source of my strength and wisdom, and the reason for my daily perseverance as a university professor.

My research on education and race speaks to the conditions of racial underrepresentation and discrimination in schools—about going to school, staying in school, and graduating from school as political acts and sites of creative yet conflicting struggles for meaningfulness and social mobility for minority youth. I want to invite readers of this book to consider these ethnographic narratives as sites for imagining these conflicting struggles, not so much to present a set of foolproof recipes or models for successful undergraduate education, but to put out in the open parts of an ongoing conversation about what some of our students experience in college, why certain students stay or drop out of college, and what it means for our students to have a meaningful college education, or at least attempt to have one. These, to me, are the most important pieces in the set of conversations regarding race and education that I participate in.

As I write this introduction, and as I reflect on the specific aspects and the cumulative picture of what I paint in this book, I want to alert the reader of yet another underlying theme that has informed and propelled this ethnographic project. Simultaneous with thinking about this ethnography as a critique of racism and imperialism, of conventional models of student assessment, and of schooling ideologies and practices in general, this work expresses a struggle with identifying, sorting, documenting, and explaining social phenomena—represented here as student voices and activities—in ways that honor the spirit, intent, and integrity of its subjects. In my disciplinary training in the social sciences and, in particular, in my training and experience in ethnographic work, there is always the compulsion, indeed a requirement, that its practitioners make good sense of their subjects' realities as they are observed and written.[44] It is the scholar's task to "capture" what they decide as interesting and important, to select and organize from a universe of data what is logically (or disciplinarily) possible and sensible, and to analyze the chosen narratives as they resonate with larger contexts and previous theories of social living. My struggle with performing all of these is not about whether or not I have fulfilled these tasks sufficiently. It is, rather, the opposite. It is about whether or not I have presented the students' tales only as they are partially, provisionally, and incompletely observable, narratable, and analyzable to me.

Subjects' truths have interesting ways of creeping up on the ethnographer, and, in my experience, I oftentimes got flustered when my student subjects revealed significant parts of their lives to me in moments when I was not paying close attention, when I got the point of their jokes days after they told me, and when the intent of their actions sometimes produced what seemed to be harmful consequences to our communities. I have also had moments of doubt, fear, and uncertainty about the ways in which I have affected my students'/subjects' lives—how some of my comedic acts, for example, seemed to distract others, or how my frequent dramatic moments of hyper-mentorship overwhelmed them. My disciplinary imperatives to organize what amounted to seventeen or so variables that I wrote on index cards to help me begin my writing seemed, many times, to be so inadequate to and inappropriate in producing a veritable account of my subjects, simply because I wanted everything to make sense to me and to my discipline. All throughout this work, then, I wrestled with these academic imperatives as I searched for and experimented with other ways of understanding and cohering on top of and in resistance to such obligatory modalities and formations.

So, in the spirit of studying "what does not fit," I present this book's collection of accounts as a representation of my struggles to make sense of my

subjects' truths as they are engaged both within the analytical models prescribed by my intellectual training (formally in communication, ethnic studies, and, tangentially, in education) and in consideration of those alternative ways of thinking and doing that my discipline and fields of study have yet to codify or have simply comprehended as "not making sense." My editorial selection of narratives and specification of analytical points are strung together only to the degree that they can be regarded not so much as an amalgamation of intellectual insights that speak to large theories of education and society but as a collection of nodes of engagement enunciated principally by my ethnographic subjects about their school, their communities, themselves. In these engagements, they have oftentimes spoken, remained silent, or acted in defiance of expectations or without careful attention to an assumed logic, stuff that I am careful not to dismiss. But what I have found provocative, and what has introspectively defined my work on this project on all levels, is that students have also done such actions so prophetically, imagining the impossible, performing the unscripted, anticipating what can be inconceivable, and practicing what is yet to be named.[45] I hope that my attempts at representing these remarkable engagements and constituting my work in the form and spirit of these engagements do justice to my subjects.

I am thoroughly convinced that my student subjects were my best teachers in performing and writing this ethnography, and they did so while "thinking outside of the box" and "through the ocean," so to speak.[46] They taught, and continue to teach me, what they know from their collective experiences and from the books they read—how to simultaneously respect and defy tradition, how to be open-minded about untested ways of doing things, how to not be always afraid of failure or be overwhelmingly held down by fear in the act of disobeying rules or not following protocol. These are attitudes and actions that no social science project intent on proposing reproducible social axioms can fully account for without losing the dignity and nuance of its subjects and their actions. This work, on the contrary, is an account of fissures and snippets of activities arranged in a logic that makes sense, hopefully, as a set of accounts that selectively express the imaginative, creative, and innovative ways of understanding how some of our students experience their schooling and how we can try to make our schools more understanding of and respectful to all of their students. To a great extent, this is what transformative schooling looks like to the students here—the imagination and building of communities within and across sites of schooling where learning is meaningful only to the degree that it is defined by all of those who care about these communities.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1 "Transforming schools" is a term I use loosely here for now, but it is widely articulated in the entire book. Within educational studies, it has a relatively recent origin as a term, it denotes multiple meanings, and it is referred to in different names and formulations, as well as applied to any or all levels of schooling. It may also include any or all schooling participants, curricula, teaching practices, and institutional policies. Edmund O'Sullivan, a principal advocate of the kind of transformative schooling I write about here, notes that "transformative education involves experiencing a deep structural shift in the basic premises of our thoughts, feelings and action. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves an understanding of ourselves and our self locations, our relations with other humans and with the natural world; an understanding of the relations of power in the interlocking structures of class, race, and gender; our body awareness; our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy" ("The Project and Vision of Transformative Education," 11). While O'Sullivan privileges the transformation of the individual in his formulation, I instead pay greater attention to the transformation of the structure of the schooling institution in my deployment of the term. This would include primarily the transformation of the ways in which schools transact with their students as coproducers of knowledge, not just consumers of it. Applied to this study, transformative education is the antithesis to and a critique of a "neoliberal educational ethos, which remains oriented by prescriptive, market-driven, and reductionist ideologies" and practices that privilege, for example, through standardized curricula and testing, static models of efficiency in teaching and learning methods, and commodification of the entire schooling process over holistic and critical visions of education (Gardner and Kelly, *Narrating Transformative Learning in Education*, 1). Its philosophies and models run parallel to scholarship and practice emanating from feminist studies, ethnic studies, and studies in multicultural education. It is also allied with, and sometimes equally understood as, emancipatory, liberatory, critical, democratic, or holistic education.

See, for example, the works of Banks, *Multicultural Education, Transformative Knowledge, and Action*; Banks and McGee Banks, *Multicultural Education*; Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*; Giroux, *Pedagogy and the Politics of Hope*; and hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*.

2 I use the demographic category "Pacific Islander," like all the other categories mentioned after it, contingently, knowing and understanding that all such designations group people as if they were all the same or that the people identified under these categories can be different from each other in terms of race, ethnicity, class, age, gender, sexuality, religion, ability, or any other kind of social category. The differentiations across and within these categories are made more apparent in the rest of the book. For a discussion of Pacific Islander heterogeneity in U.S. and other settings, refer to Camacho, "Transoceanic Flows."

3 Sixty-five is the actual number of students who were closely observed and interviewed continuously, and whose responses were formally coded and analyzed. All of them are anonymously cited in this book, either as individuals or as composites. There were numerous other students, more than one hundred, who were informally observed and had casual conversations with me, and whose voices resonate with the main respondents in this ethnography. Unless specified, they are not directly cited in this ethnography.

4 For an actual and more recent study of UW undergraduate students as a whole, refer to Beyer, Gillmore, and Fisher, *Inside the Undergraduate Experience*, a study that was undertaken under the auspices of the UW's Center for Instructional Innovation and Assessment. It did not include Pacific Islander students.

5 Arguments regarding the benefits (or not) of having minorities in schools range from issues such as desegregation to funding priorities in both public and private school settings, and from student performance and curriculum transformation to overall institutional or systemic change in all levels of schooling. See, for example, Conchas, Gottfried, and Hinga, *Inequality, Power, and School Success*; Ferguson, *The Reorder of Things*, chap. 2, "The Proliferation of Minority Difference"; Hochschild and Scovronick, *The American Dream and the Public Schools*; and Tarca, "Colorblind in Control."

6 Refer to similar claims proposed by Darling-Hammond, "What Happens to a Dream Deferred?"; Tienda, "Diversity ≠ Inclusion"; and, collectively, the authors in McCarthy et al., *Race, Identity, and Representation in Education*. There are ample data that document these demographic changes, especially in terms of racial composition of students, in all levels of schooling and in both urban and rural schools. Studies that touch on these include Olson, "Children of Change"; Posey-Maddox, *Reconceptualizing the "Urban"*; and Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, *Children of Immigration*. For primary data, consult the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics 2015*. The center's findings for data gathered from 1976 to 2012 show that "the percentage of American college students who are Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, Black, and American Indian/Alaska Native has been increasing (table 306.100). From 1976 to 2012, the percentage of Hispanic students rose from 4 percent to 15 percent, the percentage of Asian/

Pacific Islander students rose from 2 percent to 6 percent, the percentage of Black students rose from 10 percent to 15 percent, and the percentage of American Indian/Alaska Native students rose from 0.7 to 0.9 percent. During the same period, the percentage of White students fell from 84 percent to 60 percent" (378). However, there is considerable variance in the data culled just from the last three years before 2013: the numbers of college students are actually decreasing (or stable, on average) for certain subpopulations of black and Asian groups, and specifically for Pacific Islanders and Native Americans. On the basis of SAT and ACT scores, and other benchmarks such as reading assessments, scores in mathematics and science subjects, and Advanced Placement exam scores, the pool for many college-eligible underrepresented high school minorities is also shrinking. The number of schoolchildren of all races who live in poverty, except for white and select Asian students, is increasing. The number of faculty of color in postsecondary institutions was slightly over 21 percent of the total full-time faculty count in 2013. Adams, "SAT-ACT Performance for 2015 Graduates Called 'Disappointing,'" 6; Cole and Barber, *Increasing Faculty Diversity*, 5; multiple essays in Museus, Maramba, and Teranishi, *The Misrepresented Minority*; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *The Condition of Education 2016*, 223; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics 2015*, 30, 433; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups 2010*, 17, 53.

7 Those who write about this particular history of U.S. education have long acknowledged the coupling of schooling (in all levels) with Americanization (otherwise referred to as "citizenship" or the process of "national integration"), specifically of immigrants and colonized subjects. See Carnoy, *Education as Cultural Imperialism*; Chatterjee and Maira, *The Imperial University*; Constantino, *The Miseducation of the Filipino*; del Moral, *Negotiating Empire*; Maramba and Bonus, *The "Other" Students*; Mercer, "Testing and Assessment Practices in Multiethnic Education"; and Racelis and Ick, *Bearers of Benevolence*.

8 In education studies, the key expression here is John U. Ogbu's "dual frame of reference" to denote those students whose schooling experiences are mediated by an exposure to at least two discrete countries or cultures of schooling, as a consequence of their relationship to and subjectification by the state. Ogbu, "Immigrant and Involuntary Minorities in Comparative Perspective." Elaborations can be found in Darling-Hammond, "What Happens to a Dream Deferred?"; Gándara and Contreras, *The Latino Education Crisis*; Gram, *Education at the Edge of Empire*; Matute-Bianchi, "Situational Ethnicity and Patterns of School Performance"; Museus, Maramba, and Teranishi, *The Misrepresented Minority*; Ochoa, *Academic Profiling*; Olneck, "Immigrants and Education in the United States"; Pitre et al., *Educating African American Students*; and Suárez-Orozco, "Immigrant Adaptation to Schooling."

9 Current U.S. colonies in the Pacific include the eastern part of Sāmoa (acquired in 1899 through a treaty between the United States, Great Britain, and Germany); Nuku Hiva in French Polynesia (colonized from 1813 to 1832); Guam (seized from Spain in 1898); several islands in Kiribati, the Marshall Islands (occupied in 1944);

Palau (captured from Japan in 1944); the Federated States of Micronesia (administered starting in 1947); the Northern Mariana Islands (invaded in 1944); and, at some point, Pukapuka and Rakahanga (claimed in 1856, but ceded to the Cook Islands in 1980). The Philippines was a U.S. colony from 1898 to 1946. Hawai'i, before statehood in 1959, was annexed in 1898. See Diaz, *Repositioning the Missionary*; Geiger, *Facing the Pacific*; Go, "'Racism' and Colonialism"; Isaac, *American Tropics*; and Trask, *From a Native Daughter*.

10 This relationship between U.S. imperialism—the exercise of U.S. political, economic, and cultural power over people and societies, including minorities from within the United States and its territories, often by force—and the university (or schooling in general and its disciplinary formations in particular) has been amplified in historical terms by scholars in the following works: del Moral, *Negotiating Empire*; Gram, *Education at the Edge of Empire*; Motha, *Race, Empire, and English Language Teaching*; Ng, "Knowledge for Empire"; Nugent, "Knowledge and Empire"; Stratton, *Education for Empire*; and the contributions in Altbach and Kelly, *Education and the Colonial Experience*, and Chatterjee and Maira, *The Imperial University*. Also see Giroux, "The Militarization of US Higher Education after 9/11," for connections with the U.S. military-industrial-prison complex, and Leonardo, *Race, Whiteness, and Education*, for discussions that include racism and white supremacy in the contexts of empire. From a more structural "global" angle, the role of the U.S. university in reproducing U.S. neocolonialism and global capitalism that extends the historical and contemporary formations of settler colonialism is most succinctly and insightfully discussed by Grace Kyungwon Hong in her review of two books on recent Asian migration to the United States. She writes, instructively, "Globalization as a cultural, political, and economic phenomenon demands that we reconceptualize disciplinary boundaries, objects of study, and methodologies as we shape the role of the university" ("Past Legacies, Future Projects," 118).

11 Neoliberalism is understood here to be the institutionalization of policies and practices that promote self-interest, privatization of social goods, and decreased government participation in the provision of social welfare. In schooling, neoliberalist practices may include high-stakes testing, school choice and competition, school corporatization and commercialization, the hiring of part-time and non-tenure-track faculty. See Newfield, *The Great Mistake*, and Williams, *Consuming Higher Education*.

12 This critique, that certain students are valued only as they indicate a number in the school's "diversity" count but are deeply ignored as racialized bodies at the same time, partly echoes the sentiments of the Korean American students who were the subjects of Nancy Abelmann's incisive ethnography, *The Intimate University*. She claims, "Asian Americans offer, by many counts, the one color that does not count. Even as Asian American students experience often troubling segregation, U.S. racial politics teach them that they are somehow different from other college students of color and thus undeserving of race-based programs and policies" (2). Korean American students, unlike Pacific Islanders, are stereotypically assumed to be overachievers and are perceived to be overrepresented in many campuses. Pacific Islanders are

counted, but ignored, because they are mostly assumed to be insignificant and their cultures are largely unknown or misunderstood. Hence, their critiques are similar to, but qualitatively different from, those put forth by Korean Americans in Abelmann's work. For parallel arguments, refer to Maramba and Museus, "The Utility of Using Mixed-Methods"; the chapters in Museus, Maramba, and Teranishi, *The Misrepresented Minority*; and Tienda, "Diversity ≠ Inclusion."

13 A good number of studies on minorities and schooling look at the identities and socioeconomic backgrounds of students to calculate connections between such individual or group descriptors and performance in educational institutions, including other elements such as school choice, degrees of participation in campus organizations, and places of employment after graduation. See, for example, Vivian Louie's *Compelled to Excel* for the ways in which class differences among Chinese Americans influence college track options, and Michael J. White and Jennifer E. Glick's *Achieving Anew: How New Immigrants Do in American Schools, Jobs, and Neighborhoods*, for a more general overview across different population groups. Other studies, such as *The Asian American Achievement Paradox*, by Jennifer Lee and Min Zhou, combine the effects of "culture" with laws and institutional support in analyzing the reasons why certain Asian Americans have higher rates of school achievement than other minorities. A version of this claim, which focuses instead on the high achievement of Dominican and Colombian young adults in U.S. schools, can be found in Louie's other book, *Keeping the Immigrant Bargain*. These works illustrate how the experiences of Pacific Islander students parallel those of other groups, at the same time as they differ from these groups. I am careful not to count Pacific Islanders within the category "Asian American," for this is an important critique that the subjects of my ethnography vehemently expressed. Studies of Asian Americans in education, especially those that engage with their stereotypical (or mythical) status as "model minorities," are works that intersect with, but are in contrast to, my study of Pacific Islanders in higher education. See Ching and Agbayani, *Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in Higher Education*; Museus, Maramba, and Teranishi, *The Misrepresented Minority*; and Palaita, "Vāsā (Ocean)—the Space That Is Sacred."

14 "Student development theory" is a relatively large academic enterprise in the field of U.S. education studies. For an expansive summation and discussion, see Evans et al., *Student Development in College*. For a good overview of ethnic development with reference to Chicana and Chicano students, see Pizarro, *Chicanas and Chicanos in School*, 7–23. With reference to the illuminating connections between learning and identity for African American high school youth, see Na'ilah Suad Nasir's *Racialized Identities*. In contrast, studies that deal with what might be termed "school development theory" are rare and sometimes classified under historical studies of education or contemporary critiques of the American educational system. A few examples include Altbach, Berdahl, and Gumport, *American Higher Education in the Twenty-First Century*; Hurtado et al., *Enacting Diverse Learning Environments*; Newfield, *The Great Mistake*; O'Sullivan, *Academic Barbarism, Universities and Inequality*; Turner, *Racial and Ethnic Diversity in Higher Education*; and Williams, *Consuming Higher Education*.

15 In many studies of minorities in school, the campus is simply mentioned as "the setting." This is evident as well in most accounts of primary and secondary school experiences. With specific registers regarding the university itself, the preferred term is "organizational structure" or "institutional characteristics and behavior." See, for example, the reference to college characteristics in Braxton, "Reinvigorating Theory," 260–261, and Cole and Barber, *Increasing Faculty Diversity*, 20–29. "School characteristics" may include enrollment size, quality or selectivity, amount of money spent per student, type of training, and private versus state. Interestingly, Cole and Barber also state that most research finds such characteristics to have little influence on school outcomes (*Increasing Faculty Diversity*, 21). Another term that is used frequently is "campus climate" to encompass a range of variables—from institutional character and the behavior of people who inhabit the institution to curricula, policies, attitudes, and expectations—that collectively form a particular environment for the campus. On this, see Beyer, Gillmore, and Fisher, *Inside the Undergraduate Experience*; Maramba and Museus, "The Utility of Using Mixed-Methods"; and Yosso, *Critical Race Counterstories*.

16 Ferguson, *The Reorder of Things*, 213–214; Nelson, *No University Is an Island*, chap. 2.

17 Hau'ofa's *We Are the Ocean* is a collection of his important essays, interviews, stories, poetry, and artwork written and produced between 1975 and 2006. Integral to his writings was his linking of what would otherwise be the historically and politically separated areas of the Pacific Ocean identified as Micronesia, Melanesia, and Polynesia. Some of his ideas were known and, later, read by the students even before *We Are the Ocean* was published. They were drawn to Hau'ofa because they found in him a vocabulary of what and how they felt about their collective ocean-centered identities: "That the sea is as real as you and I, that it shapes the character of this planet, that it is a major source of our sustenance, that is something we all share in common wherever we are in Oceania—all are statements of fact. But above that level of everyday experience, the sea is our endless saga, the sea is our most powerful metaphor, the ocean is in us" (*We Are the Ocean*, 58). Of course, Hau'ofa has written about Oceania in this manner along with other writers such as Paul D'Arcy, Teresia Teaiwa, and Albert Wendt. It should be fair to say, however, that many students' attention to the ocean cannot be directly and only attributed to what they read. Rather, it was their intellectual exposure to the ocean's centrality in their lives, as it was made legible to them by Hau'ofa and others, that affirmed the connections they were already grappling with between their culture and the struggles they were experiencing in school. Also see such resonances in Wright and Balutski, "Understanding Pacific Islander Indigeneity."

18 Hau'ofa, *We Are the Ocean*. Also see the search for students' "home" in a study conducted by Goodwin in *Resilient Spirits*.

19 Hau'ofa, *We Are the Ocean*.

20 Refer to critiques of "decorative" diversity in Banks, *Multicultural Education, Transformative Knowledge, and Action*; Bowen and Bok, *The Shape of the River*; Bowen and Rudenstine, "Race-Sensitive Admissions"; McLaren, "White Terror and Oppositional Agency"; and Nieto, "From Brown Heroes and Holidays to Assimilationist Agendas."

21 Many educators refer to this set of strategies as bringing "funds of knowledge" or "cultural wealth" into the school. See González, Moll, and Amanti, *Funds of Knowledge*; Goodwin, *Resilient Spirits*; Valenzuela, *Subtractive Schooling*; and Yosso, "Whose Culture Has Capital?" The turn to "culture" as a resource for dealing with school struggles is not uncommon for minority students. It is interesting to note, however, that in many studies, students have "culture" but schools are simply "institutions" or possess "character," as mentioned above, as if schools, at least in terms of institutional behavior, do not follow, display, or practice a particular "culture."

22 Banks, *Multicultural Education, Transformative Knowledge, and Action*; Nieto, *Affirming Diversity*. Also see Au, *Rethinking Multicultural Education*; Howard, *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know*; Sleeter, *Multicultural Education as Social Activism*; Sleeter and Grant, *Making Choices for Multicultural Education*; and all the contributions in Banks and McGee Banks, *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education*. Multicultural education research and practice extend into all levels of schooling experience, are varied in terms of strategy and application, and have their own share of criticisms and challenges. There is also a deep sense of its specificity to U.S. settings and a recognition that multiculturalism, as it is also advocated and practiced in many parts of the world where different population groups live together, has diverse historical roots and uneven inflections. See Early, "American Education," and Banks, *Diversity and Citizenship Education*.

23 For work on this specific area of inquiry, see Bowen, Schwartz, and Camp, *End of Academic Freedom*; Chatterjee and Maira, *The Imperial University*; Cole, *The Great American University*; Delbanco, *College*; and Ferguson, *The Reorder of Things*.

24 Studies that point to analyzing the wide achievement gaps among groups of students, and prescribing ways to narrow such gaps, abound in education studies. See Howard, *Why Race and Culture Matter in Schools*; Museus, Maramba, and Teranishi, *The Misrepresented Minority*; Rovai, Gallien, and Stiff-Williams, *Closing the African American Achievement Gap*; Singham, *The Achievement Gap in U.S. Education*; and Valencia, *Students of Color and the Achievement Gap*.

25 Enrollment numbers for Pacific Islander students at the UW Seattle campus have ranged from 159 (or 0.6 percent) in 2003 to 261 (or 0.9 percent) in 2012. Source: University of Washington, Office of Minority Affairs and Diversity, Assessment and Research Unit, *State of Diversity at UW—All Campuses*. National census data show that U.S. Pacific Islander adults are less likely than whites to hold a high school diploma or GED, have lower rates of college degree attainment, and, if admitted into college, are usually first-generation and likely unable to finish on time, if at all. In the state of Washington, 12 percent of Pacific Islanders have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 28 percent of the total population of state residents, or 24 percent of the entire U.S. population. Nationally, single-race Pacific Islanders are about half as likely as non-Hispanic whites to have at least a bachelor's degree (15 percent versus 30 percent). Sāmoans have the lowest percentage with a college degree. The graduation rate among the cohort of Pacific Islander students who entered UW Seattle in fall 2008 was 76 percent, one of the lowest rates among all U.S. racial groups. Sources: Asian Americans Advancing Justice, *A Community of Contrasts*; Commission

on Asian Pacific American Affairs, *The State of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in Washington*; National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, *Federal Higher Education Policy Priorities*; National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, *The Impact of Scholarships*; Pacific Island Women's Association, *Voices of Pacific Island Women Residing in the Pacific Northwest*; Takeuchi and Hune, *Growing Presence, Emerging Voices*; University of California, Los Angeles, Asian American Studies Center, "Pacific Islanders Lagging behind in Higher Educational Attainment"; and University of Washington, Office of Minority Affairs and Diversity, *State of Diversity at UW*.

26 See Kevin K. Kumashiro's excellent critique of the misuse of "common sense" in advocating for the narrowing of the achievement gap in education, in *The Seduction of Common Sense*.

27 Refer to the variety of explanations for student departure from colleges and universities in Braxton, *Reworking the Student Departure Puzzle*; Fleming, *Enhancing Minority Student Retention*; Tierney, "Power, Identity, and the Dilemma of College Student Departure"; and Tinto, *Leaving College*.

28 Tinto, *Leaving College*.

29 Tinto, *Leaving College*. Also, Nathan, *My Freshman Year*.

30 See a parallel argument made regarding Filipino Americans in the field of education, in Maramba and Bonus, *The "Other" Students*.

31 Many agree that racial and ethnic diversity is desirable, but how to achieve it is debatable. A most instructive summary of these arguments can be found in Cole and Barber, *Increasing Faculty Diversity*, chap. 1.

32 Even though some data show that many Filipinos who immigrated into the United States after 1965 were professional degree holders and were able to occupy highly skilled or professional jobs, the Filipino Americans in this study came from mostly working-class backgrounds. The parents of the Cambodian student in the study came in as refugees. National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, *Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders*.

33 See the arguments regarding intragroup diversity in U.S. group identities in Jiménez, Fields, and Schachter, "How Ethnoraciality Matters."

34 All the names specified in this book are aliases.

35 *Yəhaw̓ali* is a Lushootseed word that refers to a place where things begin or will happen. Lushootseed is the language spoken by the Duwamish people who are native to the Seattle area. *Ubuntu* is originally a Southern African Bantu word that, in contemporary applications, generally means to be a part of a collective or to think of one's self as interconnected with others. The original program was called BASIC PLAN, which stood for Black/African Students in Coalition, Peer Leadership, and Mentoring Program.

36 For a parallel argument regarding the exclusionary history of U.S. higher education and the reproduction of social inequality perpetuated by systems of higher education, see Stich, *Access to Inequality*.

37 The academic literature calculates these perspectives within the rubric of what has been termed a "cultural deficiency" model or theory, most heavily attributed to

the work of anthropologist Oscar Lewis. Although already widely problematized or even discredited by many scholars, numerous so-called "repair the individual" policies and programs continue their deep foothold in school systems at all levels. See Lewis, *Five Families*; Valenzuela, *Subtractive Schooling*; and Pizarro, *Chicanas and Chicanos in School*.

38 Valenzuela, *Subtractive Schooling*, 3.

39 Pizarro, *Chicanas and Chicanos in School*, 25 (italics in the original).

40 Winkle-Wagner and Locks, *Diversity and Inclusion on Campus*.

41 Winkle-Wagner and Locks, *Diversity and Inclusion on Campus*.

42 For specific suggestions on how schooling can be less restrictive and more inclusive, with a view toward achieving greater retention among students and deeper involvement in their schooling, see Astin, "Student Involvement"; Crosling, Thomas, and Heagney, "Conclusions and Curriculum-Based Approaches"; Fleming, *Enhancing Minority Student Retention*; Goodwin, *Resilient Spirits*; Howard, *Why Race and Culture Matter in Schools*; and Moxley, Najor-Durack, and Dumbrigue, *Keeping Students in Higher Education*.

43 Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*.

44 Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*. For other incisive discussions of the "politics" and limits of social science research methods, see Hau'ofa, *We Are the Ocean*; Law, *After Method*; Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth*; and Starbuck, *The Production of Knowledge*.

45 For inspiration regarding "prophetic criticism," see West, "The New Cultural Politics of Difference."

46 Morgan Gardner, a transformative education scholar, might similarly refer to this process of student-teacher interaction as a "pedagogy of movement." She writes: "In a pedagogy of movement, cohesion and continuity themselves become valued as movements. They, too, are part of the teaching and learning dance of 'certain uncertainties' and 'liquid' change." Gardner, "Transformative Learning," 28. Hau'ofa, *We Are the Ocean*.

CHAPTER 1. THE STUDENTS, THE SCHOOL, THE OCEAN

1 The literature on the presumed universality of schooling (or its particularities relative to specific societies) and its criticisms is quite robust. For the most pertinent examples, see Baker and LeTendre, *National Differences, Global Similarities*; Bowles and Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America*; and Young, *Knowledge and Control*.

2 To be sure, critiques of schooling that focus on the disconnect between student diversity and white-centered curricula along with conventional teaching practices abound in education studies. My main inspirations and sources of intellectual illumination for these include Abelmann, *The Intimate University*; Pizarro, *Chicanas and Chicanos in School*; and Valenzuela, *Subtractive Schooling*.

3 For a similar account, see Goodwin, *Resilient Spirits*.

4 García, *The Chicano Movement*; Hong, "Past Legacies, Future Projects"; Maeda, *Rethinking the Asian American Movement*; Rhoads, *Freedom's Web*; Wei, *The Asian American Movement*; Williamson-Lott, *Black Power on Campus*.