



Association of Mexican American Educators Journal

A peer-reviewed, open access journal

Volume 15 Issue 2

2021

AMAE Invited Issue

Mexican American Studies in Pre-K-12 Texas Schools

Guest Editors

Sylvia Mendoza Aviña

The University of Texas at San Antonio

Lilliana Patricia Saldaña

The University of Texas at San Antonio

Editors

Patricia Sánchez

The University of Texas at San Antonio

Antonio J. Camacho

AMAE, Inc.

Associate Editors

Julie L. Figueroa

Sacramento State

Lucila D. Ek

The University of Texas at San Antonio

Managing Editor

Christian Fallas-Escobar

The University of Texas at San Antonio

<http://amaejournal.utsa.edu>

ISSN: 2377-9187

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24974/amae.15.2.423>

Texas Resistance: Mexican American Studies and the Fight Against Whiteness and White Supremacy in K-12 at the Turn of the 21st Century

Josue Puente

University of Texas Río Grande Valley

Stephanie Alvarez

University of Texas Río Grande Valley

Abstract

This essay recounts the efforts by various groups throughout Texas with a special emphasis on the Rio Grande Valley to implement Mexican American Studies at the turn of the twenty-first century. We offer a historical timeline of events that demonstrates how the Mexican American Studies course came into existence. We also detail the way in which some Mexican American Studies courses were implemented. In other cases, we describe the way different groups were able to offer professional development to teachers to help them incorporate more Mexican American Studies content in their non-Mexican American studies courses or provide the community with the resources on how to include Mexican American Studies at their school. The common theme throughout is an undeniable resistance and mobilization on the part of many, hundreds, of educators, students, and community members to ensure that the youth do not continue to receive a whitewashed education, to ensure that students receive a more accurate representation of history, culture, language, and literature. In essence, the essay details a very hard-fought battle against White supremacy in the schools at the turn of the twenty-first century in Texas in which Mexican American Studies emerged victorious many steps of the way.

Keywords: Mexican American Studies, Ethnic Studies, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, Chicano Activism, Rio Grande Valley Education

In the 1960's, Mexican American youth took to the streets demanding change to an educational system that stripped them of their culture, history, and language with a singular goal of training them as laborers rather than allowing them the opportunity to seek a higher education. Calling themselves Chicanos, they demanded not only a change to the education system but also that society respect their community by asking to speak their mother tongue without punishment, for their history to be taught in schools, and for more opportunities to attend college or the university rather than simply be pushed into a trade or military (Muñoz, 2007, pp. 99-101). Chicana/o/xs were not the first to ask for educational change for Mexican Americans but, unlike earlier movements, they pushed away from assimilation and instead demanded schooling that instilled cultural pride proclaiming that brown is beautiful and emphasizing the importance of learning about their own history. In California, Mexican American college students organized and created el Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA) and made it their priority to advocate for Mexican American Studies at the university as part of their organization's founding papers known as Los Papeles or El Plan de Santa Barbara (<http://umich.edu/~mechaum/plan.html>). These multiple movements led to the creation of Mexican American Studies/Raza Studies Programs at universities and colleges across the country.

In K-12 public education, the Brown Beret's advocated for change in public education and supported high school Mexican American student walkouts in East Los Angeles. In the second point of the "Brown Beret's 10 Point Program" they advocated for, "The Right to bilingual education as guaranteed under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo," along with point 4, "We demand that the true history of the Mexican American be taught in all schools in the five Southwest states," which marked the Brown Beret's position on public education reform for the Mexican American community (Valdez and Steiner, 1972 p. 304). In Texas, Chicana educational reform was pushed by MAYO (Mexican American Youth Organization) by helping organize walkouts across South Texas. Among such walkouts was the 1968 Edcouch Elsa walkout where students advocated for similar educational reforms like the ones the Brown Beret's demanded in California. Nevertheless, few of these changes occurred in K-12 public education, even in the states where the Chicano Movement was at its height like California, Texas, and other states.

Mexican American students, then, and even still today, often go through school without formally studying Mexican American history or culture. Instead, public schools push an assimilationist historical narrative of whiteness reinforcing white supremacy through social studies

state standards. In Texas, those standards are known as the TEKS (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills). TEKS are just one-way Texas intuitions have white-washed the curriculum and supported white supremacy, but like much of Mexican American history, oppression often finds different forms of resistance and in a state that prides itself in its popular motto “everything is bigger in Texas,” that also includes resistance. This essay explores how the TEKS function as a means of embedding whiteness by limiting who is and is not part of the historical narrative and why we must push away from seeing the standards as one dimensional and static and instead see them as dynamic with the ability to include culturally relevant content while still meeting a mandated state standard. This essay also looks at collective resistance to white supremacy in Texas education by communities, the public, and private organizations. The results range from the Texas State Board of Education (SBOE) approving a hard-fought Mexican American history course to creating spaces for teacher trainings in an effort against whiteness and white supremacy.

In 2013, the National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS) *Tejas Foco* formed a K-12 Mexican American Studies (MAS) committee chaired by Juan Tejeda with the intent to advocate for MAS in K-12. The following year, 2014, the Texas State Board of Education (SBOE) representative Rubén Cortez, along with MAS advocates, would propose a Mexican American Studies course which would not be approved that year after much advocacy. However, four years later on April 11, 2018, the Texas SBOE, after two failed attempts to approve a MAS textbook, once again listened to testimony on the importance of creating standards for a high school social studies course in Mexican American history and approving a course. What could have been addressed in one board meeting was expanded to six months and three meetings in 2018 as a Republican controlled board questioned the harm this class might bring to students. Board members against creating this course used language that, as Bree Picower (2009) states, reveal ways in which white individuals maintain dominant racial ideologies. For example, they questioned the name Mexican American Studies as divisive and pushed against Americanism. According to board member David Bradley, “[I] do not subscribe to hyphenated Americanism... I find hyphenated Americanism to be divisive,” (Swaby, 2018). According to Picower’s (2009) research, this is how a white educator supports white supremacy by using tools of whiteness. Members of the board used these tools to try and mask the racist ideologies they had about this class.

According to Picower (2009), “ideological tools [are] beliefs to which they subscribe to protect their hegemonic stories,” explaining why the board saw no need for the course to even be created in the first place (p. 197). In other words, board members see the failure to fully embrace whiteness as divisive, but they do not recognize the failure to recognize Mexicans as part of an American identity as divisive. One of the solutions posed by Bradley was a name change “Americans of Mexican descent.” Board members were able to claim a win against the course with this changing of the name of the course by pushing ethnic identity second to Americanism (Picower, 2009, 197). Therefore, even when the course was voted into being implemented when the community fought against the name change, David Bradley, a firm believer of “we are all Americans,” mocked the community by pushing for and winning the name change (Swaby, 2018). This attempt included mocking Rubén Cortez, the board member who had been leading the cause for the class and naming it Mexican American Studies by stating that he “needs to learn to be thankful” (Swaby, 2018). Although much of the comments reinforcing these positions came from David Bradley, because he was the leader of the Republican control of the SBOE, the others also endorsed it reflecting a systemic support of whiteness and white supremacy. This response by the board member represents a performative tool of whiteness where the board member justified his actions based on his feelings and beliefs and “engaged to protect [his] beliefs based on [his] ideological tools or hegemonic understanding” (Picower, 2009, p. 199). Before the final vote on June 2018, the name of the course was changed to Ethnic Studies: Mexican American Studies thanks to the advocacy of many, yet political stunts to remind Mexican Americans of their social position were made making this a bitter sweet victory including David Bradley’s comments to the board on “needing to move on to more important things” (Yaffe-Bellany, 2018). Moreover, the change in name did not come willingly. There was quite a bit of activism by the Mexican American Studies community to have this name changed; newspaper essays, press conferences, blogs, mobilization to get as many people to the capital as possible to testify against the name change and a rally before the meeting.

This course provides an opportunity for Mexican American students to see that they are a part of the curriculum and gain an educational space to explore their own social and historical positions in the United States; an idea five years in the making when the National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies Tejas Foco established the MAS K-12 committee in 2013 to push for the creation of a special topics course in the public schools. In 2014, with the assistance of Rio

Grande Valley (RGV) SBOE Representative Rubén Cortez, the committee struggled with a reluctant Texas State Board of Education. At first glance, it may be argued that the only limitation was a white republican-controlled board who used tools of whiteness to prevent educational changes, from supporting a racist textbook that had many historical errors to questioning the divisive idea of a Mexican American Studies class that according to them separated American ideologies by race, reminiscent of language used by those in Arizona that banned Raza Studies. Yet, there are several issues that limit the impact of this Mexican American studies course. For example, this course is not a required class, but rather an elective, making it up to the student to take this class and an option for a district to provide. This means that Mexican American students can go through the education system without taking the course because their district did not provide the class, or the student chose not to take it. In fact, this makes it so that it is highly unlikely that students will take the course. Nevertheless, many in the community want that to change and community resistance has changed their strategies from demanding state support to pushing their local school boards and high schools to provide this MAS class. In the Rio Grande Valley (RGV), local organizations along with university and state non-profit organizations began to advocate for the creation of this class in districts across the Valley as early as 2013. In fact, SBOE Representative Rubén Cortez ran on the promise of inserting MAS in the curriculum after hearing from constituents. Soon after, in 2015, the RGV MAS K-12 Coalition was founded, chaired by Christopher Carmona, which began to hold workshops for teachers interested in teaching MAS or already teaching MAS. In the spring of 2019, The Center for Mexican American Studies at University of Texas Rio Gran Valley (UTRGV) led and organized a MAS Mesa Comunitaria inviting districts across the Valley to get information on the need for MAS in K-12 and steps to take to provide this class.

At the 2019 Mesa Comunitaria, eleven RGV school districts were given testimonios from teachers, community members and students on the benefits MAS has on students. This initiative from The Center for Mexican American Studies (CMAS) at UTRGV was not possible without the support of the community and from organizations like IDRA (Intercultural Development Research Association), ARISE (A Resource In Serving Equality), LUPE (La Unión de Pueblo Entero), and the Equal Voice Network whose joint efforts showed strong support for these classes. At the same time, CMAS leading this effort marks an important moment in the positions that Texas universities have in changing the educational narrative from training future teachers to advocating for long-

term educational changes and support. For example, this Mesa Comunitaria did not consist simply of academic experts in the field but rather community members and students whose first-hand experiences were valued to be of greater value higher than empirical statistics and bringing the community into the fold of education (Huber, Johnson, & Kohli, 2006). Even when it came to planning for this event Dr. Stephanie Alvarez, Director of the Center for Mexican American Studies, invited community members from across the RGV to sit down and discuss the best way to organize this event placing the community in charge of every part of the Mesa Comunitaria. This connection with education outside of the classroom counters an educational model that separates the home from the classroom that benefits white students but harms Mexican American students (Huber, Johnson, & Kohli, 2006). To go even further, this Mesa Comunitaria also showcased the benefit this course brought to students. Testimonios from Donna Independent School District (Donna ISD) MAS high school students effectively demonstrated how the students who took this class had a pride in their community and felt like they belonged in the historical narrative that otherwise ignores them (Huber, Johnson, & Kohli, 2006). Even so, it is important to note that the 2019 RGV Mesa Comunitaria was not the first attempt of a collective push from a state university, academic organization, or community organizations to counter white supremacy and whiteness in K-12 in the 21st Century Education. Other attempts that have been made and continue to be made by University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) Mexican American Studies, SOMOS MAS and NACCS (National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies) Tejas Foco.

Key to much of these efforts is how whiteness and white supremacy often use gatekeepers to limit what individuals can do to change the status quo which often takes the form of an institution or requirement but most often revolve around funding. For example, the UTSA and NACCS Tejas workshops are important resources for teachers, but both workshops require funding to continue to function. NACCS Tejas uses registration fees to subsidize their spending which allows them to provide resources for teachers. This limits the number of teachers who participate because of their limited access to funding for travel and registration. Like many teachers in the United States, Texas teachers are often overworked and underpaid which in turn means volunteering and self-funding their participation in workshops like these which is very difficult. Furthermore, most of these teachers are Raza and women, meaning that they face even more obstacles than other teachers.

Nevertheless, programs have responded to these limitations in a variety of different ways by applying for grants and funding from inside and outside their respected institutions. These grant-funded projects often tackle three major issues that affect teacher training; 1) funding—some grants pay the teachers for participating in the project, 2) time—the grants often work with teachers' schedules and the projects coordinate with the school districts, and 3) gives teachers valuable resources that they do not have to spend their money on. Moreover, in the case of the grant funded projects analyzed here, we find attempts to provide long-term impact and sustainability by sharing the resources through free access via bilingual websites that make the grant funded projects an important tool for countering whiteness and white supremacy.

In spring 2019, The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley's B3 Institute was awarded a two-million-dollar grant for *Historias Americanas* that would support enriching history content with place-based teacher trainings for K-12 in two school districts: Edinburg CISD and Brownsville ISD. At the same time, the Center for Mexican American Studies in collaboration with the Center for Bilingual Studies, which are also housed under the B3 Institute at UTRGV, was awarded a \$99,000 grant from The National Endowment for the Humanities to fund a project that would help create bilingual, culturally relevant social studies content for K-5 Social Studies classrooms in the Pharr San Juan Alamo (PSJA) ISD and Harlingen ISD in the Rio Grande Valley, which has a large Mexican American population of upwards of 98%. This program is Social Studies Through Authentic Relevant Content (SSTARC) and is directed by both Dr. Joy Esquierdo, Director of the Center for Bilingual Studies and Profesor of Bilingual Studies, and Dr. Stephanie Alvarez, Director of the Center for Mexican American Studies and Associate Professor of Mexican American Studies (<https://harlingenedc.com/data-resources/demographics/>). Dr. Maritza De La Trinidad, Associate Professor in the Mexican American Studies program, and Dr. Francisco Guajardo, former Director of the B3 Institute at the start of the project and now Chief Operating Officer of The Museum of South Texas, are the project directors of *Historias Americanas*. Although both *Historias Americanas* and SSTARC share some parallels such as people involved, location, and goals they have many differences in the approach taken to incorporate Mexican American Studies into the classroom. Whereas *Historias Americanas* includes site visits and lectures to provide resources and information for teachers to teach local histories, SSTARC involves collective work that is heavy on self-reflection and controlled by the teachers' deconstruction of their own internalized

institutionalized racism. Yet both grants bring important content forward to teachers intending to change the implication of Social Studies for Mexican American students.

The Historias Americanas grant is the collective work of four different institutions with B3 Institute as the main organizational institution, Edinburg CISD, and Brownsville ISD as supporting school districts and finally the Museum of South Texas History, the Center for Mexican American Studies, and the Center for Bilingual Studies as a resource hub. Historias' goal is to,

teach place-based pedagogical approaches to approximately 75 K-12 teachers that examine and build upon student and community knowledge and cultural wealth to link micro realities to American history. Historias Americanas develops and implements culturally, and historically relevant lessons, activities, and programs rooted in the geography, history and languages of the region to provide a micro-macro perspective to promote engaged citizenship. (Historias Americanas)

The interest, therefore, is in giving teachers the resources they need to teach local histories, and by doing so, they would be teaching MAS content. Historias is working with the assumption that a factor that is not allowing teachers to teach MAS content is because they do not have access to primary and secondary sources that are used to support historical arguments made. According to Emma Pérez, the decolonial imaginary is a third space between colonial and decolonial where things like identity, culture, and gender all exist in a secular narrative, where the imaginary reflects an incomplete mirror image of one's identity (Pérez, 1999). When it comes to history, Pérez argues that the imaginary often is reflected by a colonial historiography that makes Chicano/a/x historians write colonial views of a marginalized Mexican American community by dividing history into thematic and periodic elements often removing gender, culture, and individuals to fit the colonial mold (Pérez, 1999). It can be argued that Historias Americanas adopts the model of Pérez's decolonial imaginary by exploring other non-colonial methods to discuss Mexican American history and places it in Texas social studies education, yet Historias Americanas falls short in successfully crossing the colonial imaginary completely. This occurs because Historias Americanas uses a sort of transcultural methodological approach that incorporates traditional teacher training, inserting Mexican American History into the fold, but also incorporating some decolonial methods at the same time. However, they still "become historians under spatio-temporal bounds dependent upon a colonial moment" (Pérez, 1999). After all, it is nearly

impossible to fully escape the “colonial moment.” For example, in the Historias Americanas Summer 2019 Institute, for three days teachers participated in lectures, site visits, and engaged in small group discussions where half the day was spent learning about local histories from visiting scholars. The time that was dedicated to pedagogy was dedicated to “place-based pedagogy,” which according to Dr. Maritza De La Trinidad,

us[es] the environment as a classroom, so place-based becomes a way to use the community or locations in a community, whether it be here in the Rio Grande Valley, or in the Midwest, or in Arizona or Mexico, they can use place-based to teach the history and the culture of the region, of their region. (Cited in Hoang, 2019)

Historias Americanas, therefore, is a perfect example of an important form of social resistance to whiteness where educators find themselves in an external struggle of interpretation of ideologies. For one, Historias Americanas attempts to solve the issue with representation of content in the TEKS by using the same set standards as the blueprint in what content to provide and at the same time subvert. As it pertains to history, TEKS represent the historical narrative every Texan is taught and what they see as historical fact which too often places white individuals as central to history and superior to all other historical figures. Historias Americanas, however, uses their “decolonial imaginary” to circumvent the “recommended” events and people provided by the state of Texas for each of the TEKS standards and replaces them with place-based suggestions, given the place is the Rio Grande Valley, this, then allows for the place and people to be Mexican American.

Like Historias Americanas, Project SSTARC, deliberately works with selected teachers in two school districts to train them in culturally relevant curriculum. Since the project is funded through the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) they can pay the teachers directly for their training, provide them with books, and materials to take back and use in their classrooms. The origins of Project STAARC are different in many ways from Historias Americanas and other initiatives around MAS activism, in part, because of the two individual Latinx women who are the Co-Directors of the grant, Stephanie Alvarez, Ph.D. and Joy Esquirodo, Ph.D., have publicly stated that SSTARC is, in large part, the result of two mothers who wanted to see more culturally relevant content in their kids’ education, one that represents the community their kids belong to because they understand the benefits this can have on all children. This demonstrates that

SSTARC is an attempt for educational change from two Latinx mothers who are in a position to advocate for it (Puente, Feb. 2019). Both Dr. Esquiedo's years of teaching in public schools and Dr. Alvarez's educational and social activism to bring MAS to the university and highlight cultural history in the RGV play a role in how SSTARC would achieve their goal. Moreover, Dr. Esquiedo and Dr. Alvarez have already had experience running similar project with Project CRESS (Culturally Relevant Education through Social Studies), a Humanities Texas grant in partnership with PSJA ISD and McAllen ISD in 2017 that provided 2-day workshops to K-5 Dual language teachers in Mexican American Studies. It should also be noted that Project SSTARC grant personnel had attended UTSA K-12 MAS Academies workshops that certainly influenced and inspired their own work.

The UTSA Mexican American Studies Program for eight years has hosted a series of MAS Teacher Academies and for the past three years along with San Antonio based non-profit educational enrichment organization IDRA (Intercultural Development Research Association) they have begun hosting a series of free teacher workshops throughout the year where they invite educators from across the state to gain knowledge on how to incorporate Mexican American Studies in their classrooms (Saldaña et al., 2020). This movement came from the creation of the K-12 Mexican American Studies NACCS Tejas Foco committee in 2013 when UTSA decided that since there would be an attempt to propose a Mexican American history course then there should also be workshops available for teachers to take that would provide them with the content and pedagogy required to teach the course (Saldaña et al., 2020). UTSA began to organize their MAS Teacher Academy in 2014 using whatever resources they could find and grounding their work in decolonial praxis under the guidance of professor Keta Miranda (UTSA MAS Teacher Academy, 2020). Because teachers asked for TEKS support for the content, the following year, the UTSA MAS Teaching Academy content was supported with TEKS. UTSA then, in 2018, began providing different opportunities for teachers by running one-day workshops in the fall and spring in partnership with IDRA in addition to their summer Teaching Academy that represented a shift from only social studies content into different subjects such as math, English and art (Saldaña et al., 2020). Unlike the UTRGV MAS Mesa Comunitaria, UTSA's workshop explores how to enrich different subjects and the workshops are run by teachers who are already writing MAS-based lesson plans (Saldaña et al., 2020). Therefore, UTSA's MAS Academy and spring and fall workshops explore the need for including MAS content in all subjects to better benefit a larger group of

students, which is shown by the inclusion of testimonios from both parents and students who have participated in Mexican American Studies classes.

Similar workshops have appeared in Texas from other University groups and organizations. For example, NACCS Tejas Foco in 2015 organized their own workshop during the first Annual MAS Summit. However, the NACCS Tejas Foco MAS Summit was different from UTSA since it required a paid registration to be part of this one-day workshop, where the UTSA/IDRA one-day workshop is free. It is important to note that the workshops are a resistance in and of itself. Part of what makes the resistance meaningful and impactful is the repetition of them every year. The community and teachers—both new to the field and veterans of MAS—come to rely on the workshops and know they are available. This then results in the amplification of MAS throughout the community, San Antonio, in particular, but the state as well. Although the adoption of the course is particularly powerful, teachers teaching common subjects, but integrating MAS content and MAS pedagogies that they learn through the MAS workshops and the grants is quite powerful and allows for the proliferation of MAS in extraordinary ways—a hidden resistance to white supremacy. This continuation and collective support from San Antonio teachers make the UTSA workshops an example of how collective support from teachers can help deconstruct whiteness in the curriculum without limiting the efforts to one subject (Saldaña et al., 2020). With the addition of the partnership of IDRA in 2018 and this organization's new teacher-based network, UTSA's workshops have put into effect a self-sustainable educational ecosystem placing teachers at the forefront of educational social changes (Saldaña et al., 2020). IDRA's own mission statement reads "to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. IDRA strengthens and transforms public education by providing dynamic training; useful research, evaluation, and frameworks for action; timely policy analyses; and innovative materials and programs" (https://www.idra.org/services_categories/mexican-american-studies). By partnering with UTSA, IDRA has brought with them an array of resources that teachers can use. This has led to IDRA creating within their "Equity Connection" a "MAS Community of Practice where educators, researchers, parents and community members [can] discuss and take action to strengthen public schooling" (https://www.idra.org/services_categories/mexican-american-studies). It can be argued that with the partnership with IDRA and the foundation of IDRA's MAS community of practice, UTSA and IDRA's educational ecosystem has the potential of becoming a safe space where teachers can

deconstruct whiteness and fight back white supremacy by creating and sharing different methods to bring in Mexican American Studies into the classrooms all across the state (https://www.idra.org/services_categories/mexican-american-studies).

Teacher run professional development workshops in Mexican American Studies offered by the university represent a change in the relationship of institutions and teachers that goes further than preparing them for the classroom, but also offer support after graduation in multiple ways. They not only offer teachers continued professional development in pedagogy, but also leadership development as they have practitioners, not professors, deliver the workshops. These workshops are a great example of how non-profits and state universities are resisting whiteness and deconstructing white supremacy by supporting the teachers who are at the forefront of the struggle (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2015).

The goal of Project SSTARC is to, “provide an opportunity for local K-5 teachers to gain a better knowledge of local and regional history, create relevant social studies content for their students in both English and Spanish, and disseminate the content on a wide scale to enrich the schooling experience of students by exposing them to authentic humanities content” (<https://www.utrgv.edu/sstarc>). To achieve this SSTARC is divided into two goals: short- term and long-term impact. The short-term consists of three-day workshops and the long-term made up by a bilingual website with teacher resources. Even so, both short- term and long-term goals all revolve around teacher involvement and teacher-made content developed during workshops in which SSTARC facilitates discussion, provides resources, and aides in building lesson plans to create a safe space for teachers to create culturally relevant MAS content.

In the summer of 2019, SSTARC ran their first workshop. Although it was a social studies workshop to the outsider it might have seemed to focus less on history and more on culture, but this is because SSTARC employs Pérez’s theory of decolonial imaginary as means to explore different sources of history that connect to not only teachers, but also their students. Teachers began to understand history in a much different way and sources of history in ways that were more relatable to them, their students, and the community. Cognizant of the fact that the teachers need to still address the issue of TEKS and the curriculum, SSTARC took the task of exploring what content was being taught and what TEKS were open to interpretation. After identifying these TEKS, Project SSTARC named those TEKS that are culturally relevant and thereby were the justification for teachers to include in their lesson plan. Moreover, SSTARC provided both digital

and physical resources teachers could use in their classrooms (Kohli, 2013). Scholars presented on subject matter that aligned to these culturally relevant TEKS to justify the use of the content they presented to the teachers.

With the culturally relevant TEKS and the content, teachers were then asked to engage in deep conversations with another teacher about the topics, how they related to them and how their lived experiences connected to them. They were asked to share with each other and then with the larger group. It was after this process of deep reflection, that the teachers then collaboratively engaged in creating a lesson plan based on their grade. Since teachers were grouped by their respected grade level each day, Project SSTARC collected six teacher-based lesson plans that represented a change in mainstream ideas of social studies. In just three days teachers brought forward a collection of lesson plans that tackled issues such as migration, colonization, culture, language, and civil rights which were not explicitly included in Texas standards, but still met the TEKS. What also came out from these lesson plans is that teachers began to realize and discuss their own lived experiences and see their internal struggle as Mexican and Mexican American teachers, specifically women of color and crafted lesson plans reflecting those experiences. Project SSTARC lesson plans are not just about the content teachers can use to teach Mexican American Studies but represent how these teachers accepted the need to teach this content and deconstructed their own experiences, internalized racism as well as institutionalized racism (Kohli, 2013). Although the written lesson plans do not explicitly show it, a crucial part of Project SSTARC is self-reflection where teachers are asked to reflect on the importance of teaching Mexican American Studies to their students. Their responses often reflected on the need they personally had as students for someone to teach them this content. The teachers who participated in the workshop began to discuss issues regarding race, culture, history, and language they faced as students at all levels of education, often sharing stories of themselves and/or families. They often shared stories of racial injustices that they themselves or their families faced that mirror what Rita Kohli discusses in her work on internalized racism where teachers of color “revealed a deep a connection between repeated experiences with racism and feeling racially inferior” (Kohli, 2013). These stories often resulted in teachers developing a great desire to implement the teaching of Mexican American Studies with their students, so they did not have to feel the same way they did throughout their schooling. Teachers even began to feel a sense of belonging and pride in being Mexican American because as some expressed it was the

first time someone told them that their lived experiences and their community were valued. This is another similarity to Kohli's own research where both Project SSTARC and Kohli, "shed light on the process teachers of color can engage in to unpack their experiences with internalized racism so they do not replicate racial hierarchies in their own classrooms" (Kohli, 2013). Therefore, the lesson plans represent a commitment from the teachers to not continue the same racial hierarchies for their students and communities but were just a small part of the work that came out of Project SSTARC. The larger takeaway was changing the teachers' perspective on what is being taught and the value of culturally relevant content not just for the students but the community as a whole.

The second aspect of Project SSTARC is the building of a website that houses the content created from Project SSTARC workshops lesson plans, articles, a list of Latina/o children's literature, and video presentations of teachers' work along with the scholar's presentations content. By creating the website this gives the teachers who participated in the workshops easy access to their work and resources. Their work will then also be accessible to other teachers and educators at the same time who are interested in teaching MAS in their classes. The Project SSTARC website is unique since not only does it house Project SSTARC content but includes content from other state and national resources. True to Project SSTARC's mission statement is that all the lesson plans are available in both English and Spanish (<https://www.utrgv.edu/sstarc>). Another example is the website's plethora of videos showcasing teacher lesson plans and reflections because teachers were encouraged to speak in whatever language they would like. The lesson plans are bilingual, and teachers are also very comfortable using Tex-Mex (<https://www.utrgv.edu/sstarc>). Because Project SSTARC is entering its second year, 2021, the website is still pending much of the content.

The year of 2020 proved to be a pivotal year for the entire nation, Texas, and the Río Grande Valley. On May 25, 2020 the world witnessed the murder of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin thanks to the recording caught on cellphone by seventeen year-old Darnella Frazier. The murder sparked outrage across the nation and an already large #BlackLivesMatter movement swelled to unprecedented numbers for months. In McAllen, Texas one of the most astonishing moments of a #BLM protest occurred when on June 5, 2020 Daniel Peña emerged from his truck ripping a #BLM poster from the hands of a protester and then began to wield a powered chainsaw yelling racial slurs to the protestors to leave, that it was the

Valley, insinuating that there was no need for a #BLM protest, there is no racism in the Valley. Two of the people that were present at that event were recent graduates of McAllen ISD (MISD) and just beginning college. They connected with four other alumna and together the six women of would go on to found The Grande Narrative. The Grande Narrative would be a critical movement in the Valley in terms of Ethnic Studies. By August 2020, The Grande Narrative launched a social media campaign to petition MISD to incorporate more Black history and at least one literature book by a Black author in ELA courses among other things and had already gained the support of some school board members and met with MISD superintendent. By March 2021, The Grande Narrative after meeting several times with MISD social studies and ELA coordinators and seeking input from Stephanie Alvarez, PhD (UTRGV) and Trinidad Gonzalez, PhD (South Texas College) produced “Proposal: Diversify MISD. A Collection of resources to improve the teaching of ethnic studies courses, ELA readings, and inclusivity of minority narratives” and successfully got MISD to approve the teaching of both African American Studies and Mexican American Studies at all high school campuses in 2021-2022. MISD is the first school district in the Rio Grande Valley to offer African American Studies and the first to offer Mexican American Studies at all its campuses. The Grande Narrative continues to be active on social media sharing information about Ethnic Studies and how to take action on Ethnic Studies issues such as TX SB 2202; the ban on critical race theory.

In conclusion, Mexican American resistance against whiteness and white supremacy in the K-12 curriculum in the 21st Century consists of different singular yet interconnected movements (Figure 1). The most prominent emerging in 2014 with the desire to have a SBOE approved MAS course which would not come about until 2018. The result would lead to a local push for school districts to provide the class in schools and for universities and non-profit organization collaborations to provide resources and professional development opportunities for teachers to teach Mexican American Studies. In addition, professors sought ways through external funding to reach out and support and develop teachers’ ability to teach MAS content that likely would not have otherwise happen. There is no one person or group leading a Texas resistance since all these attempts of deconstructing racism through education are interconnected in multiple ways and the leadership of the programs not only know one another, but also seek-out one another for guidance and support. They offer a multitude of counter-narratives to white supremacy. It is

because of this collective resistance that Texas teachers now have more tools to deconstruct whiteness in the K-12 curriculum in Texas than ever before.

The UTSA MAS Teacher Academy and their fall and spring workshops have set forward examples on how to continuously provide educators with tools to deconstruct and resist whiteness through MAS. The work of NACCS Tejas K-12 Committee, CRESS, Project SSTARC and Historias Americanas declare that universities owe a debt to the communities, and they intend to represent and provide both teacher training and websites to house accessible lesson plans for teachers in K-12. The Grande Narrative, however, demonstrates the power of activism outside of the academy and the potency of youth to make change. In the case of the initiatives at both UTSA and UTRGV, they demonstrate a commitment to serving and educating teachers beyond the time they are there to receive their degree. Moreover, as the state changes, so does the resistance and new attempts to counter the state narrative and therefore allowing more Mexican American students to learn about their community, history, and culture. This Texas resistance is not the first and just represents a new chapter of educational change with the end goal to include as much Mexican American representation into the Texas curriculum as possible for the benefit of all students.

Appendix

K-12 MAS Efforts in Texas Timeline

- 2013: NACCS Tejas Foco forms Pre-K-12 MAS committee and begins to advocate for a MAS class in public schools (Chaired by Juan Tejeda)
- 2013: UTSA Mexican American Studies program decides to create workshops for MAS teachers (Founded by Marie “Keta” Miranda)
- 2013 Fall: The Rio Grande Valley Coalition for Mexican American Studies formed by faculty at South Texas College, UT Brownsville, and UT Pan American
- 2013: Nuestro Grupo is founded in Austin in September
- 2014: E-Mail and Call-In Campaign to SBOE regarding to create an elective in Mexican Studies, led by NACCS Tejas Foco
- 2014: SBOE votes in April to allow MAS into Social Studies Special Topics but does not create a new course and requests for a MAS textbook, arguing there is no need to create standards for the course, just a textbook

- 2014: Houston ISD approves a MAS class as an Innovative Course, approved unanimously, 9-0
- 2014 Spring: Mexican American History lesson plans created by NACCS TEJAS FOCO Pre K-12 MAS Committee chaired by Juan Carmona and Victoria Rojas, RGV MAS MAS Coalition houses lesson plans on UTPA MAS website until MAS Tejas Foco website created in 2015
- 2014 Spring: Ruben Cortez sets goal of 100 MAS classes before FALL so SBOE would not take down course because of lack of interest
- 2014 Summer: First UTSA MAS Teachers' Academy
- 2014 July: RGV MAS coalition runs a bilingual workshop on MAS (Chaired by Christopher Carmona)
- 2014 Fall: First MAS Dual Credit High School Course offered at Mission ISD in conjunction with South Texas College by Victoria Rojas
- 2014 Fall: Rio Grande Valley Coalition for Mexican American Studies members Victoria Rojas and Juan Carmona create Mexican American Studies curriculum aligned with TEKS Special Topics available online
- 2015 January 15: Academia Cuauhtli Opens its doors in Austin
- 2015 March /April: Request for Financial Support for MAS in Higher Ed to get MAS in K-12 by NACCS Tejas Foco
- 2015: Second UTSA MAS Teachers' Academy in June
- 2015: RGV MAS Summit and Workshop
- 2016: Feb 19: NACCS TEJAS FOCO K-12 MAS committee agrees to run a MAS Summit later that year in the summer
- 2016: Second UTSA MAS Teachers Academy
- 2016 Summer: Responsible Ethnic Studies Textbook (REST) Coalition is Formed of over 10 different organizations
 - Response to the only textbook that was submitted to SBOE for consideration for MAS
 - Textbook was riddled with offensive stereotypes and factual errors
 - REST undertakes a massive organizing campaign that includes, but is not limited to press conferences, protests, and petitions
- 2016 November 15: SBOE votes against the only MAS textbook submitted.
 - Call for a second round of MAS Textbooks
- 2017: SBOE does not approve the only textbook submitted

- 2017 Summer: RGV MAS Coalition hosts 2nd Educational Workshop
- 2017 Summer: Fourth UTSA MAS Teachers Academy
- 2017 Summer: UTRGV CMAS & CBS Project CRESS K-5 Bilingual Teacher Workshop for MAS Social Studies is funded by Texas Humanities (Stephanie Alvarez & Joy Esquierdo)
- 2018 February: SBOE begins to hear support for creating an elective course in MAS
- 2018 April: SBOE approves the elective class but changes the name to Ethnic Studies: Americans of Mexican decent
 - At same times the SBOE passes a motion calling for TEA to present innovative courses in Native American studies, Latino studies, African American studies, and/or Asian Pacific Islander studies to the SBOE for inclusion in the TEKS standards
- 2018 May 30: State-wide Press Conferences to Protest the Name Change/Keep Mexican American Studies as name of TEA approved elective class. Press conferences held in Austin, San Antonio, Dallas, Houston, and Rio Grande Valley
- 2018 June 12: SBOE changes name of course to Ethnic Studies: Mexican American Studies after protest from the community
- 2018 Summer: Fifth UTSA MAS Teachers' Academy
- 2018 Summer: Third NACCS Tejas Foco MAS K-12 Summit
- 2018 Fall: IDRA (Aurelio Montemayor) joins UTSA's MAS Teachers' Academy and provides one-day MAS teacher workshops in spring and fall
- 2018 December: Working group for Ethnic Studies in Texas is established. Orlando Lara, then Associate Director of Comparative Race and Ethnic Studies at TCU organizes a call to discuss state-wide efforts to develop a variety of Ethnic Studies courses. This group develops a working mission statement and begins to hold monthly calls to help support Ethnic Studies work across Texas
- 2019: UTRGV CBS & CMAS Project SSTARC is funded by National Endowment for the Humanities, project creates bilingual MAS teacher training and lesson plans in K-5 based off former CRESS grant. (Stephanie Alvarez & Joy Esquierdo). First Workshop held
- 2019: UTRGV B3 Historias Americanas is funded by the Department of Education and provides Social Studies K-12 teachers in Brownsville ISD & Edinburg ISD professional development in MAS. (Maritza De La Trinidad and Francisco Guajardo)

- 2019 April: UTRGV CMAS Mesa Comunitaria to guide Schools, Teachers, Parents & Community Organizations on how to offer MAS in the public schools. Partners with IDRA, ARISE, Equal Voice Network, NACCS Tejas Foco, IDRA & Rubén Cortez
- 2019 May: TCU Comparative Race and Ethnic Studies hosts a North Texas regional gathering for Ethnic Studies from K-16 in the North Texas Area (Lara 2021)
- 2019 Summer: Sixth UTSA MAS Teachers' Academy
- 2019 Summer: UTRGV CBS & CMAS First SSTARC K-5 Dual Language MAS teacher workshop
- 2019 Summer: UTRGV B3 Historias Americanas runs first institute
- 2019 September: Members of the Ethnic Studies working group name the group the Ethnic Studies Network of Texas (ESNT) and create an private Facebook group
- 2019 Fall: UTRGV B3 Historias Americans Institute
- 2020 Spring: UTRGV B3 Historias Americans Institute
- 2020 Summer: Seventh UTSA MAS Teacher's Academy (Virtual)
- 2020 August: The Grande Narrative is founded to fight for Black Studies in McAllen ISD.
- 2020 August 3-7: ESNT hosts its first Ethnic Studies Summer Web Series entirely online. A total of 120 people attend throughout the week. The series combines workshops for Mexican American Studies, African American Studies, and Afro-Latinx Studies. This is one of the first, perhaps the first, multi-Ethnic Studies professional development workshops held in the state (Lara 2021)
- 2020 Fall: UTRGV B3 Historias Americans Institute
- 2020 October: 5th NACCS Tejas Foco Summit on MAS in Texas Public Schools- Virtual
- 2021 February 2: Representative Cristina Morales introduces HB 1504 which would allow students to count Ethnic Studies towards graduation. The bill would allow students to count Ethnic Studies as one of the 4 Social Studies required for graduation. Passes in the House, fails to make it to the floor in the Senate
- 2021 Spring: UTRGV B3 Historias Americans Institute
- 2021 April 28: SB 2202 Passes in the Senate. Bill bans the teaching of a republican interpretation of "critical race theory" in Texas public schools
- 2021 May 11: HB 3979, duplicate bill of SB 2202 banning "critical race theory" in Texas Public Schools is introduced. Passed in Special session June 2021

- NACCS Tejas Foco PK-12 Committee organizes against SB 2202 & in support of HB 1504 with weekly calls, working in collaboration with IDRA, TELC, Tony Diaz, and others throughout Spring
- Ethnic Studies Network of Texas and The Grande Narrative organized in support of HB 1504 & against SB 2202 throughout spring & summer 2021
- 2021 May: Pharr San Juan Alamo ISD offers first ever Mexican American Studies Course as a dual language course in summer term
- 2021 Summer: Eighth UTSA MAS Teacher's Academy (Virtual)
- 2021 Summer: UTRGV B3 Historias Americans last summer Institute
- 2021 July 26-29: The ESNT hosts the "Powering Ethnic Studies in Texas Summer Convergence," entirely online. It begins to take donations to support the communications infrastructure and work of the network. The event focuses more on developing a vision for Ethnic Studies in Texas and a set of shared social movement values and strategies, while still offering pedagogical development and information about HB 3979 for participants (Lara 2021)
- 2021 August: Second UTRGV SSTARC K-5 Dual Language MAS Teacher Workshop
- 2021-2022: McAllen ISD offers Mexican American Studies and African American Studies at all High Schools

References

- Cortez, R. (2018, May 30). *Protest the name change/Keep Mexican American studies* [Press Conference and Rally]. La Unión Del Pueblo Entero, San Juan, Texas.
- The Harlingen Economic Development Corporation. (n.d.). *City of Harlingen, TX Demographics – Population - Median Income*. <https://harlingenedc.com/choose-harlingen/demographics>
- Historias Americanas: Engaging History and Citizenship in the Rio Grande Valley. <https://oese.ed.gov/files/2018/10/Historias-Americanas-abstract.pdf>
- Hoang, J. (2019, April 24). UTRGV Partners with Local Districts on History Education. *The Monitor (blog)*. <https://www.themonitor.com/2019/04/24/utrgv-partners-local-districts-history-education/>.
- Huber, L. P., Johnson, R. N., & Kohli, R. (2006). Naming racism: A conceptual look at internalized racism in U.S. schools. *Chicano-Latino Law Review*, 26(1), 183-206.
- IDRA. (n.d.). Mexican American Studies Archives. https://www.idra.org/services_categories/mexican-american-studies/
- Kohli, R. (2013). Unpacking internalized racism: teachers of color striving for racially just classrooms. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 17(3), 367–387.
- Lara, O. (2021, July 27). Ethnic Studies Network of Texas Timeline. (Personal Communication).
- MEChA. (1968). Plan de Santa Barbara. <http://umich.edu/~mechaum/plan.html>.
- Muñoz, C. (2007). *Youth, identity, power. The Chicano movement*. Verso Press.
- Pérez, E. (1999). *The decolonial imaginary: Writing Chicanas into history*. Indiana University Press.
- Picower, B. (2009). The unexamined whiteness of teaching: How white teachers maintain dominant racial ideologies. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 12(2) 197-215.
- Puente, J. (2019, February 23). Project SSTARC summer workshop. Personal notes. Edinburg, TX, United States.
- Puente, J. (2019, May 28). Mesa comunitaria on Mexican American studies in the schools. Personal notes. Edinburg, TX, United States.
- Swaby, A. (2018, April 11). Texas education board approves course formerly known as Mexican-American studies. *The Texas Tribune*. <https://www.texastribune.org/2018/04/11/texas-education-board-mexican-american-studies-course/>.
- Tintiango-Cubales, A., Kohli, R., Sacramento, J., Henning, N., Agarwal-Rangnath, R., & Sleeter, C. (2015). Toward an ethnic studies pedagogy: Implications for K-12 Schools from the research. *The Urban Review*, 47(1), 104–125.
- SSTARC: Social studies through authentic and relevant curriculum. (n.d.). <https://www.utrgv.edu/sstarc/>.
- Saldaña, L., Cervantes, M., Vasquez Gonzales, G., Lopez, A. and García, J. (2020, March 7). Engaging a decolonial framework in the continued evolution of the Mexican American studies academy, NACCS Tejas Foco, South Texas College, McAllen, Tx.
- Valdez, L., and Steiner, S. (1972). *The Brown Berets. Aztlan. An anthology of Mexican American literature*. Alferd A. Knopf Press.
- Yaffe-Bellany, D. (2018, June 13). Texas education board votes to call long-sought Texas course ethnic studies: Mexican American studies. *The Texas Tribune*. <https://www.texastribune.org/2018/06/13/mexican-american-studies-vote/>