



# UNDERSTANDING DECOLONIZATION

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Community Dialogue Series



## Why Decolonize?

- Decolonizing means thinking about how students experience the university differently.
  - What systems and institutional processes keep students from succeeding?
  - Are our classrooms and curriculum inclusive of all students?
  - What knowledge are we centering?
- Decolonization is not just a new trendy buzzword in higher education. It is fundamentally about student retention.

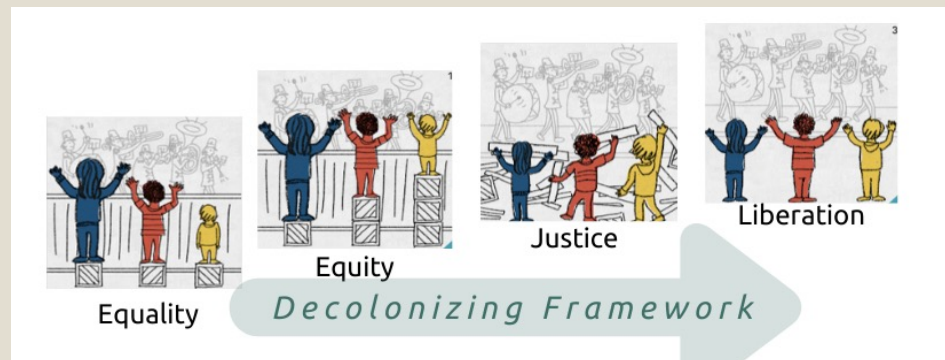
# What is Decolonization?

- Decolonization is the process of identifying, confronting and dismantling colonial power structures to actively prioritize historically marginalized members and groups of society; specifically, recentering Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) land, life, tradition and history. – Council for Equity & Justice
- “Accepting the decentering of the West globally, embracing multiculturalism, compels educators to focus attention on the issue of voice. Who speaks? Who listens? And why?” – bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*



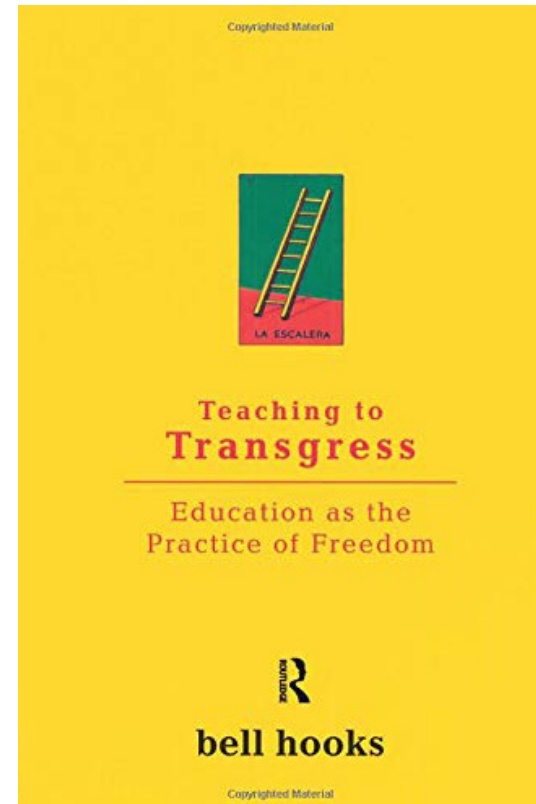
# Decolonizing vs. Diversifying

- These are two different things.
- Decolonizing is not about diversifying representation, although that is an important step.
- Decolonizing is:
  - a complete reconfiguration of dominant knowledge.
  - a challenge to settler colonialism. Centering indigenous people and knowledge.
  - Ultimately about liberation



ALL TOO OFTEN WE FOUND A WILL TO INCLUDE THOSE CONSIDERED "MARGINAL" WITHOUT A WILLINGNESS TO ACCORD THEIR WORK THE SAME RESPECT AND CONSIDERATION GIVEN OTHER WORK... FOR EXAMPLE, INDIVIDUALS WILL OFTEN FOCUS ON WOMEN OF COLOR AT THE VERY END OF THE SEMESTER, OR LUMP EVERYTHING ABOUT RACE AND DIFFERENCE TOGETHER INTO ONE SECTION.

-- bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress* pages 35-44



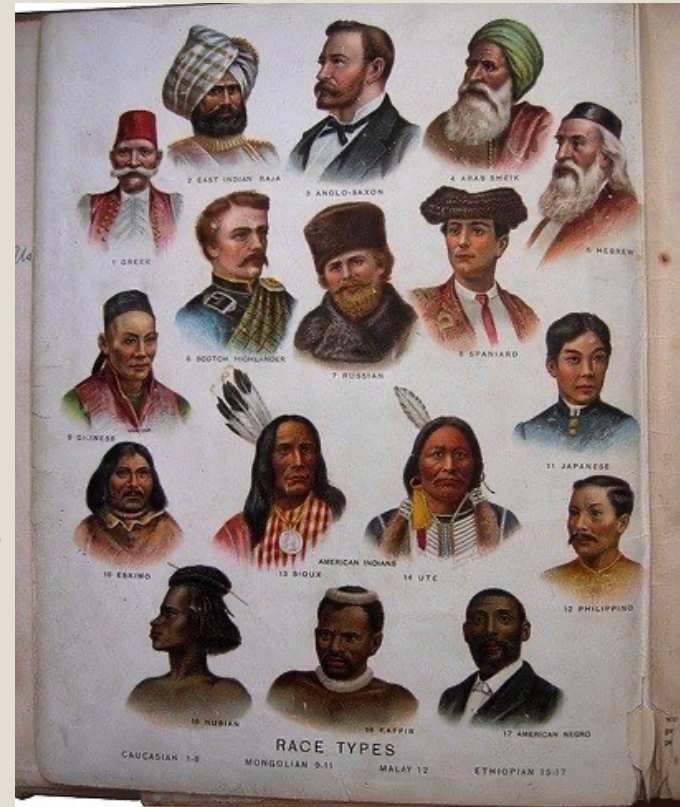
How can we move beyond  
diverse representation in our  
classrooms?

# Example: Land Acknowledgment

- We recognize that we reside on the Lenapehoking — the traditional land of the Lenape people, past and present. We acknowledge the Lenape people as the indigenous stewards of this colonized land. We commit to supporting the Lenape people by building relationships; recognizing their continuing presence, and respecting and honoring them as original caretakers of this land.
- **In Breakout Rooms: How can we use this land acknowledgment on our campuses and in our classrooms?**

# Knowledge is Power

- Knowledge and knowledge production does not occur in vacuums. Knowledge reflects power structures and inequalities.
- Decolonizing the curriculum means acknowledging that what we know is the product of power relations.
- The global economy of knowledge is shaped by hierarchies of race, class, and gender.
  - North America and Europe sit at the top of the knowledge hierarchy.
  - Shaped by a colonial history where white upper-class Western men sat at the top of the social hierarchy.
  - Most academic knowledge consists of the experiences, histories, and achievements of this group.



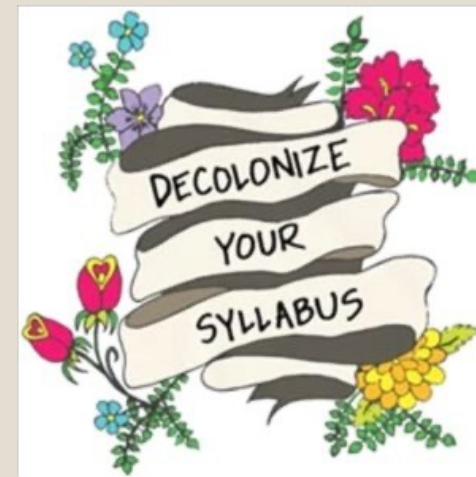


# Student Retention through Decolonizing

- Decolonizing is rethinking, reframing, and reconstructing the current curriculum and institutional processes in order to make them more inclusive.
- Students who recognize themselves in the curriculum are more likely to complete their degrees.
- **In Breakout Rooms:**
  1. How can we elevate more perspectives and knowledge in our teaching?
  2. How do we include our students' voices and perspectives so that knowledge is produced collectively instead of only top-down?
  3. What policies and processes might create barriers for student success?

# Ideas for Decolonizing the Classroom

- diversify materials and content in all spaces
- teach to learning outcomes that address power and social justice;
- design assessments that allow diverse students to demonstrate mastery in diverse ways;
- involve students in the creation of knowledge, content, student activities, and curriculum;
- embrace diverse language usage in interactions, institutional materials, writing and tests;
- Get involved at the institutional, local, state, and national levels to advocate for equity.





# What do students want?

- Teaching students that knowledge is open to questioning and investigation.
- Challenging and asking questions is key.
- “Students are eager to break through barriers of knowing. They are willing to surrender to the wonder of re-learning and learning new ways of knowing that go against the grain. We can give students the education they desire and deserve. We can teach in ways that transform consciousness, creating a climate of free expression that is the essence of a truly liberatory liberal arts education.”
  - – bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*

# Risk & Vulnerability

- Decolonizing means giving up some authority and control in the classroom.
- How do we help one another take risks in the classroom?
- How do we hold our colleagues accountable, and in turn remain open to them to hold us accountable?



**Empowerment** cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risk.

~ bell hooks