

On Purpose and Agency, or, The *Giants Program*

→ A Positionality Statement; or, Apologia I

My name is Tate Universe (my first name is given, and my last name was forged over decades), and I'm 23 years old. I'm tall and awkward, introverted and for the most part leaning to the anti-social side; none of this research or participatory action engagement is familiar to me as a brown skin Chicane-American from urban areas in Los Angeles such as Boyle Heights and Inglewood, and they (my community college and my undergraduate university) didn't even get around to enlightening me about the potential for transformative work or intersections between critical philosophies and praxis, I had to search it out actively myself.

The process of becoming educated in spite of my difficult circumstances as a youth which I will mention more about later required extensive arcs of effort that I had to aim carefully and boldly for to get closer to my goals. Attending community college was difficult to navigate alone and at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic; receiving consideration for undergraduate applications was heart-crushingly prolonged when resulting offers didn't attract me in return; UCSB has been similarly terrifying because as quickly and naturally as I was able to adapt to the research landscapes and physical embodiments of collective thought via labs, I had nonetheless struggled the whole way through to feel like a person which belonged at such an institution. As I prepare to graduate in a month I feel I have earned the degree, assuredly, but am still left wondering if I'll be guaranteed any sort of ethos to back up the experiences that I undertook to earn the physical document which I now possess in exchange for over \$100,000 of agreed upon blood money (97% scholarshiped as a result of my a) poverty, b) housing insecurity, and c) independent youth status). Will the White people look at me differently when I put on my own white people costume or perhaps culturally reflective uniform and attempt my own service to the world as a researcher/teacher/dreamer? Aside from a few 'traditional type' gems and the gracious, abundant, and wide-open love from the sparse few Black/Brown researchers/educators who I came to pass in my own socialization/learning, I didn't really feel the love from schooling here at UC Santa Barbara, Santa Monica College, or any of the eight public schools I attended. I didn't fit in as a Queer kid, and my neurodivergence and ACEs made it harder still.

This concerns me deeply as it reflects the gaping wound I perceive, have experienced, and continue to pursue in research, in the education system for pretty much every kid growing up in American K-12 schools regarding **agency and purpose**. This is the area which I most care about, an interdisciplinary combination of psychology, pedagogy, and anthropology, which has yet to be even remotely tapped into by the multitudes of strong and diverse networks that support groups can provide. To reiterate: my concern and the reason for writing this document which outlines a project currently early in the works is because I think our society (American and Earthling) is currently knee-capped by our inciteful and capitalistic reproducing behaviors which are proliferated by our current K-12 schooling standards and values. We need to take a deep look at the desired *outcomes* and *futures* which result from controlling the narratives enforced within our schools, and the way that this integration into society continues to circulate needless violence via persisting prejudices, othering, persecution, and fear (the gender binary, for example; persecution and orientation towards undocumented citizens, another). We may need to revive ancestral wisdom via indigenous ways of knowing (not just Indigenous American/Alaskan Native Nations, but global Indigenous Peoples), so that lessons are heeded in advance of their potential consequences (what stories could we tell to change the US from a coal country to a renewable energies empire? The Frog and the Scorpion?)

As a young person I have finished my undergraduate education and been immediately faced with noticeably impacted graduate application seasons amid the current federal administration; despite my longstanding motivation and persistent transformative style of effort, whatever charisma and worthiness I can foster with colleagues and with my mentees is not transmitted successfully when I have applied for PhD programs to various schools/programs for previous two years (I chose to extend my transfer experience at my university UC Santa Barbara in order to further curate research experience when grad apps proved fruitless). But as much as this unsettles me about the current state of academia and the willingness of aging professors to be even efficacious mentors to driven students, it doesn't discourage me or reduce the worthiness of my unique knowledge and experiences as potentially meaningful to a preferable future!

I'll just begin the work I feel is necessary and trust that the right people will want to get involved regardless of my connection to a graduate school (until next

year's applications). Sounds crazy but I've only ever really known limit situations and pushing past them, and every single human I've been graced with meeting on this journey so far has been overwhelmingly supportive of me and my dream; I am led to believe they want to see the same dream as I do, and do what they can to support it vicariously through me- for this I owe a deep gratitude.

My experiences of LAUSD illustrated generational wounds which persisted because of colonial and systemically oppressive schools which laud academic excellence as the par for schooling in the states rather than a) concern for societal good, b) appreciation of life, ability to curate joy, and c) knowledge of democratic processes and how to engage democratically with one's society. What children lose in consequence of this injustice is lost on lawmakers for the most part, it perishes in a silent manner, squeezed out of greater possibility due to apathy, demotivation, and a lack of civic agency.

My experiences with regular homelessness growing up (and, to this day) demonstrated to me the undermining of so many children's potentials purely as a result of conditions which they could never control, and I speak on this behalf as well. Is it fitting for me to fall through the net when it's part of schooling design for me to be sifted out of by the mesh? Was I inappropriately reaching outside of class and racial barriers when I refused to die in consequence to my personal experiences of neglect, foster family living, and familial abuse in the mean streets of Los Angeles? I wanted to stand up for my two brothers, on whom's behalves I felt enraged for they shared the same circumstances of squalor and isolation that I did, and whose futures were always and very much now are realized within the contexts of their limited ability to generate stability coming from a background of total poverty. My older brother Seth is 26 and he went straight to work after high school because there was nothing that motivated him more at 18 than the task to survive; my little brother Chaz is 20 and he went straight to work after high school because there was nothing that motivated him more at 18 than the task to survive.

I was a natural caretaker for my brothers growing up, and sought to protect them at all costs; I made them breakfast, lunch and dinner for many intermittent periods throughout our childhoods; I washed and dried their clothes, and I went to the food bank starting from the age of 14 to bring home food even before I could pay for groceries. It developed into good mentorship skills for others in high school as I grew community learning how to be a student producer and general venue

manager; I found myself mentoring peers my age about important and critical aspects of their lives, because I could piece things out in a way which made sense but also elucidate important constructs/frameworks within the domain of psychology about how to interpret reality in a way which is more functional and conducive to joy.

This mentorship nature blossomed in college when I got numerous opportunities to train, mentor, instruct, and facilitate discussion with UC Santa Barbara undergraduate and graduate students in multiple management/mentorship positions (which I identify on my CV which can be found on my blog), and since then I've recruited a network of peers of mostly young ages who voluntarily stand behind me as enthusiasts for the same vision that I outline below. They want to help; they want to contribute; they believe in its potential; and so I plan to include them because enthusiasm is worth its weight in gold to me and my plans. Despite how much traditional education has rejected me, I still do find that it has allowed my life to intersect with an ever-growing network of allies which fill me with hope and perspective, and this has made all the difference.

→ Abstract

I want to begin a project which could be expansive and important to research and education in the United States. I was wondering if you would be interested/willing to be a mentor to me in this process, and guide me along pathways which are best informed by critical race theories, asset-framing, liberation psychology, and all the other things Trump hates so that I can have a running start? In LAUSD, longitudinal data from the last half-decade have shown that high school students' 'Growth Mindset' has dropped from 71% to 66%, while 'Self-Efficacy' has fallen from 57% to 53% (Los Angeles Unified School District, 2025); research indicates that for Black and Latine/o/a students, these psychological costs are more acute because they must navigate identity-based barriers and belonging uncertainty that their majority peers do not experience in the same way (Walton & Cohen, 2011). I believe that there is a massive threat of apathy resulting from a general lack of sense of justice, a lack of a perception of civic responsibility, and a feeling of inescapable hopeless impending doom; I want to combat it using social media, to turn the tides from hate-mongering, misinformation, and rage-bait to a

high scrutiny for reality, universal respect for other human beings, and global communalism.

→ Purpose

- ◆ To empower youths, with confidence. I believe that teens from marginalized communities in the US are the key to opening up global collectivism, and making the representatives of the US government more proportionally represented by people with global experiences. It does not just entail sending more of the typically left out kids to a no-excuses school program; it entails cultivating a cultural movement which inspires an alternative society which actually scrutinizes life as they know it.
 - Can a culture of apathy, burnout, and listlessness be curbed by empowerment to engage deeper in society and find one's own personal potential for cultivating the world that they personally want to see?
 - Yes. You just need to be motivated enough to see the vision far enough through that it breaks through the reality which overshadows us. Whether that takes beating the odds and attending college, or just getting out of an abusive household to start creating art and living independently, these are outcomes which would constitute a *different* social generation.
- ◆ To re-establish the centered position that the "teacher" possesses in societies (Giroux noted that educators can transform the world, as they so directly influence the beliefs and behaviors of those next), but also to redefine the elitism which has been stowed into the teacher symbolic construct as a result of patriarchal hoarding of the mentor symbol so that power can be retained for the few (historically, white men):
 - TRUST RESPECT APPRECIATION ACCEDANCE TO TEACHERS IN OUR SOCIETY; learn from indigenous peoples across the world about what the fuck a teacher does for a society; they are the tent-pole. Stop being fucking rude to teachers, stop paying them

shit, stop homeschooling your kids in most cases it is bad for our society.

- BUT IN ADDITION; the learner is also a teacher, and the teacher is and always was a learner themselves (Freire)
 - ALSO IN ADDITION: Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation offers invaluable defining cultures such as; the dissolving of hierarchical relationships/systems of cultural oppression in K-12 schooling and higher education, and; an exploration of value of teaching critical race theories and real American history
 - FINALLY: the schoolhouse and the teachers within it being our society's only teachers is now undeniably colonial in nature, and archaic to boot. Social media has shown us how humans are deeply interested in learning as long as the opportunity is available and the content is easily consumable; we have all become life-long learners now that we know how to scroll. So we must look beyond the colonized "teacher" role and embrace alternative teachers as well (for does the disciplinary advisor at a high school who disproportionately disciplines Black and Latine students not also teach?)
- ◆ To start working on an emotional wound, personally, by creating **art** that reaches others and inspires further motivation beyond my limited reach.
- I realize now that I need to express art in order to deal with The Absurd of life as Camus puts it. I am too impacted by my trauma as a student who was overwhelmingly rejected from public school processes socializing youth for life beyond school; LAUSD is where I hail from and I need to go back there one day to put my sweat into making that system slightly more bearable for students.

→ Principles

- ◆ Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Freire)
 - Dialogues using the native languages and symbols to decode systemic oppression is the fastest way to bring further relief to our society and bring us closer to something collectivist; if

dialogues can be a large inspiration of this new movement of teaching (and in addition the culture of mentorship so that senior students teach novice students) then it will be much more common for news to come around that small groups of people are scrutinizing (for good reasons) the qualities of life in their community and how they are governed, and doing things to actively dismantle what they don't like about their society such as protesting or writing to their local politicians.

◆ Grammar of Schooling (Tyack & Tobin)

- The conversation of "if students even benefit from sitting in classes for 14 years based on certain knowledge and unit standards" should be extended to STUDENTS. Nobody asks what the fuck students in school feel they would like, or perhaps if they wished to see schools provide or not provide certain guidance/instruction.
- We need to poll young people, and collect data on *their* visions for schooling.

◆ Relationships of Knowledge and Practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle)

- In reality, what an expert teacher for these new purposes looks like is not known yet. Some people need to be those first expert teachers, and then evoke the change in their application of teaching; the key component which ties this all together is a culture of mentorship; the teacher is going to pass down the information because it is culturally valuable (weighty) and because they have great expectations and hope for the learner.
- The information is passed down in a way so that the student must know it well enough to teach it to others and pass it on.
 - Because of this a culture of communal learning, mentorship, and peer learning is critical.

◆ Understanding Progressive Education in 21st Century (Tippett & Lee)

- How does one educate? We must teach this to students as well- they need to be able to self-organize- because the privileged role of mentor is no longer bound to the college-educated white man, now it can be stolen and repurposed by *anyone* and we

have to acknowledge that dark forces already know this and use it in the name of misinformation to bilaterally divide the current hegemonic empire of earth.

- It is an injustice not to teach black, brown, and queer kids how to join up and stand up for their human rights; it is an injustice to not teach men and women how to break gender roles before they leave high school.
- So to teach (to teach how to teach) includes:
 - Experience (experts choose what to share and what documents to use to support it)
 - Temporal (the process of becoming learned)
 - Action (*doing* must be included in the process)
 - Participation (learning *caused by* doing)
 - Reflection (independent, small group, big group)
 - *Can these be achieved through social media content?* Social media facilitates reactions and engagement through comments and “reply posts”, or “clip reactions”, so that rhetoric is not dogmatic and can/will be challenged at any time (because the internet was built for the socialization of information, it may include empirical scrutiny!)
- ◆ Schooling for Critical Consciousness (Graves & Sieder)
 - This is hard to summarize, it’s basically the biggest influence of this whole project. It just identifies multiple different school designs which attempted to cultivate critical consciousness in American students, and how those various designs succeeded/failed.
 - These will influence what kinds of content Tate plans to make, because Tate’s content and brand which they will be modeling for others will be centered around the subjects of teaching, critical consciousness, symbolism in fiction, and probably also dungeons and dragons
 - Challenge children to have ambitions, confidence for themselves, passion for the wellbeings of their communities, and to learn how to live in a democratic society

- ◆ The Having of Wonderful Ideas (Duckworth)
 - This alternative model of teaching can make a lot of room for experimentation. Not all experimentation will be ultra-hyper-successful (such as a student creating an environmental activism-oriented TikTok channel, and becoming a popular creator known for teaching environmental activism), but to engage in a pedagogy that encourages wonderful ideas is necessary for continued social and scientific innovations.
- ◆ Braiding Sweetgrass (Kimmerer)
 - The way that we interpret reality is often not including the very real perspectives of others- for example the author Kimmerer is very clearly neurodivergent and shows in the narrative a great fascination with plants, therefore they interpret their own world, their life, and their purpose differently from others who conversely do not have a special interest related to flora. But is any of it untrue? When she describes loss; when she describes the figurative rape of her peoples and hundreds of other nations by Americans, American boarding schools, and Manifest Destiny; she does it through a perspective of rationale and reason both informed by Western (perhaps we could say empirical?) educated experiences (she has completed a doctoral program), and also indigenous experiences (plants/Earth are sustaining, and we get to coexist, and that this is a privilege)
 - Open the door for neurodivergent people and/or global perspectives to augment our collective interpretation of reality. Why do we exploit so much in 2026? Why are we so conditioned to consume very specific things? Having America do it for a century didn't turn out to benefit anybody that much (well except for Coca-Cola, which is so brand-recognizable even the polar bears crave it :)), so maybe alternative perspectives such as Buddhist or Rasta could become dominant.
- ◆ Handbook of Hip Hop Pedagogy (Kelly & Graves)
 - Culture will evolve faster than you can control

- Mindfully observe what you can produce, and be mindful of your impact on others with what you produce
- Expressions of emotion can be unfiltered and sometimes harmful for society, for instance glorifying the objectification of women in our society through hip-hop lyrics; can we mentor the next generation to be mindful of this?
- ◆ School Citizenship (Homana et al.)
 - “schools can help foster the knowledge, skills and dispositions that young people need to develop into politically aware and socially responsible individuals” (p. 1, Homana et al., 2005)
- ◆ [Updated 3/30/26] Writings for a Liberation Psychology (Martin-Baro)
 - *“It is the real problem of our own peoples that ought to constitute the fundamental object of our work, not the problems that concern people elsewhere”* (p. 26)
 - *“[for psychologists] it is necessary to involve ourselves in a new praxis, an activity of transforming reality that will let us not only know about what is but also about what is not, and by which we may try to orient ourselves towards what ought to be”* (p. 28)
 - Three essential elements for building a liberation psychology:
 - A new horizon
 - A new epistemology
 - ◆ A *“critical revision”* of what is currently taken as knowledge/truth to understand what leads to *“liberating potential”* or *“seeds of subjugation”*
 - A new praxis
 - ◆ To transform relationships of oppression to be liberated when possible
 - Three urgent tasks presented to liberation psychology:
 - Historical memory
 - ◆ Folk communication/knowledge via stories/knowledge via transfer of knowledge using folk mediums
 - ◆ Indigenous ways of knowing

- ◆ Connection to greater collective humankind and its development throughout time to be more liberating
- De-ideologizing “*common sense*” and everyday experience
 - ◆ Many things that we hear about today or are told are true may not be partially or even at all related to the truth of reality. We may be deluded based on assumptions we make internally about our safety and privilege as first world Americans
 - ◆ For example is it much more likely for black and brown kids to be disciplined in school on average
 - ◆ For example it is much more likely for children of immigrants who are people of color to be flagged for developmental disorders in early education and placed into special education tracks than white or non-second generation immigrant children.
- Utilizing the virtues of the people
 - ◆ This includes ability to be superhuman or push past possibilities in limit situations
 - ◆ Also includes:
 - Uncompromising solidarity
 - Ability to deliver and sacrifice for the collective good
 - Tremendous faith in the human capacity to change the world
 - Hope for a tomorrow
- Bring about critical consciousness in the people so that they become aware of and responsive to the current state of many countries on earth (as well as the oppression which occurs within countries with vast privilege) as “*sitting on top of the poor and developed societies as regimes that subject the majority of the population to miserable conditions, allocating goods unequally so that a small minority can enjoy all manner of comforts and luxuries*” (p. 34)

- Reinvent science as a non-ahistoric humanist tool to empirically demand for better rights for human beings globally.
 - This means using science less “universally”, and applying knowledge of complex histories and contexts to be more “provincial” [I personally disagree with Martin-Baro’s insistence of disbanding from universalism, but only because I feel that it can indeed accommodate the necessary “provincialism” that he suggests science should amend to]. Science is by rule practiced by human beings with diverse wealths of knowledge, so that by virtue of collaboration more “universal” and fully-reasoned products are brought about; we can be both empirical and socioculturally informed, so that as scientists we can acknowledge our commitment to rational truth and as humans acknowledge our imperative to human life, sustaining life, and preserving our unique identities/cultures as a historical fingerprint.
- *“It is within the psychologist’s purview to intervene in the subjective processes that sustain those structures of injustice and make them viable”* (p. 45)
 - *“It is a question of whether psychological knowledge will be placed in the service of constructing a society where the welfare of the few is not built on the wretchedness of the many, where the fulfillment of some does not require that others be deprived, where the interests of the minority do not demand the dehumanization of all”* (p. 46)

→ Function

- ◆ Key practical role of Tate Universe and colleagues as journalist-researchers
 - Create videos, podcasts, and short clips which appeal to young people, and are educational and folk-oriented in nature.
 - Be initial models for a movement of learners-becoming-teachers, as we inspire young people to radically take education into their own hands and endeavor to

scrutinize the facts of life around them and whether or not they personally support this ongoing reality. The goal is to inspire others online to become avid supporters of our main goal which is “to change your entire feed to Folk content”, so that instead of doom-scrolling, individuals who use social media become more likely to:

- Engage in empirical/rhetorical scrutiny online and in their real lives, advocating for fairness, justice, and solutions informed by indigenous ways of knowing (for instance seeing the symbolic *roots* of an issue, instead of the fragrance of the flowers)
 - Click the follow button on content creators who advocate for this cultural shift (who identify themselves as Folk)
 - Become teachers in their own right, experimenting with (and often failing) being scrutinizing journalists which post their findings online in attempts to teach others and raise critical consciousness about issues which are personally impactful to them, and
 - Turn away from content which seeks to waste time, not generate meaningful thought or appreciation, or which does not actually benefit anyone (such as misinformation or AI content)
- ◆ Redefining contemporary teacher-student hierarchical boundaries
- Teachers become no longer scary, or authoritative
 - They are actually your strongest allies, who will train you to be excellent in life (excellence being true contentedness, self-actualization, pro-social behaviors, and confidence in democratic processes)
 - They return to the symbols of stories, Yoda, Obi-Wan, Jaime Escalante from *Stand and Deliver*, or perhaps the Gaia-like Goddess of Mercy Granmamare from *Ponyo*.
- ◆ Capturing and modeling authentic (not moral) human virtues:
- Hope
 - Joy

- Desire which is not capitalistic in nature (does not seek to all-consume, destroy, over-produce, exploit for gain), and is instead simply jovial/vigorous/child-like
- Curiosity (for nature, for science, for humans, plants, animals, and global nations)

→ Intended Products

- ◆ Confidence in one's present self, and confidence in one's future processes
- ◆ The ability to be self-challenging (it goes without saying that this requires self-confidence, self-efficacy, faith, belonging, and a sense of competence); in others words can be enthusiastic about picking a future direction, or making plans which have scale.
 - One day, because of learning from the content, children/young adults will be so sufficiently empowered that they will have the ability to create goals for themselves far off into the future (1 year, 5 years), and be motivated to reach them.
 - This must also include the inverse quality, which is a sense of self which is defensible to threats; which can embody vulnerable-ass dorky-ass love of specific things/aesthetics/people, in a reality where they are no longer cringe.

{If I wanna be really into founding father Benjamin Franklin and his expansive life story I am not weird for it!}

- ◆ Knowledge and confidence with democratic process such as
 - Voting; writing to congresspeople; protesting; collectively organizing
 - Speaking/hearing with others in one's community, to be an active participant/resistance based on each's own critical opinions
 - Higher standards for first world country governments

- Frustration that many aspects of American living are still not socialized such as all medicine & healthcare or all childcare
- Expectation of government to shift actually reasonably quickly to reflect the interests and concerns of the people they represent (actual representation)
- Trust in evolving scientific empiricism, because it only gets more accurate in representing the extent to which certain ideologies reinforce systemic oppression, and others simply don't???
- This includes breaking apart the construct of the WEIRD research monolith, as though non-American university-affiliated researchers could not produce reports containing scientific/truth merit.

→ Plan of Action

- ◆ Record videos of conversations of real life which are both entertaining and revealing.
 - The Public Opinion Poll: a measure that I build from the ground up which seeks to qualitatively interview one person or multiple people, and has probing questions which would reveal the folk narrative to each individual regardless of their beliefs
 - "Do you have children"
 - "How much of your costs are affordable"
 - "In your opinion what is the root of oppression in our world"
 - Conversations with friends/family (pseudonyms) about the state of "normal" urban and suburban lives
 - Conversations with researchers and professors about:
 - Topics which they are experts in which they have human feelings about
 - Aspects of their real lives which make them actually real, and not un-touchable, substantiating their worth as humans, creating 21st century ethos for:
 - ◆ This researcher as a scientist creating what we as a society come to believe as true

- ◆ The content on Tate's channels, as journalism which endorses humanism, globalism, and is reliable and trustworthy at procuring *truth*
- Conversations with random strangers on the street about their lives, truths, and conventions which allow them to survive.
- Finally, I will produce the first Apologia, of myself, in a short 15 minute video which I will also release at some point. The intention of this is to set a precedent for other Folk educators who pick up the work, to show to their audience the ways in which they embody the specific type of journalism and education that they endorse. This is also to add ethos to who each content creator is and the extent to which they care about their journalism.
 - The Apologia is just as it sounds. Not an apology, but a clear rationale deconstruction of my worldview and my motivations, and how they have informed the actions which I'm responsible for in the present day. It will for me include a long description of my experiences of homelessness, racial and queer discrimination, food insecurity, and of perseverance because of hope.
- ◆ Not news, but journalism which is both Folk and critically conscious
- ◆ Publish videos for multiple different channels, aligned within a singular media brand
 - Create the different channels "Ours by Folk" (Youtube videos) "AllOurs" (Instagram reels, youtube shorts, TikTok) and "After Ours" (Youtube videos and spotify as a longform podcast)
- ◆ Create a diverse training module online (a free class with videos and assignments) to teach other creators how to style their videos within this philosophy to begin a cultural movement that causes a "wave" which totally changes American users' feeds.
 - First few years will be one selected array of creators who we specifically invest time and resources in to teach about our materials and practices and philosophies.

- We need to hand pick these creators (and be hands-on and intentional about training), but all the rest will voluntarily join the movement by themselves and teach themselves using only the same modules.
- ◆ Recordings currently ongoing, releases are scheduled for late May
 - This is because I expect Summer to be tumultuous because America is currently in a war it does not want to be in