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Introduction

By: Hawi Tilahun, Dilreet Dhaliwal, Trey Muraoka, Karantha Lowe

“Why am I compelled to write?... Because the world I create in the writing compensates for what the real world does not give me.”

-Gloria Anzaldua

The collection of works we feature was partly inspired by the book *Chicana Without Apology*, written by Eden Torres. In the summer of 2013, we read this work in our Mellon cohort as part of our yearlong seminar. Further establishing the foundations for an understanding of Chicana feminist thought, writer and activist Eden Torres utilizes theory, lived experiences, and narratives to understand Chicana life. Through her recollections, she illuminates pivotal themes such as the multilayer nature of identity and the role of memory and trauma in the construction of the self and the community. As a first-generation college student and the first person in her family to earn a PhD, the book provides a vivid and thought-provoking reflection in the journey for academic success and the pursuit for social justice. The themes in *Chicana Without Apology* bring us to reflect on the idea of “borderlands,” further elucidated upon by the author, Torres; this concept refers to an area of hybridity, a place that is neither fully Mexico nor the United States. Though the physical boundaries remain, this area is filled with people who do not differentiate between physical demarcations; instead, they embrace both worlds, allowing for multi-layered identities that speak to the experiences of human interactions.

As students of color, we strive to understand this concept of the “borderlands” through critical scholarship and lived narratives. In our research, we strive to understand how borders, both in the physical and imaginary sense, have been constructed. Furthermore, we investigate how our experiences in the academy and in our respective communities speak to the realities of power structures and marginalized identities. Part of the revelation embedded in our work is the many untold narratives that challenge borders of power and institutions. Dominant narratives within the nation-state framework and in academic writing often erase histories of those deemed the “periphery.”

Thus, through our writing, we seek justice and restoration. We seek to restore our voices and the voices of our communities back into the the course of *political* history. By political history, we testify to the political nature of historical discourse which often fails to take-note of the multifaceted nature of truth.

Our engagement with truths take different forms, from academic writing to artistic expression. The latter was inspired by our visit of the “Sights, Sounds, Soul: Twin Cities Through the Lens of Charles Chamblis” exhibit at the Minnesota Historical Society. This exhibit opened our eyes to the *weapon* of art--as a powerful tool for storytelling and history-making. That art could tell the story that words could not. That it could better represent the wounds unhealed or the triumphs uncelebrated. Art fills in the gaps that formal academia and scholarship cannot. The freedom of art and media forms give agency to words we are told to hold. In *Tapestries*, the different arts come together to give voice to hidden and subverted narratives. The photos and visuals narrate history and conjure emotions that allow for a different type of learning and journey of discovery.

By way of our scholarship and civic engagement as Mellon Mays Fellows, we deliver this collection with tender reflections and humble vulnerabilities. Through our journey together, we have discovered that writing is a battle-ground. In exploring themes of national history, trauma and memory, we confront our own prevailing assumptions while also battling with new truths. By employing both a level of distance and intimacy, we share our stories in ways that are unique and important to us. Whether it is through exploring the complexity of Japanese American internment during World War II, exploring one’s own family history through the exploration of visual narratives, or understanding the formation of the Ethiopian state to unravel the origins of ethnic conflict, we seek insight and understanding. Evaluating the relationship between hip-hop and one’s environment, navigating journeys of restoration, critically questioning one’s naming, and interrogating identity allows us to carve sacred spaces in the academy in order to honor both our own voices and the perspectives of our communities. We hope that our collective writing speaks to the value of all individual voices and their valuable places in the course of history.