

# Decolonizing Education at MC

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## A View from Anthropology

Maria Sprehn  
October 28, 2020

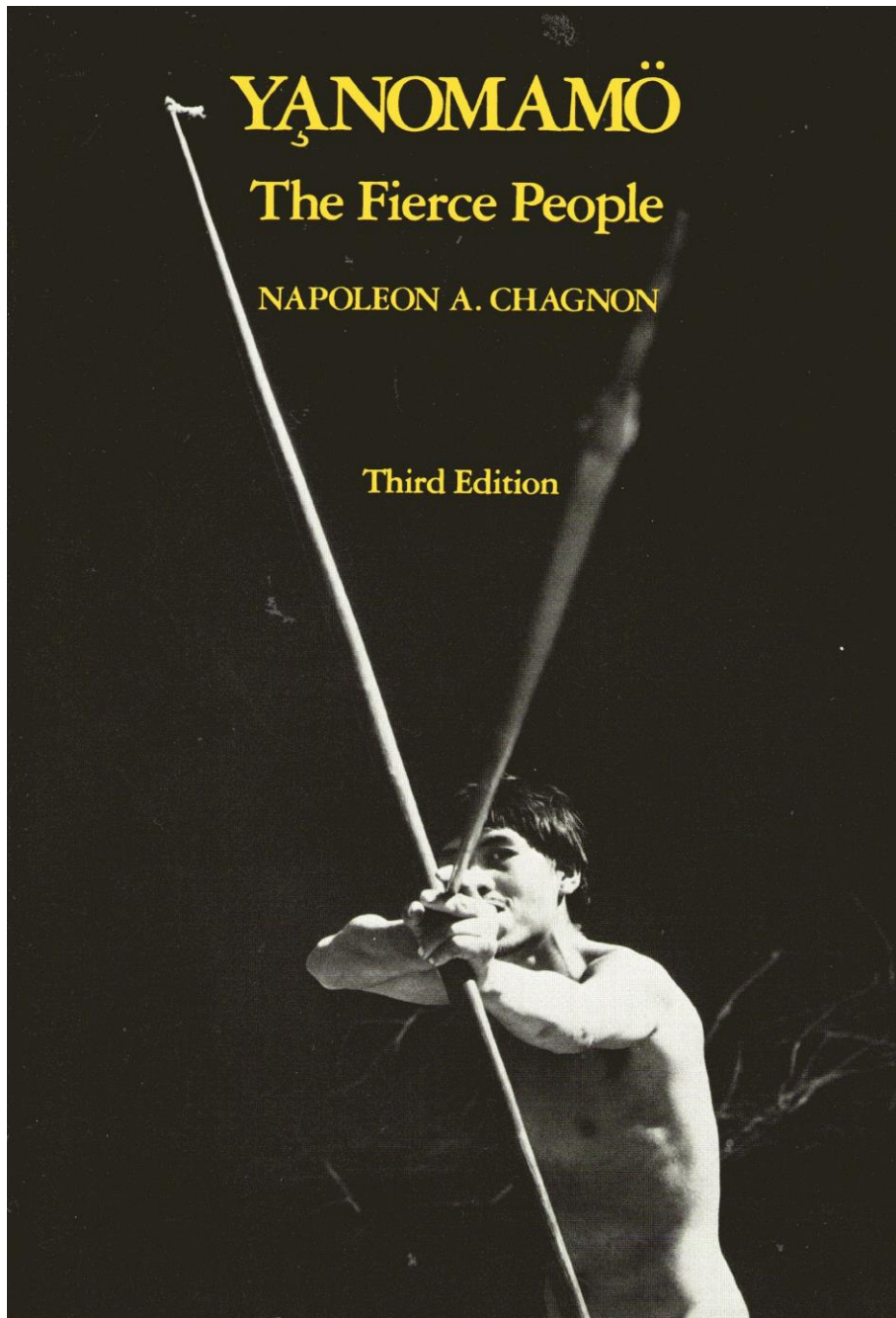
In the social sciences, we should continually change how we teach the world—our students and the community—and how we teach about the world. It is a process.

The ‘classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy.’

bell hooks, 2014, *Teaching to Transgress*

# Decolonizing Introductory Social Science Courses

1. Decolonize subjectivities including race, ethnicity, gender, human-nature relationship...etc.
2. Address the context of where we are doing the unlearning. Montgomery County, Maryland is different from Mexico City or New Zealand, for example. The year is 2020—a long time since my undergraduate studies in anthropology in the 1980s.
3. Knowledge production is a continuous process so decolonizing (or unlearning) is a continuous process.



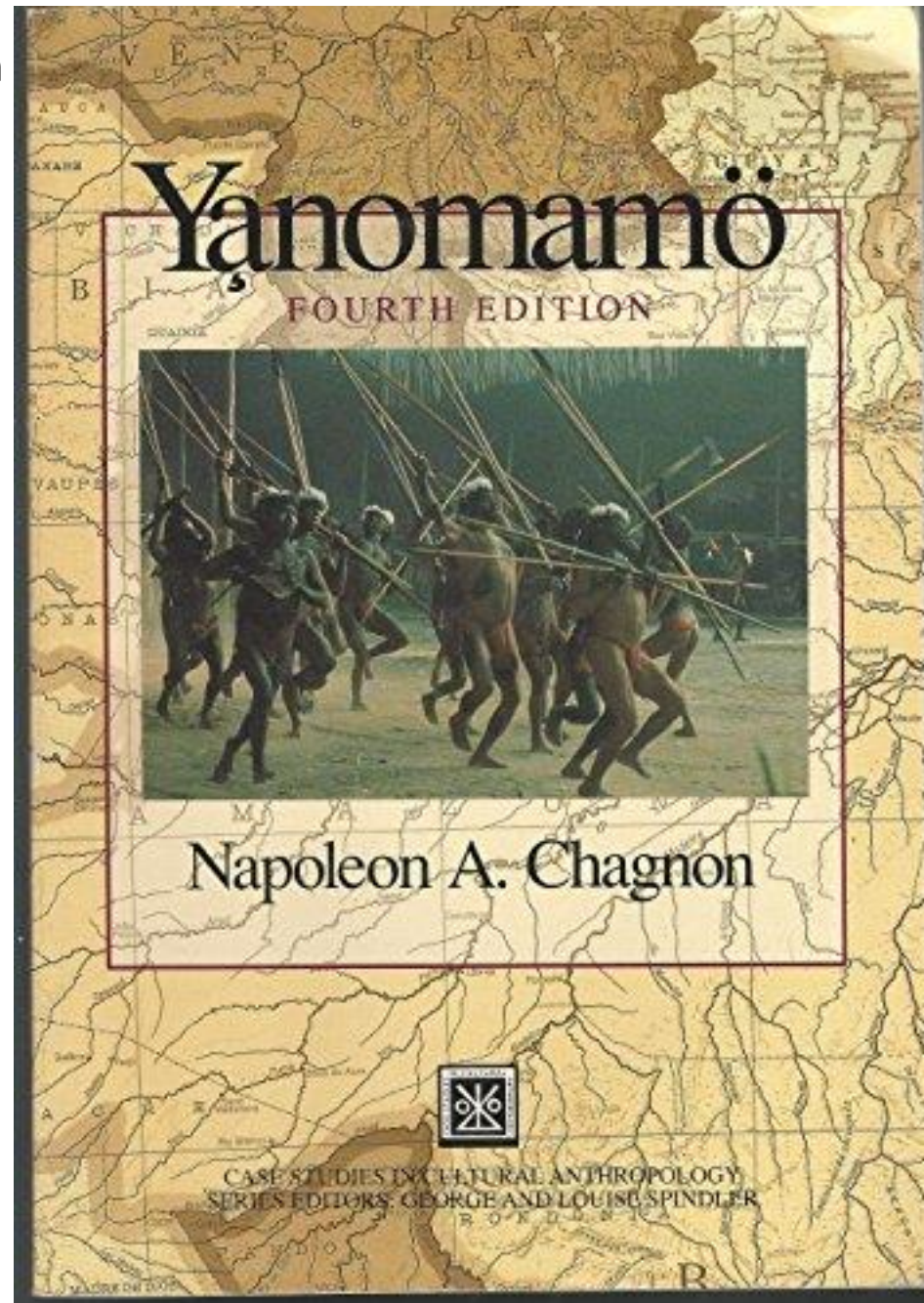
Teaching students to question the production of knowledge and address the power of knowledge.

## Yanomamö Case Study



1984 versus 1992

Discuss: images and representation, race, stereotype, voice and “the other”





# Adding voices.



March 2, 2020

Davi Kopenawa addressed the United Nations Human Rights Council with a statement about indigenous rights and the environment.

His 2013 book is *Falling Sky*.

See his [conversation on Democracy Now!](#)

Mr. President,

My name is Davi Kopenawa, and I represent the Yanomami people, in total 41,000 people between Brazil and Venezuela.

We thank the Special Rapporteur for underlining in his report that indigenous peoples are more likely to invest in good management of forests, soil and water.

However, the example of Brazil's good practice with regards to legislation, agroecological farming and land protection has been severely dismantled since the new administration took office. Our lives are threatened once again.

Land protection is not guaranteed as violent attacks, destruction of property and land invasions in Indigenous communities starkly increase. Despite our territory has been officially demarcated, the government does not want to respect our rights.

There are already around 20,000 illegal miners invading our territory, contaminating our water and bringing back diseases such as mercury intoxication and malaria. The bill in Parliament to legalise industrial mining within indigenous territories would be a real act of genocide for indigenous communities.

We will not give up our land. We do not wish to be like non-indigenous people. The Federal Government must comply with its constitutional obligations and guarantee our rights. This would not be good practice, but a duty.

Thank you.

# Bringing it back to the classroom

“What did you learn about indigenous peoples in grade school?”



Logo: 1937 - 2020

“What is happening in the world today?”



Dakota Access Pipeline DC protest (2017)

# Including diverse voices from academics.

Dear Students,

There are many perspectives on looking at the world. Only some are from the white, mostly male, and European view. Let's explore.

Professor Sprehn

# Including diverse voices from academics.

## ***3 Ways to Speak English***

Jamila Lyiscott, 2014

[https://www.ted.com/talks/jamila\\_lyiscott\\_3\\_ways\\_to\\_speak\\_english?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/jamila_lyiscott_3_ways_to_speak_english?language=en)



## **Why English Class is Silencing Students of Color**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u4dc1axRwE4>

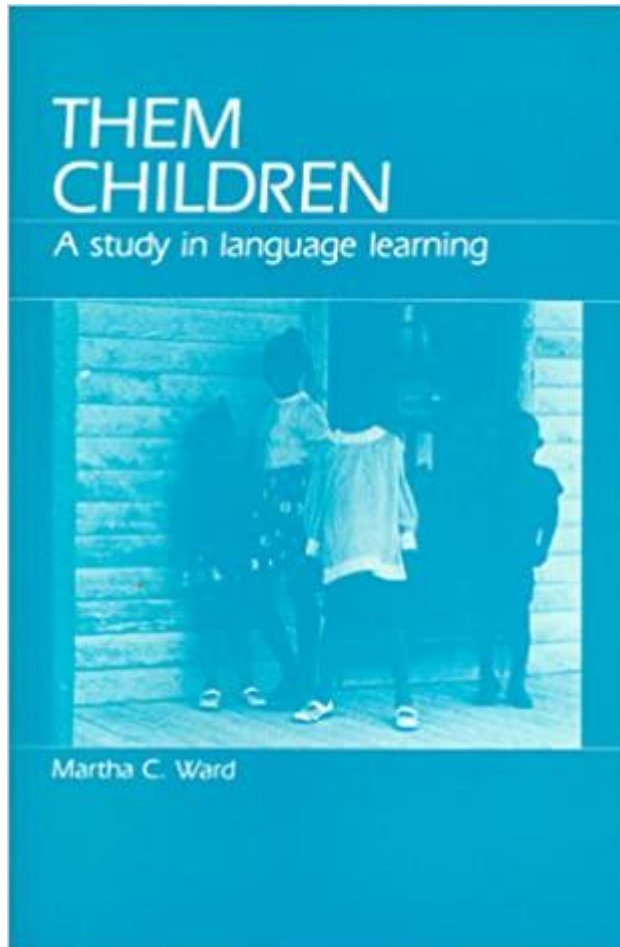
## ***Black Appetite. White Food. Issues of Race, Voice, and Justice Within and Beyond the Classroom.***

Jamila Lyiscott, 2019

Introduction; Part I: Naming the Problem; 1. Vision-Driven Justice; 2. Black Appetite, White Food; 3. If You Think You're Giving Students of Color a Voice, Get Over Yourself!; 4. Your Pedagogy Might Be More Aligned with Colonialism Than You Realize; 5. Why Did All the Black Students Boycott My Classroom?; Part II: Tools for Analysis and Action; 6. T.H.U.G. L.I.F.E., Black Girl Magic, and Harry Potter; 7. The Politics of Ratchetness; 8. Critical Hope in the Context of Crisis; 9. Why I Started Using Cyphers for Justice; Afterword



# Including diverse voices.



Martha Ward's (1986) study shows how the educational system and students' backgrounds and experiences (including home life) are not congruent.

“The variety of cultures that make up American society puts an extraordinary burden of understanding on every level of the education system.”

# Including diverse voices from students.

MC Anthropology gets the conversation out beyond the classroom with projects incorporating students as ethnographers.

- Race and Ethnicity “Exhibit”: MC and Dual Enrollment Students at Gaithersburg High School (2019)
- Digital Stories (Mini-documentaries)  
    YouTube presentations based on data collected by students.  
    (Partnership with PPHI, 2020)



ANTH 201 Student:

Do people think of you differently depending on where you are?

Interviewee:

“Yes, at any retail store where you wouldn’t really find minorities, they’ll think I’m a thief”.

— Anonymous

# MC Anthropology's Gaithersburg HS Dual Enrollment Student Ethnographers





# MC Anthropology Student Ethnographers



## References

Capan, Zeynep Gulsah, Sebastian Garbe and Michaela Zöhrer. 2020. *How do we teach the world?*

Hooks, Bell. 2014. *Teaching to Transgress.*

Lyiscott, Jamila. 2019. *Black Appetite. White Food. Issues of Race, Voice, and Justice Within and Beyond the Classroom.*

Ward, Martha. 1983. *Them Children: A Study in Language Learning.*